Your child and online gaming: what you need to know

GAMING 4 GOOD

GET SAFE ONLINE.org

Your child and Gaming4Good

GAMING 4GOOD

Like many other things children do online, gaming has undergone a massive increase in popularity since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of more time spent at home and restrictions on physical social contact.

Also in common with many other online activities, there are both positive and negative aspects to gaming. But the commonly held traditional view that children's gaming is largely a negative thing, is becoming rapidly overturned as more people appreciate its many positive aspects. Depending on the games in question, these include:

- Supporting development of a wide range of cognitive and motor skills
- Developing qualities such as strategic thinking, rationalising, problem solving and persistence
- Encouraging creativity
- Teaching teamwork, in the case of many Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs or MMOs)
- Teaching competitiveness, again in the case of multiplayer games
- Socialising with friends, especially when doing so in person is challenging owing to various restrictions.
- Learning the value of money and spending it wisely.

All of these are qualities are vital not only in gaming, but also in equipping our young people for life ahead of them.

Also, as an industry, game development often leads the way in technology, with innovations in functionality and features finding their way into not only other consumer products, but defence, communications and many other sectors. Gaming equips children to understand and embrace this evolution and its benefits.

Aside from these very obvious benefits, gaming has proved a lifeline to many young people over the lockdowns – relieving their boredom and supporting their ongoing wellbeing in a time of unfamiliarity and upheaval.

Working with your child

Check out these findings from an Ofcom survey of internet usage in 2020*, based on children's responses:

- Around 7 in 10 children aged 5-15 played games online
- Time spent gaming in a typical day increased over 2019
- 22% of 8-15-year-olds chatted to people they knew only through playing the game

This research, and a new YouGov parent survey for Get Safe Online**, both highlighted a commonplace concern amongst parents being pressure to spend money in-game. Our survey also revealed concerns that children spend too much time sitting still whilst gaming instead of exercising.

However, some of the responses of the Get Safe Online survey indicated that parents' understanding of their children's online gaming activity is very different from what children are actually doing.

It's very important that you understand and support your child's interest in online gaming. Like many parents, you may have little or no interest in it yourself, but there are things you can do to both encourage them to find the best games as well as helping them avoid the negative aspects mentioned above. Who knows, you may even find a favourite game for yourself.

Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2020/21, Ofcom
*** You Gov Gaming4Good survey May 2021*

What are the risks?

- Risks to children who play games online arise largely from the vast number of people both in the UK and abroad who are also playing, the minimal restrictions and the fact that they are not playing face-to-face.

- Stranger danger can pose a risk to the safety of the child, or a risk of financial or identity theft to you, if your child overshares personal family information online. Cybercriminals also use gaming platforms and forums to recruit young people for illicit activities such as malware coding and money muling, and some radicalisation begins on gaming platforms.

- Playing games with an inappropriate age rating, potentially exposing them to violent, sexual or other unsuitable content.

- Playing games which either reference gambling, or involve gambling to, for example, predict results or win money.

- Running up bills (for example, on in-game properties/in-app purchases), perhaps on your credit card.

- Spending excessive time gaming, to the exclusion of social contact, exercise and schoolwork, and potential health risks.

Keep your child's online gaming safe

- **Work with your child** to find the best games for their age, interests and personality.

- **Join your child** in online gaming from time to time and randomly. This will give you an idea of the games they're playing and who they connect with.

- **Have open and honest conversations** with your child about their online gaming and the risks involved including stranger danger, bullying and oversharing. Tell them that not everybody they meet on gaming platforms and forums is who they claim to be.

- **Set and monitor limits** for the amount of daily or weekly time your children spend online gaming.

- You could pre-load some spending money on to their game, but **when it's gone, it's gone**.

- Check PEGI (Pan European Game Information) **age ratings of games** to ensure your children aren't accessing inappropriate content.

- **Don't give your child access to your payment card details** as extras can be very costly.

- Impress upon your child that t**hey can come to you or another responsible adult** with any concerns. Depending on their age, you could also discuss **how to report issues** to the gaming platform and/or the police.

Get Safe Online

Get Safe Online is the UK's leading source of information and advice on online safety and security, for the public and small businesses. It is a not-for-profit, public/private sector partnership backed by law enforcement agencies and leading organisations in internet security, banking and retail.

For more information and expert, easy-to-follow, impartial advice on safeguarding yourself, your family, finances, devices and workplace, visit **www.getsafeonline.org**

If you think you've been a victim of online fraud, report it to Action Fraud, the UK's national fraud and cybercrime reporting centre on 0300 123 20 40 or at www.actionfraud.police.uk

In Scotland, report fraud to Police Scotland by calling 101.

GET SAFE ONLINE.org ®

www.getsafeonline.org