

Online Gaming: How to Keep Your Children Safe

A Guide for Parents

Online gaming is now very much a part of using games consoles, tablets and computers. Online gaming means that you can play live with people across the world through a range of devices. The games can offer children a world of adventure in which they can immerse themselves in a fantasy setting. Most other online players are looking to do the same. However, it is important to understand that there are risks involved with online gaming which can put your child in danger. Use the tips in this guide to help keep your child safe when playing games online.

What Do You Need to Know about Online Gaming?

Gaming is a fun and sociable way for your child to spend time. They'll develop problem-solving and teamwork skills while playing these games. All good stuff, but you should be aware of the following:

- Some games allow children to chat with anyone in the world, which means they could come across offensive language and bullying. Ask your child to let you know if they hear anything that upsets them.
- Not everyone online is who they say they are. Children should avoid giving out any personal details which could identify them or their location.
- Some games require players to buy extra items or elements to continue or complete a game. Be wary of this, as there are stories of children spending hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds on a game before their parents have realised.
- In extreme cases, bullying can be used as a tactic to win games. Children can find themselves either being bullied or bullying.



What Can I Do to Keep My Child Safe?

- Get involved by finding out what games your child likes to play, then play them together to find out more about how they work. You can also check if they're age-appropriate while you play.
- Ask who they play with online, who they might talk to, and what type of things they talk about. Ask whether they hear swearing when in live chat (usually via headphones). Gaming sites often have ways of reporting inappropriate behaviour.

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- Try to encourage your child to play games in a communal area such as the kitchen or living room where you all spend time together. That way, you can keep an eye on them while they are playing and 'eavesdrop' on what is being discussed.
- When possible, especially with younger children, change the settings on your phone or tablet computer to 'airplane mode' if the game can be played offline. This will prevent your child from making any accidental purchases or talking with someone they don't know.

- Make sure you agree as a family what games can be played, and discuss with your child why they can't play certain games. Always be guided by the age rating of a game. Even though it may not appear to be unsuitable at first glance, some games feature language, themes or images which are not suitable for younger children. In addition, if the game is intended for older children and adults, your child may be coming into contact with older individuals during their play and may therefore be exposed to inappropriate language and conversations.
- Teach your children to protect themselves - discuss what information they can and can't share, who they can and can't talk to, and what to do if they are worried about anything.

