

### Online Games

Online games can be a great way for children to stay busy and keep in touch with their friends and family. However, children's access to unsuitable content as a result of gaming is on the increase. There are a variety of other risks involved with online gaming: chances of being bullied, trolling and scams, in-game purchases and opportunities to talk to people that they do not know.

In order to decide if a game is appropriate for your child, there are a variety of things you can do. Firstly, check the content of the game and any chat function, as well relevant age ratings. Secondly, consider who your child could have contact with while using the game; it is possible to turn off or limit chat functions in the settings. It is also important to observe whether the game affects your child's behaviour. Very intensive games can result in short-term behavioural changes, which can be avoided by ensuring that a game is suitable and by limiting a child's playing time. Finally, many games also have opportunities for in-app purchasing. There has been increasing pressure on children to purchase power ups or skins in order to compete against others. In a game's settings, in-app purchases can be turned off, or a spending cap limit can be set on a device or app.

### Gaming Advice: Top Tips for Setting Boundaries Around Gaming

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit [www.nationalonlinesafety.com](http://www.nationalonlinesafety.com) for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

## Top Tips for SETTING BOUNDARIES AROUND GAMING

If your child loves video games, then you'll probably be aware that how long they spend gaming – and what they're actually playing – can occasionally become a source of concern or conflict. The UK's trade body for interactive entertainment, Ukie, has recently launched a campaign to promote safer and more responsible gaming among young people – with parents and carers helping by setting sensible and fair boundaries. Our guide has tips on key areas where you could agree some healthy ground rules for your child's gaming activity.



#### PROMOTE SAFER GAME CHOICES

Deciding which online games are OK – and which should be avoided – is tricky. Some titles allow children to cooperate or compete with strangers, which creates potential risks. Watching your child play online for a while could provide more insight into a particular game, while the parental controls on most consoles allow you to limit who can chat to your child or send them friend requests. Remind your child of the hazards around strangers online when you discuss this boundary with them.

#### ENCOURAGE REGULAR BREAKS

Help your child understand the need to take regular breaks, playing in shorter bursts rather than marathon sessions. Bear in mind that some games (such as role-playing games) require time investment from the player, while others (online team games, for example) can't be stopped or paused at a moment's notice. A quick break every hour or so is good practice, and you could suggest some things to do in these breaks, such as having a drink of water or getting some fresh air.

#### AGREE SPENDING LIMITS

There's no doubt that gaming can be expensive, and younger players often don't realise how much paying for digital items and subscriptions can add up to. Many young gamers love to buy new skins or upgrades for their character, so you could settle on a fixed amount that your child is allowed to spend on in-game items each week or month. This sort of boundary will not only help your child to manage their expectations but will also make you more aware of the price of these items.

#### DISCUSS AGE RATINGS

Children often ignore the age ratings on games – or are unaware they even exist. If you're happy with your child playing a particular game even though it's rated above their age, then establish that as a boundary: emphasise that you've made an exception, and talk about what age ratings mean and why they're important. You could add context to this boundary by browsing gamers' boxes together while shopping, discussing why some games might have earned certain age ratings.

#### MEET OUR EXPERT

Daniel Lipscombe is a writer specialising in technology, video gaming, virtual reality and Web3. He has also written 18 guidebooks for children, covering games such as Fortnite, Apex Legends, Roblox, Roblox and Minecraft. With work published by the likes of iFC Games, Kotaku, Pocket Gamer and XOXO, he has reviewed more than 50 games and products over the past year.

Source: <https://hipoi.app/about/privacy.html>

#### FACTOR IN FRIENDS

If your child is a keen video gamer, the chances are that they'll have other gamers among their social circle, too. When friends visit, do they instantly dash to their console or computer? You could put boundaries in place before their guests arrive by agreeing on a length of gaming time, bear in mind, though, that they may try to extend this once they're together. Try coming up with activities or challenges for them during screen breaks – if they join in, they earn a little extra time on their game.

#### ENJOY GAMING TOGETHER

Setting time aside to play video games together can be an enjoyable bonding exercise. Undeniably, some young gamers may be less enthusiastic about a parent or carer joining in, but it can be a productive way of encouraging them to share their hobby with you. Setting goals or tasks might be useful if they love Minecraft, choose something to build together. If Fortnite's their favourite, ask to try out some of the fun game modes, like Frog Hunt, which don't require high skill levels.

#### TALK ABOUT EMOTIONS

Help your child to monitor their emotions as they play. Discuss what is (and isn't) an acceptable level of competitiveness to show while gaming. Are they allowed to trash talk other players, for example? Can they notice when they get angry if they lose? Do they think these emotions are healthy? Some games can provoke anger, but others can bring joy, humour and the thrill of overcoming a challenge. Try to steer your child towards games that tend to produce these more positive feelings.

#### BE PREPARED FOR TROLLS

A frequent problem when gaming online is other players who are deliberately troublesome. Make sure your child knows how to report and block someone who makes their experience a negative one. Between you, decide if or how they should deal with these online trolls. Talk about where your child's boundaries are in terms of what they think is acceptable behaviour by other users is merely frustrating, and what crosses the line to become upsetting or abusive.

**NOS** National Online Safety  
#WakeUpWednesday

Twitter: @nationalonlinesafety  
Facebook: /NationalOnlineSafety  
Instagram: @nationalonlinesafety  
TikTok: @national\_online\_safety

Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into. Current as of the date of release: 13.09.2023

For more information or support, please do not hesitate in speaking to Miss Arnett, our computing lead.