



What is my child doing online?

Gaming

The internet has changed the way that young people play games. Games can be played against anyone in the world, at any time and for as long as you want.

In the past, computer games were something you played against the computer, or friends that came round to your house. They were also something that you 'completed' and then moved onto the next one.

Online, you can adventure in complex worlds, create characters, and meet and make friends to fight battles and go on journeys together...

Almost anything that connects to the internet will allow you to play these games – desktop computers, laptops, consoles, like Playstation or Xbox, or even mobile phones.

Gaming is great fun, but just as with anything online, there are risks you should help your child navigate. It's important that you're involved in your child's experiences, even if it feels like a different world! Here are some simple ways to help your child game safely.

Check the age rating of the game just like with films, you should check the game's age rating before allowing your child to play. The organisation 'PEGI' set age ratings for games and classify their content according to what is appropriate for different age groups. The rating will help you decide whether the game is suitable for your child.

Talk to them about the games they play
Ask your child what is hot, and what is not! Get them to tell you about the game and, if they can bear it, play against them!

You might want to ask them:

- Which of their friends play it?
- Who are their friends in the game?
- To tell you about their character and profile

It is important to stay up-to-date and regularly ask your children about the games they play and the people they are friends with.

Look for the games advice.

When you know the kind of games your child is playing, go on and take a look.

Look to see if the game has advice for parents and carers. This can help you to assess the appropriateness and learn more about the functions of the site. In general, this advice tends to focus on the fun aspects of the game, but it should also highlight the safety measures the site has in place to protect your child and what you can do as a parent or carer to protect them, such as setting parental controls.

It is important that you read this information and learn how to report any issues directly to the site. This way you can help your child if they need it.

Know who they're talking to.

Most of the popular online games are played by adults and children alike. Therefore, your children need to be aware of the information that they share and the people they talk to.

It's never a good idea to share personal information such as their name, address, email address, passwords, telephone numbers or the name of their school with people they don't know and trust in the real world. Talk to your child about how people can sometimes lie online or pretend to be someone else.

Encourage your child to keep gaming friends 'in the game' and not to invite them to be friends on their social networks.

Set Boundaries. Some online games are virtual worlds which never end, where missions can take hours to complete. It's important to set limits on the amount of time your child spends playing online. Be aware of how long they spend gaming and set rules, as you would for TV. Also, ensure that they take regular screen breaks – at least five minutes every 45- 60 minutes.

Know what to do if something goes wrong.

Things can go wrong when gaming, whether that's someone being mean, inappropriate or asking you to do something that you're not comfortable with. It's important that you and your child know what steps you can take in the game to block and report people and how to report and seek support from other services.