CASS GUIDES

Online gaming: helping children to play safe

Gaming can be a great way for young people to relax, socialise with their friends and have fun. Children can play on games consoles, apps or websites, and chat to other players or watch them play through live-streaming.

But there are some dangers. And with so many games available online, it can be hard for parents to know how to keep their child safe.

What are the risks of online games?

- **Children may view inappropriate or upsetting content** if they play games that aren't suitable for their age. This could include sexual or violent material. It might be in-game content or produced by other players.
- **Some players can be abusive towards others** or try to exclude them from the game. Some players may also hack another user's account.
- **Children may play with adults they don't know.** People of all ages play games. Some adults may exploit this and try to build an emotional connection with a child for the purpose of grooming.
- **Some children may find it hard to stop playing games** or find that gaming is getting the way of them doing other activities.

5 ways to help children play safe

1. Check the game's content

Always check age ratings but remember they don't cover everything. It's important to check the game out yourself before letting a young child play it.

2. Know how to mute, block and report

Help children understand that people they meet online may not always be who they claim to be. Some games let you mute, block and report other users. Make sure your child knows how to do this if someone in the game upsets them or makes them feel uncomfortable. Childline has online gaming advice to help them do this. Remind your child they can come to you if they're ever worried.

3. Be Share Aware

Remind your child not to give out any personal information, photos or videos to anyone online, even if they know them. If your child plays games with people they don't know, remind them not to take the conversation off the game and onto other social networks or into a private chat.

4. Activate safety settings

Turn on parental controls on gaming consoles to help prevent children from downloading age inappropriate games or seeing harmful material. Contact the O2 & NSPCC Online Safety Helpline for free on 0808 800 5002 for advice on how to do this.

5. Keep the conversation going

Have regular conversations with your child about staying safe online. Agree what games are suitable for them to play and help them understand why others are inappropriate. Talk to them about the types of games they may be watching on game streaming sites.

Remind them they should tell a trusted adult, like a teacher or parent, if they see or hear something that upsets them when gaming. And they can talk to Childline for free 24 hours a day if they're ever worried.

Addiction

If you are concerned about someone you know who seems to spend far too much time playing computer games, the "Family Lives" organisation provides support and advice. You can visit their website at www.familylives.org.uk or call them on 0808 800 2222.

For more information please visit www.nspcc.org.uk

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