



Jane McGonigal Reality is Broken!

How gaming can change the world

It's a safe bet that the 300 members of our community that attended Jane McGonigal's one-night only talk were gamers or parents of gamers. In fact, in the US, 99% of boys and 94% of girls game 13 and 8 hours a week respectively. In her talk, McGonigal presented the data (shocking at times) and the science behind the positive impact that gaming could have on our children and ourselves. She offered that gaming could encourage optimism, foster courage, and build willpower—whether gaming alone or in “extreme scale collaboration” with a gaming community.

Jane McGonigal is the director of game research and development at the Institute for the Future and has a PhD from the University of California at Berkeley in performance studies & games research. She is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. Her # 1 goal is to see a game designer win a Nobel Peace Prize—by the year 2023.

With the weight of her gaming experience, education, and substantial body of research, McGonigal delivered on her promise to “show the science” behind her claims.

Motivation: A study conducted as a form of behavior therapy with a HopeLab's *Re-Mission* game for young people on chemotherapy showed that those patients had better outcomes. Children were more motivated to comply with their medication and other protocols because they felt empowered by the game to have some control over their disease.

Retention: Scans of the brain conducted while gaming showed incredible stimulation in its learning and reward centers—a marked amount over the brain when passively watching even the most educational of television shows. The result is better retention of material or behavior—or as McGonigal stated, “what you learn in a game will stay with you.”

Happiness: The groundbreaking clinical trials at East Carolina University revealed that online games could outperform pharmaceuticals as treatment for clinical depression and anxiety with just 30 minutes of online gaming per day. McGonigal expanded on this by saying, “the opposite of play isn't work. It's depression.”

Failure. The virtual world is very hard. According to McGonigal, gamers spend 80% of their time failing. In our reality, young people are not given such an abundance of chances to fail. This is perhaps the key reason that gaming can unlock, as McGonigal terms, the “superpowers” inside of us to defeat challenges in our real world selves.

After a walk through her research and experience as both a gamer and developer, McGonigal summarized by saying that what we learn and how we feel in games will decidedly improve our mental, social, and emotional resilience in our off-line reality.

So if it's true that reality is broken and that gamers have superpowers, the question is how much is too much? McGonigal cautions that the benefits of gaming decrease sharply after 3-4 hours per day for adults and no more than 20 hours a week for kids under 18.

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Dr. Jane McGonigal
<http://janemcgonigal.com>