

## **STAY Tuned ep.17- Leveling Up Together: Gaming, Community, and Mental Health With Derek Lewis**

**Mei:** [00:00:00] Welcome back to Stay Tuned, Supporting Transition Aged Youth. This podcast is brought to you by the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research at UMass Chan Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, and in partnership with our research sponsor, the National Institute of Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research.

I'm your co host, Mei. And I'm your cohost, Emily. And today we have on Derek Lewis. Um, he's actually been a very long standing member of our Young Adult Advisory Board. Um, I think last time we spoke I asked you how long you had been on the board for. Was it since 2016? Am I remembering that correctly?

**Derek:** It was, I think, 2016 or 2017.

**Mei:** 2016, 2017. So regardless, quite a while. Um, yeah, we're super happy to have you on the podcast today. Cause we want to talk about how you use video games, uh, and the community you've found through video games to engage in your [00:01:00] community, um, and like what that sort of looks like for you, because I know that you've spoken about how active you are in the gaming community. So, we have lots of questions for you.

**Derek:** Absolutely. So I do have five brothers. I have four older brothers, a younger brother, and I have a younger sister.

What got me into gaming was, um, well, hold on, let me back up a little bit. So we all live with my aunt, my aunt raised us. And she also used to work for, uh, public and social services. So she helped give out like food stamps, cash aid. So she also worked for the County and all of us were under children's services, um, growing up because, you know, my mom was on drugs and on the streets.

Um, so one thing that is kind of interesting. Always been in the household from what I can remember. well it is two things? It was hip hop and video games from way back in the days when video games was [00:02:00] starting to climb the charts, like among my cousins and my brothers always used to tell me stories about them playing Atari in the early eighties, you know, like early, mid eighties.

And then the Nintendo system that first came out. All the way up until, so for me, I was born in 89. I still remember playing super Nintendo in the nineties and playing the regular Nintendo that came out in the eighties and Sega Genesis, the first PlayStation. I still remember all of that growing up. And I always, I always say it wasn't for my cousins, older cousins and older brothers.

I would not be in the video games. If I didn't see them playing video games. And I, it intrigued me to play video games as well. In elementary school, I remember playing, like going to blockbuster video, getting rental, getting video games from blockbuster video in elementary school, getting whatever I wanted to play for the whole weekend and just play it for hours and more hours and as a kid, you know, but I think that just [00:03:00] seeing my siblings and my cousins playing video games and us being with my aunt and she was like, okay, I'll buy you guys a system for Christmas or whatever.

You know, because she, we kept up with all the latest games, you know, growing up, I remember buying PlayStation two, PlayStation three, I think my first system was PlayStation three. I bought myself was PS3. Um, but that was all because of, it was in the family. And I think if I wasn't with my aunt and my siblings weren't with my aunt and we went around our cousins.

Um, we wouldn't, I wouldn't even know about video game. I had access to them being in the situation I was in, you know, with my, and with my, with my family. So I think that's the only way I can tie it in. I just, I was just been around it my whole life. I needed to treat me, you know, um, and it was a beautiful thing because I was friendly competition at home with, you know, football and basketball game outside of just doing sports.

We used [00:04:00] to play. Play the video game. Let's go play, you know, Madden NFL. Let's go play, you know, NBA live. Let's go, let's, let's go in there and play. See how, who, and then whoever loses got to get the controller and play against me next. You know, um, we never played for money or anything like that, but it was just.

Family friendly competition, you know, sure, you know, I'm I'm five and older. They can't nobody beat me today, you know, stuff like that.

**Mei:** I mean, I think we're all impacted by your childhood a ton, right? So it makes perfect sense that the things you sort of grew up with, um, grew up playing with are what you're still interested in.

And especially if you have so many fond memories, um, over gaming, then it makes perfect sense that you'd still want to continue that in your adult life. So it makes sense to me.

**Derek:** Yeah, because even now my cousins who are in their 50s still say, well, yeah, you used to play video game all the time when you were a kid.

I know you still play now. Nothing's [00:05:00] changed. Nothing changed. The technology's gotten a lot better. It's more easy, more accessible and the games look more realistic than ever and they're more complicated. But like now you, you were doing that as a kid. We remember you six, seven years old, stuck on the video game.

I was at home just You know, the video game actually kept me off the streets because living in LA gang culture is big here. You know, the streets, the street, you can get as easily to get involved with the wrong people and be in a situation. So I think that because I was stuck on a video game or wanted to play the video game, I stayed home.

I'm about, I gotta go home. I gotta go, I gotta go get on the game. I'm not worried about all that other stuff no more. I'm not worried about that at all. I want to go home and play the game. Yeah. Literally even my young adulthood going into, uh, my teenage years up to my adulthood when it was really like active and it was really, I was like, I'm going home.

I, I got, I got things to do. [00:06:00] I would go home. So I would say a video game kept me off the street. Mm.

**Emily:** It's kinda like a protective factor

**Derek:** as well. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. A big one. Because you know, when you have family and friends, you know, all your peers and everybody around you getting involved with the streets one way or another, and.

And, and seeing how the streets can, or how the gang cultures and, and everything consume you and make you go down the wrong path, I have an older brother who's three years older than me. And he got involved with gangs in the streets at like 12 years old, 13 years old, you know, and to this day, he's almost 40 and it still has an effect on him.

So, like you said, you think about your past when, when you think about the decisions you made as a kid, those, some of those decisions you made then still

have an effect on how you make decisions now. So, so me seeing that and seeing what came with that, I was like, I don't think I want to do that. I thought I did at one point in time, [00:07:00] but as I got older and reality started settling, it's like, yeah, that looks like a long path that I don't want to go down.

Once you see somebody go down and you like, yeah, I'm good. I look back 15, 20 years now, and it's like, Ooh, I made the right decision. I'm still at home playing games and he's still out doing what he do. It's amazing though. It's amazing. But I have a lot of homies and people that I play games with that said the same thing from across the nation.

Even, even other countries, like we've all talked about it. People coming from New York, coming from Chicago and Florida. You know, kind of like how the youth advisory board is. We're all coming from across the country. That's how the game was. Yeah. It all comes from different places, similar walks of life, different walks of life, but the video game brought us together and literally like bonded us together.

And a lot of them were a lot of my friends I do play with who are older than me. And they're like [00:08:00] late thirties, early forties, some mid forties going into their fifties. They say the same thing, man. And then this, this video game is the reason why I'm still alive. You know, the video game is why I'm still alive and I'm still here.

I'm taking care of my children. I'm taking care of my girlfriend, my wife, and I'm, I have a career, you know, because of the video game, things could have been a lot worse.

**Mei:** Man, the domino effect is really so crazy. How just one little thing you pick up can change the trajectory of your life.

**Derek:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, and I think that because I'm always think like why did I gravitate towards I don't even know why I mean I did it as a kid, but then I never because some of my family members and Friends that I grew up with none of them really gravitated towards video game Like I I can't think of one person who's been involved with it like me that I grew up with or I've been around around

**Mei:** [00:09:00] Recently in one of our, um, past young adult advisory board meetings, you had mentioned how, uh, that when you got married, a lot of your groomsmen were actually friends that you, you had met through gaming . I would love to hear, like, how did you evolve those friendships over time?

Like, um, how did you sort of transition those friendships into in person to the point where, you know, you were like, yes, come be at my wedding.

**Derek:** So I think that to start, um, most, like when you, so I met my, the guys that were at my wedding, I met them actually playing Call of Duty.

I think it was in 20. 11 2011 or 2010 or 11. Um, and most of the time when you're playing with people, especially playing Call of Duty, people are talking trash on there. You know, they, they, they got a little something to say, you know, this, that, and the other. There's always a, a back and forth, back and forth on there.

Like every opportunity you get, you, you go in on each [00:10:00] other while you're playing. It's competitive. You know, and I think just over time playing with them, we built a relationship, you know, like a good friendship with each other. And whenever they were in town, because I live in Los Angeles, um, they were like, Hey, whenever I come to LA, I'll link up with you, whatever, whatever.

So we had actually, um, met up prior to the wedding a few times, you know, like one of my, one of my friends, um, actually, um, is a Disneyland fan. His, um, wife and then his, um, his, um, girlfriend, they, um, used to come down here a lot to go to Disneyland and Disneyland's like 20 minutes from me, I'm not too far from it.

And, um, just me linking up with him constantly over the years and us building like a really good bond and a good friendship. I asked him to be, you know, one of my groomsmen in the wedding and he was like, absolutely. You know, and then my other [00:11:00] friend, he's from, um, Chicago. Uh, what's crazy is. He actually met his now fiance from Call of Duty as well.

He met her from playing together and they just ended up talking and having a gaming relationship, just literally building a friendship. And then he came to LA and he basically linked up with me when he came here. And then he linked up with her and saw her in person and the rest is history. They're engaged.

They have a 10 year old. They bought a house together. They live together and, um, yeah, they, they have built a relationship from meeting on call of duty as well. So I asked him to be in the wedding as well. And he was like, sure. You know, we're like brothers for life. Both of them said that. And we all have a, we all know each other as well.

Like each one of them know, they know each other and they know me, of course. And we have a really good, um, relationship with just like [00:12:00] literally it's like a brotherhood, you know? Um, um, and it's just, it's been going now for almost 15 years. We've been knowing each other for at least, I have for me and one from Chicago, uh, 15, that's half our lives already, we've known each other.

Yeah, so, so it's, it's, it's, it's a thing. I mean, but then there's a lot of other people I have met or I knew from somewhere else or whatever that I, I got game with and been gaming with for years, or a lot of people are new that I just met and just started gaming with. Um, some people I have at least 10 year relations, 10, 10 year friendships with from the video.

**Emily:** Wow. That's, that's impressive too, that you were able to like, You know, make those friends and then like keep them for so long, especially if they started online. I feel like that's definitely not an easy thing to do.

**Derek:** Oh, yeah. Well, I would say I would thank God that these people had the same [00:13:00] phone numbers in case they did stop gaming.

And I, we ended up adding each other on social media, or we ended up having each other's phone numbers. And then we're sending each other stuff on social media or just. Keeping in contact like they're, they're both constantly in contact with me now asking, you know, how's my wife doing? How's the baby doing?

**Mei:** it definitely takes a lot of effort to maintain long distance friendships like that. Um, like what are your tips? To sort of maintain those ties and, and just keep everyone in your life. Cause I know it can definitely be really draining.

**Derek:** Um, I think as long as you're, as long as we're gaming together, it's like the friendships will always be there. I think as long as we're, cause even some of them, some of, how can I say this? Some of our friends don't game as much. Um, and they may have gotten off of social media as well. So with not gaming as much was not.

Being on social media as much every now and then [00:14:00] we'll call and just do a check in, you know, because from being on the game with people, you, you talk. You know, you, you talk, you check in and, you know, almost see how everything's going outside of the game. You know, I think, I think that that's probably the key to it all with the, with the, some of my, some of the homies or some of my homies is the fact that we do do like a mental health check in with each other is more than just us gaming some of them, of course, don't, some of

the ones I play with don't want to do that, but the ones that are like real friends, we definitely, definitely going to be checking in.

With each other through all stages of life, you know, I'm thinking of 15 years, a lot has happened in everyone's lives in a 15 year span, you know, so, so I think that if you want to keep the, keep the friendship going, keep the relationship going. Um, you just do check in. And of course you still game with each other I think [00:15:00] gaming is gaming with each other, or gaming together.

It's probably the thing that keeps it going or even over different systems because I could sit back and think like I've always been on PlayStation. That's why I got my PlayStation shirt on today. Um, I've always been on PlayStation with these guys and we've, we've now, um, graduated to graduated or game together through three systems that we met on PlayStation three.

So we went from PlayStation three, PlayStation four, and now we're all on PlayStation five.

**Emily:** Wow. Yeah, I like that too that you were talking about how, you know, like, yeah, like the friendship they started through gaming and that's still like a really important aspect of it but like, you kind of took it to that next level also being able to call each other and like talk about, you know, just like check in on like how life is going like outside of gaming and like, I think having that, you know, shared.

Interest and shared, like experience to like build a foundation is really important. And then [00:16:00] like, you know, you're saying like being able to kind of take it to that next level as well. And like, make sure that these are like actual, like solidified friendships and not just like gaming buddies, which that's great too.

But then you were saying like, it can be helpful for your mental health too, if like, you can have those people to check in with.

**Derek:** Oh yeah, no, absolutely. Cause I remember. Like when I first started gaming, I could think it was maybe 2000 when I first started like really online gaming, 2010, 2011, I was literally going through like a depression, like a serious depression, but what kept me or what got me out of the depression was the fact that I was able to do some stress relieving, do the video game or through video games, just in general, mostly a call of duty.

So, um, that helped a lot. And but then also. You know, they were, we were checking in with each other and, you know, things were just a little rough at the time. Um, my aunt that [00:17:00] raised me was, you know, um, dying from cancer and then she ended up passing away in 2013. And my, the, the, the, my friends were there, they were there going through that, that grieving process, even at the, even at the beginning of it, because the beginning of it was the hardest part when she first passed away, that first six months still was a blur.

Like, I don't even remember like what happened. Or how life was, as you know, it wasn't the easiest and it was really rough, but being able to game with, with, with the homies and also being able to check in with each other and just talk about everything and them, them understanding what was going on and who my was in my life, they were there for me to help me get through that, you know, grieving process.

So I always tell people, you know, a lot of people may look at online game and like, it's just a thing, but like, we always talk about it. Even some of the new guys that I just met or just started playing with this year. We [00:18:00] always say it's, it's, it's more than like a habit. It's literally a lifestyle. And with it being a lifestyle, it's, um, you know, it, it, it has its perks with being a lifestyle because you have your, your like gaming family, almost like they're part of your therapy.

You know, they're part of your mental health

I think another one of our friends his mother actually got murdered and with his mother being murdered, he told us that being in the chat with us, he was saying like, this has helped me get through that grieving process of knowing my mother got murdered.

And, um, it was, it was real rough on him, but he was like, I love you guys. My brothers for life. For helping me get through this, helping me with this grieving process just by goofing off, just by being like, just helping me laugh and helping me deal with this pain, you know? And I was like, wow, I didn't even know because he kind of disappeared for a little bit.

Then he came back and I was asking my other friend, like, hey, what happened to him? And he said, yeah, this happened. I was like, oh, [00:19:00] and he said, but let's just keep checking in with him, making sure he's okay, you know, and be good friends to him.

**Emily:** Yeah. I mean, that's. You know, both of those are like really heavy, heavy things and I think it's great that you guys were able to be there for each



other through all of that and, you know, like, I and I like what you said to like your friend was making sure that you guys were checking in on him and just like seeing how he's doing.

I think that's really important. Yeah, I mean, they sound like really good friends.

**Derek:** Oh, yeah.

**Mei:** Yeah, and I think it's so important like you're saying to have some sort of outlet that you use to to let off steam and goof off and just have that sort of social connection with people who also enjoy your same hobby.

So, yeah, I think it's, it's awesome. You found out through gaming and, you know, for people listening, it doesn't have to be gaming, it can be anything right. Like any, you know, maybe you like to knit so you can find, you know, a virtual knitting club, maybe, or like [00:20:00] book club, literally anything.

**Derek:** Oh, yeah. Like, believe it or not, there are gaming community is so big and so vast in terms of like variety of games. YouTube is like the goat of different games that are out there. Like I didn't even know there was certain games out there. Like I'm watching, I'm watching videos now of recently I was watching videos of this guy who does, um, there's a game called planet coasters.

And he does reviews on people that build theme parks on this game called planet coaster They're putting two three hundred hours in on building their own theme park from scratch from the ground up and it's almost like a groundbreaking thing like the rides the Everything the details and I was like, I also didn't watch a two hour video of this guy reviewing other people's Uh theme parks.

I was like, why am I doing this? Intrigued [00:21:00] by this, you know, because the time it took, I know it took a long time to build that from the ground up, but it's very interesting to see how people's brains work and how they operate and how they want to, you know, they, they, they want to do these things and they want to show everybody that they did it.

It's just like, whoa, this is very impressive.

**Mei:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, that's true. Cause like, I feel like, okay, if we take the rollercoaster example, not everyone, probably most people don't have the resources to literally build their own rollercoaster, but that doesn't mean they don't have good ideas for what would make a good rollercoaster.

So I feel like. Was it Coaster World? Is that what it was called?

**Derek:** I think it's called Planet Coaster. But I think it's not just roller coasters. It's a whole theme park from the ground up.

**Mei:** That is so cool.

**Derek:** Everything. Like, I was like,

**Mei:** how did

**Derek:** they do it?

**Mei:** That is so awesome. Like, I [00:22:00] feel like there's so many games like that, that give people the opportunity to, um, like put their ideas out in the world when they don't have the opportunity to in, you know, in actuality.

**Derek:** So yeah. There's another one that's similar to that is called, um, Oh my God. I cannot think of his name. It's um, City Skies. There you go. City Skies 1 and City Skies 2. City Skies 2 just recently came out in the last six months or so. And that's another one where you're building the whole city from the ground up.

I'm working on it

**Emily:** right now.

**Derek:** Yeah, that includes plumbing, electrical, how you, how you do, um, how you can get like, um, solar energy. Oh my God, like police stations, fire stations, schools, hospitals. Everything. Jobs are just different types of homes. The [00:23:00] income. Oh my, that one is another one that's just like planet coaster.

This might build in a whole infrastructure of the city. People building mega cities, building little Los Angeles counties and stuff like that. You know, 3000 square miles, 4000 square miles over just a whole city. Everything that can go on the city. Theme parks, stadiums, everything, colleges. You see that you'd be like, Oh, this is crazy too.

**Emily:** Yeah. I, I like to play the Sims and like, I also kind of watched those videos on YouTube where it's like, people build these like really intricate

houses. I'm like, how did you even think of that? Like the creativity that people have is so impressive with these types of games.

**Derek:** Cause, cause I know it takes a lot of, some people say they put a hundred hours plus into doing these things and they go back to it every day.

You know, it's almost like a mechanic or an engineer, you know, um, it's, it's, it's very [00:24:00] impressive. Like I like, I like watching stuff like that. Cause I'm just like, I, I don't think I could ever do anything like this. It's too time consuming, but the fact that somebody did do it, it's very impressive.

**Mei:** I

**Derek:** agree.

**Mei:** I think that's, I mean, it's like appreciating art in a way. There you go. Yeah, absolutely. I think it really is art. Think it's been made very clear that online communities can definitely be real, authentic communities. Where you can build a lot of lasting relationships out of them. Um, and the thing is there's a lot of differing opinions about how video games impact people. Like some people think it could be a great tool, a great use of time.

And I think. You've shown us today, a lot of the benefits of, um, online gaming, but then there's also the argument of, um, it's not good for your mental health. And, you know, people are getting too [00:25:00] sucked up into the virtual world and not spending enough time on, you know, things that should be quote unquote important in your real life.

So I was just curious, like, what's your perspective on online gaming and whether it hurts or helps. people in the long run. And like, I mean, it sounds like you've ultimately been able to benefit from it, but how, how did you strike that balance? I guess

**Derek:** that's actually what I was about to say was at first, when I first started playing, I didn't have nothing else to do, or I did have things to do, but I wasn't like working at the time I was looking for a job.

So what I did, my spirit, the time I had, I just, I just gained all day. So, but I think as I've gotten older and responsibilities and things have changed, I think that I have like a balance. There's definitely, definitely, I had to have a balance for it because, you know, I remember at one point in time I was working two [00:26:00] jobs, 16 hours a day.

You know, my day started 5 30 a. m. and didn't end till 10 p. m. at night. Um, and that was Monday through Thursday. So there was no way for, there was no time for me to game in during the week. But then when I had like a Friday off and weekends, it wasn't, you know, on top of that, you know, me and my wife used to go to Disneyland a lot.

We had, um, excuse me. We had an annual passes at Disneyland. So we used to go there on the weekend. Um, again, I would still try to squeeze some time to play in at that time. Cause I was just so every day was something was going on. So I think the, I had like one day a week, maybe two days a week where I would play.

I would now say that with Friday and Saturday. But it was a balance to it, because I just didn't have any time to do it during the week, during work hours, you know, I wasn't at home. Um, so, so I think that, and I think this, this was at the time, there was [00:27:00] like a portable game, you know, the Nintendo Switch, and um, I think that was really it, just like the Nintendo Switch was like the only portable game they had at the time.

But now everything is, you can play computer games on your cell phone. You know, you can download, I can even play my PlayStation 5 on my cell phone. Um, what's like the PlayStation streaming app or whatever. Uh, but I just choose not to, I choose not to, because I look at it like gaming, for me, gaming has always been at home.

And when I was a kid watching, playing with my older brothers, um, with the Nintendo, uh, Super Nintendo and, um, um, the red, the original Nintendo and Nintendo 64, we played all that at home. So because I'm used to gaming community being at home, home based, I never really got into the portable gaming thing.

Um, so I think that was another thing that was a balance too. Like I could have done it, but I didn't really want to. Um, but, but just gaming in general, when [00:28:00] I was at that time, like even now, like I, I still try to get on at least once a day, um, but with, you know, my wife being pregnant and me still working and just having things to do during the day.

I can't. Get on like right now, if I wanted to, I don't have the time to do it. So I think just the balance of, of your, I guess you could say your priority list. Like, I think the priority list is what made me realize, like, I'm still do it. But I just don't do it as much as I used to.

**Emily:** Yeah. I think that balance is definitely really important. Um, I mean, for anything really, you know, like, yeah, good to talk about anything and have balance with it. But yeah, that's and I liked what you said to about, like, um, you know, for you, like, it's, it's something that you dedicate time towards. You know, like maybe once a day and like it's something that you do while you're at home or like when you have days off like I think that is, that's a good way to kind of like find that balance where it's just sort of, you know, you have a lot of other stuff going on [00:29:00] and you have, you know, everything in your life, but you still kind of make time for something like that that like, let's see, let off some steam and like it.

You get to like hang out with your friends and I think that's really

**Derek:** important. It's, it's, it's a stress reliever. It really is. I think that gaming can be a, can be a stress reliever and it can, you know, help you with just the stresses of life, especially right now with the way things are going, you know, um, probably the biggest stress reliever that I have, uh, besides just taking a nap or something, you know, of, uh, it's definitely a stress reliever.

a stress reliever during a tough time, you know.

**Emily:** Yeah.

**Derek:** I can vouch for that. I can definitely vouch for that all the way and say it is a stress reliever and it does help with just daily living, you know.

**Emily:** Right. Yeah. Well, yeah. And you were, you know, talking about how you've met a lot of friends like through gaming, [00:30:00] um, and like kind of like build that community over time.

And like, do you think that there are ways in which like having those sort of communities and those friendships online Do you think that in some ways like people tend to gravitate towards that type of connection like online? over like in person connection Um, and like do you think that having that community and those friendships online makes socializing easier sometimes?

**Derek:** Yeah, that's a really good question I guess because i'm already a social person You could say it would, but some people aren't as social. So I would say, I think it depends. I think it just depends on the person. Cause some people may be better with socializing with people on the game and the comfort of their homes, you know, compared to socializing with people in person, they could be

a different person, you know, like they'd have social, they could have some type of social anxiety, like in public.

You know, cause I, I have [00:31:00] a good friend of mine. Um, he. Doesn't do well in crowd, like big crowds of people, but he's a very social person in like a setting where it's just a few people, he's more social, probably more social than I am on par with my social, how social I am, but in big crowds, like, like I would say, like going to the, maybe the mall compared to going to Disneyland, the mall is a little more comfortable for him than Disneyland would be, you know, cause there's thousands and thousands of people at Disneyland, there's maybe hundreds of people at the mall.

So I've. If that makes it actually makes sense, I just think it depends on how social you are in both settings, you know, because there's also people on the game that aren't as social. They don't have a headset. They don't talk when we're playing. Um, they're just, you know, they're just there. They're not talking about anything.

They're just gaming, you know? Um, but [00:32:00] then there's people that are like, like me that socialize with everybody, add people as friends and we'll play a game together and, you know, just that and the other. So, I literally think it depends on the person

**Mei:** I agree. I think it's, you have to do a little bit of. I don't know. I feel like soul searching sounds dramatic but just have some sort of, you know, get to know yourself and learn like how you like to socialize like if you think you do have trouble connecting to people in person.

Um, then maybe try out an online community, you know, and then see if you can develop that friendship into an in person friendship. Um, or like vice versa, maybe online communities don't work for you and you don't feel connected through them. Okay. Then, you know, try something in person. Um, I think it's, there's no one size fits all.

**Derek:** I think it's also a conversation started too, because when I worked at a, [00:33:00] um, when I worked at a transition, transitional age youth center, I worked there for eight years. And a lot of times I wear like a PlayStation shirt or some type of gaming shirt, or even like an anime shirt or something like that.

And it's a conversation starter with people who are fully antisocial. They're not social at all. And one thing could spark their attention. And then there's a full blown conversation to somebody that they said isn't social. So, you know, with,

with that being said, I think it just, When I have conversations with other people about video gaming and just gaming in general, they say the same thing like, oh, um, oh, you play this or you play that or how's this and how's that?

You know, it's literally a conversation starter and it could turn somebody to a complete social person.

**Mei:** Bring someone out of their shell.

**Derek:** Oh yeah. Open them all the way up. Literally. Open them all the way up. They turn into a different person. He'd be like, wow. [00:34:00] You know, they're like this, they didn't talk at all.

I was like, I'm just, I'm just going off what I do it. And they see, Oh, I've done this. I played this and I've done that. Like, Oh yeah, you should try this. You should try that. And they're like, you know, it literally is a, it's a, it's very interesting to see, you know, especially over time, they'll come back and we'll still have the conversations about video games or about anime or about whatever, you know, it just opened up completely.

It's a good, it's a, it's a great feeling to see people do that too. Yeah.

**Mei:** Yeah, yeah, to see that, see it, sort of see what clicks with them, what gets them to open up.

**Derek:** So

**Mei:** yeah, well, on that note, um, I really want to know what are your favorite video games right now? You have any recommendations for people who want to get into gaming

**Derek:** right at this moment?

**Mei:** Yeah. Right at this moment.

**Derek:** Okay. So as of right now, I'm only playing two [00:35:00] games on my PlayStation 5. I have a Playstation 5, which is actually mounted on the wall over here, uh, connected to the big TV.

I am only playing Tekken 8, which is a fighting game, um, and I'm playing this other game called Helldivers 2. I am stuck, full fledged, in this game. It's only

been out, what, two months now, and I'm over 130 hours late in two months. This game, is one of the dopest games I think I've ever played because of, because of the way it progresses and degresses by how many people are playing and what people are doing. And, you know, we have like orders and this, that, and the other.

It's amazing. It's really dope. And it's like all the records and done all these crazy numbers and all can, and nobody, I remember when they announced it and I saw like the preview trailer, I didn't think nothing of it. And then it came out and I saw people playing and I was like, wait a minute. What is that?[00:36:00]

I started playing it and the rest is history.

**Emily:** That sounds like a fun one to like play with friends too.

**Derek:** Oh yeah, I've met a lot of friends just from playing that and people that I'm friends with on PlayStation. Um, people that I am friends with on PlayStation as well or Just on the game in general, they play it and man, it's, it's amazing.

It really is. It's a really fun game. I'm enjoying that.

**Mei:** Yeah. It sounds awesome.

**Derek:** Oh yeah. Just, I would say, look it up, look up some videos. You'll see exactly why it's making all the waves. I think they said at one point in time, the servers, The servers had 750,000 people on there at one time.

**Emily:** Wow.

**Derek:** That's about that.

They had, they had to, they had to keep extending the servers because there was so many people playing. The game would break, couldn't nobody, you couldn't get on the server. It was like trying to reconnect. Trying to reconnect to where they've had to constantly [00:37:00] make, get the server bigger, get the service bigger from like 200,000 to three 50 to 500 to.

I think it's up to 750.



**Emily:** Wow.

**Derek:** Yeah, it's broken almost every record you could think of in terms of like people that are playing it on a regular basis. Daily, like a daily record of like, I think at one time, 300, 350, 000, we were playing all at once one game worldwide. I think it's worldwide.

**Mei:** Yeah. that is insane

**Derek:** And Tekken 8 as well. Yeah, Tekken 8 as well. I tell people I've been playing Tekken since the first one came out in the 90s. And now we're on the eighth one. What 30 almost 30 years later and um, I've been playing that one as well. It looks amazing too So those are those are honestly those are the only two games that i'm playing I end up deleting a lot of games off because i'm like i'm not going to play these games

**Emily:** thank you for those recommendations. Those both sound really interesting. And thank you for just, yeah, for being here and for like sharing your [00:38:00] story. And it was really great getting to talk to you and hearing all about, you know, your community and video games and how much they've impacted you.

**Derek:** Oh, yeah. No, thank you guys. I appreciate you. Appreciate both of you for having me here. You know, anytime you want to talk more about it. I'm here.

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