

Online Gaming: A Guide

Online games can offer children a world of adventure to immerse themselves in, but it is important to understand how children can stay safe and what games are appropriate for their age.

For more detailed information and advice:

www.net-aware.org.uk
www.internetmatters.org



What is online gaming?



Online gaming describes any video game that offers online interactions with other players.

Most games now provide online interactions.

The difference with each game is the level of interaction on offer: how much information players share and how many people they interact with.



What are children doing while online gaming?

Playing together

Often with other players from all over the world, sometimes with people you know and sometimes with strangers.

Trading virtual items

Exchanging items and power-ups, sometimes money can be spent to unlock more items to trade.

Sharing information

Setting up an account to create an online profile and persona, different privacy levels can be set.

Social media gaming

Boundaries between gaming and social media are blurred, many children's first experience of an online interaction with a stranger will be in a game

Watching other people play

watching videos or live-streams of other players, sometimes these videos can be edited to include inappropriate clips.



What are some gaming trends?

Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMORPG)

Offer an immersive shared experience that continuously evolves. Examples include Fortnite and World of Warcraft.

Mobile gaming

Free-to-play games (with options for in-game purchases) and low cost gaming apps.

Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR)

Using the real world and taking gaming outside. Examples include Pokemon GO and Harry Potter: Wizards Unite.

Social gaming

Can be for casual gamers or also offer deeper social interactions to encourage players to get real-time feedback, build communities and add to immersive nature. Gamers can share hints with friends or upload and stream their gameplay.



What are some gaming trends?

Live streaming games

Real-time videos of people playing a game. Commentaries can be added.

Cryptocurrency

A digital currency in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of units of currency and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank. Used for making in-game purchases. Examples include Bitcoin and Ethereum.

eSports

Organised gaming where players compete in worldwide tournaments as individuals and teams to win large cash prizes. Players often spend many hours training to improve their gameplay.

Cloud-based games

Allows players to run live games in a cloud server and stream it on their mobile devices without having to download any software or app.



Benefits



Learning and Development

- Develop early learning skills e.g. reading (learn in an engaging way)
- Enhance memory, brain speed and concentration (strategy and problem solving skills requiring lots of information)
- Improved multi-tasking skills (attention to detail and quick reactions)
- Build skills for future careers (strategic, analytical, understand culture and perspectives)

Physical and Social

- Nurture relationships through shared moments and improve social skills
- Way to be social and make friends if restricted due to disabilities
- Promotes teamwork and builds confidence
- Some games can help motivate children to stay active while gaming (e.g. Pokemon GO)
- Provide a way to develop compassion (some specifically designed games/apps)
- Provide a safe context to talk about fears (easier to talk in virtual context)
- New way to experience stories
- Create time and space for deeper thinking about topics



Potential Risks



Online Game Addiction

- Games are designed to minimise the hurdles to repeat play and maximise enjoyment. Playing lots of games is not addiction, it is when it is to the severe detriment of other parts of life

Contact with Strangers

- Growth of social networking in gaming
- Use of personas to hide real identities

Online Gaming Health

- Sedentary hobby, bright flashing lights – important to take regular breaks

Costs and Gambling

- In-game purchases
- Skin gambling/Loot Boxes – chance to win an in-game item
- Third party apps offering in-game currency in exchange for information

Effects on Behaviour

- A direct link between video game violence and violent behaviour has not been found, however it is important to check the PEGI ratings



Managing Emotions



When children play on their own, or for too long, this can affect their mood and mental state. Frustration, not wanting to stop or even anger can be symptoms we notice. If you notice these effects it is important to pay attention to the cause.

Tips to help your child:

- Create time to enjoy games together (helps to spot cause and effect)
- Find a wider range of games to play
- Introduce calming games
- Discuss and agree with your child a good length of playtime – help them to take ownership
- Avoid medicalising bad habits – it is not necessarily an addiction

More detailed advice:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/expert-opinion/what-to-do-if-gaming-gets-out-of-hand/>



Healthy Gaming Top Tips



In addition to making your child part of the process of creating clear boundaries on what games they can play, when and for how long, here are some more tips to help them stay healthy when gaming:

- Encourage your child to take regular breaks
- Play games in open spaces
- Show them how to stay respectful while gaming
- Help them to see the bigger picture when it comes to gaming
- Encourage them to try challenging games that offer variation in activities
- Encourage your child to notice enjoyment and frustrations
- Explain the importance of protecting their personal information
- Make gaming active
- Give them tools to use when things go wrong



Further Resources

There are further resources and information available on <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/online-gaming-advice/online-gaming-resources/>

- Setting parental controls on games and consoles
- Online game review sites to choose games
- Gaming guides for parents
- Gaming guides for children
- Gaming books
- Gaming organisations

