

Play Safe: Tips for Online Gaming

More and more children and teens enjoy video games, but in this area, families need to do their homework together!

- ▶ Some video games can benefit children, such as improving hand-eye coordination and problem-solving skills. Games are enjoyable – and all children need some fun in their lives! Some games that are not too intense or overly stimulating can help resolve stress once in a while.
- ▶ However, there is a growing number of video games that include content that is inappropriate for children – and even for teens! And too many teens are spending excessive time gaming.

Parents should try to reinforce positive games that enhance children's creativity and thinking skills, but limit access to games that are not safe or healthy.

- ▶ Parents should also monitor how much time their children are playing games, and when.
- ▶ The key is knowing what your children are doing and for how long, and making good gaming decisions together.

Tips for Making Gaming Fun and Safe

- ▶ If you can, download an app first and try it out. If your children already have an app or game, ask them to show you how it works.
 - Check out what games your children are playing, looking for content that is violent, sexual, racist, or dehumanizing.
 - Explore the online games your children play. Even if you found it on a reputable app store, that doesn't guarantee it is safe. Look for online reviews. Is the game age appropriate? Is the game moderated? Is there a chat component? Before downloading a game, make sure it is legitimate.
 - Find out about and closely supervise the features offered by the games your children play. For example, are avatars used? That is better than sharing a photo or turning on the webcam. Online gaming friends don't need to see each other.

- ▶ **Talk to your gamers about their passwords. They should be long, complex, and unique. If you can't remember all of your passwords, use a password manager.**
- ▶ **Ensure your children get your permission before chatting with other online gamers or connecting via social networking sites, instant messaging, etc. Or consider games that allow you to block or restrict individuals who can play with your child.**
 - Learn how to adjust / increase privacy settings and monitor how they are set up on your child's devices. Most apps, games, and social networking sites have privacy settings that determine who can and can't view a user's profile and information. But many game makers default to the least secure settings. Learn how to use and increase privacy settings.
 - Monitor your child's instant messaging (IM) logs (e.g. Skype®, Facebook® Messenger, Google® Talk, KIK® Messenger, WhatsApp® Messenger, textPlus®, Snapchat®).
 - Don't allow your children to participate in unmonitored chat rooms that are included with many online games. Closely supervise the interactions that occur in moderated chat rooms, as well. People of all ages are connecting in those virtual settings – and not all of them are interested in only the games. Know what your children (even teens) are up to – for their safety.
 - Teach your gamers to block anyone who makes them feel uncomfortable. Hurtful comments and bullying online have a serious impact on mental health.
- ▶ **Be aware! Cybercriminals often entice gamers into clicking bad links or downloading malicious files by offering cheats or hacks – which is known as “phishing.” Teach your kids ...**
 - Be wary of clicking on links or downloading anything that comes from a stranger or that you were not expecting.
 - Verify links before clicking on them by hovering over them with your cursor to see the links' true destination.
 - If an offer seems too good to be true, chances are it is.
- ▶ **Downloading cheats or mods from websites other than the official game website can be dangerous. Mods can contain viruses that will damage your computer or mobile, and give hackers access to your personal data. Whenever you can, always use the app store or official websites.**
- ▶ **Share with care. The more information you post, the easier it may be for a criminal to use that information to steal your identity, access your data, or commit other crimes.**
 - Monitor how much personal information your children and teens provide on gaming account profiles.
 - Your gamers can use a cool and safe game name that doesn't include their real information.
 - Teach them to share less online. If a stranger asks them to share personal information, they should say no.

- ▶ **Talk to kids about when playing games is no longer fun.**
 - Are they being bullied or hurt?
 - Do they feel like they can't stop? Gaming addiction is a real thing – for people of all ages.
 - Is online gaming interfering with other important activities – sleep, in-person fun, exercise, homework ...?
 - Do they feel like things are becoming too competitive?

- ▶ **Make sure your children and teens take breaks from gaming. Make sure your children take a break if they're:**
 - not enjoying the game as much.
 - getting angry or upset at other people or the game.
 - feeling tired or hungry.
 - starting to ignore things they need to do, like homework.

Create rules and boundaries around gaming together. And when you need to, remind your children about the things you agree to.

