

'Bereavement' counselling is now available to help children come to terms with the death of their Tamagotchi.

Dr Mark Griffiths is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. He has published over 50 refereed research papers on gambling and gaming addictions, and in 1994 was the first recipient of the John Rosencrance Research Prize. His current interests are concerned with 'technological addictions', particularly to computer games and the Internet.

Mark Griffiths

Are virtual pets more demanding than the real thing?

Over the past few months I have been receiving more and more calls from various parts of the media asking me for my thoughts on Tamagotchis — or cyberpets, as the press have dubbed them — particularly about whether they are a threat to either educational or social development. At the moment it is far too early to give definitive answers to such questions, but these press enquiries have certainly stimulated my thoughts on the subject.

A threat to mental health?

Tamagotchis are currently the country's best-selling toy, and appear to be a craze sweeping the UK child population. In Japan (where they originated), Tamagotchis have been selling a million a month since their launch in November 1996. Since their launch in this country on 8 May 1997, Tamagotchis have been discussed on *Esther* and *The Late Show*, have made an appearance in *The Archers*, and have been written about in newspaper stories up and down the country. For instance *Gotchi! Is this toy a threat to our mental health?* which appeared in the Independent on Sunday (13 July 1997), was one such story.

Although the toys are probably a fad, they do seem to be a new breed of toy that is more interesting psychologically than many of its predecessors like Space Hoppers, Deely-Boppers, and the Rubik's Cube. Many may argue that we have always been fascinated by portable

games and toys. However, unlike most toys, which people eventually get bored with, it is alleged that Tamagotchis require their owners to be the slave rather than the master. This Christmas there is likely to be a Tamagotchi bonanza, which will be fuelled by more sophisticated versions and six more colours. Many schools, both here and in South East Asia, have already banned them in an attempt to stop them interfering with children's educational development.

For those reading this who still have no idea what a Tamagotchi is or does, then let me explain. Tamagotchi means 'egg watch' or 'lovable egg', and the device looks like an egg-shaped key ring. It is about 60mm in diameter and has a small liquid crystal display screen. By pulling a small tag on the side, an 'egg' hatches to reveal a small chick, and the owner has to attend to its every need by pressing the appropriate buttons.

Constant attention

These virtual pets demand all the things you would expect of a real pet (being fed, going to the toilet, going for walks, being disciplined when it is naughty, being given injections if it is sick, etc.). They require constant attention to survive. Unhappy animals that are not fed or nurtured make noises (squeals, snarls) at their owners and will die if they are ignored. The aim of the game — if indeed it is a game — is to keep the Tamagotchi alive for as long as possible. The

The owner of a Tamagotchi is required to be a slave rather than a master.

- Alderman Quiley, Eastleigh
- Bourne Comm. College, Emsworth
- Brighthelm, Brighton
- The Colnaght, Aldershot
- Court Moor, Fleet
- Cricket Green, Basingstoke
- Canbourne School, Basingstoke
- Cricklade College, Andover
- Fenny Hill, Southampton
- Frognore Community, Yateley
- Hampson Park, Southampton
- John Hunt of Everest, Basingstoke
- King Richard, Portsmouth
- Oak Farm, Farnborough
- Oak Park Community, Havant
- Quinton College, Basingstoke
- Romsey, Greatbridge
- St Luke's C.E., Southampton
- The Waverley, Farnborough
- Weston Park, City Girls', Southampton
- Wotton, Andover
- Harrow
- Gayton High
- Havering
- Abbs Cross, Hornchurch
- Britons, Ramfam
- Harold Hill Community, Romford
- St Edward's C.E., Romford
- Hereford & Worcester
- Abbey High, Redditch
- Belmore, Hereford
- Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat,
- Clubsley, Hereford
- Christopher Whitehead, St Johns
- Eastham High, Hereford
- The Hill Jnr High, Upton-upon-Severn
- The John Kyrie High, Ross-on-Wye
- Kingstons High, Ledbury
- Lady Hawkins, Kington
- Prince Henry's High, Evesham
- Queen Elizabeth High, Bromyard
- St David's High, Hereford
- St Peter's, Tutton Unit, Worcester
- Woolley High
- Whitecross High, Hereford
- Wigmore High, Leominster
- Hertfordshire
- Aceyfield, Hemel Hempstead
- Berkhamstead
- Francis Bacon (GM), St Albans
- Mariborough School, St Albans
- Melrose, St Albans
- Nicholas Breakspear, St Albans
- St Frederick Osborne,
- St Albans High
- St Georges, Harpenden
- The Village College, Berkhamstead
- Townsend C.E., St Albans
- Tring
- Hillingdon
- Barnhill, Hayes
- Hayes Manor
- Vyners
- Hounslow
- Busch House, Isleworth
- Green, Isleworth
- Gunnersbury School for Girls,
- Gunnersbury School for Boys
- Heston Manor
- Isleworth and Syon
- Lendon School, Feltham
- St Mark's R.C.
- Humberside
- Baysharth Comprehensive,
- Baron-upon-Humber
- Fredrick Gough, Scunthorpe
- Greatfield, Hull
- Howden Comp., Scunthorpe
- John Leggat, College, Scunthorpe
- North Axtone Comp., Scunthorpe
- North Lindsey College, Scunthorpe
- South Holderness Comp., Epsworth
- St Hugh's, Scunthorpe
- St Mary's College, Hull
- Thomas Sumpter, Scunthorpe
- Western Comprehensive, Grimsby
- Winterton Comprehensive
- Winterton, Grimsby
- Vernyarden School, Goode
- Isle of Man
- Balskircree High
- Castle Rushen, Castletown
- Queen Elizabeth 2nd High
- St Ninians, Douglas
- Isle Of Wight
- Archbishop King RC Middle, Newport

