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Top Safety Tips for Online Gaming

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There are risks associated with online gaming, especially in a number of the multiplayer games conducted live online. Listed below are a collection of tips to make your online gamer safer while playing.

Parents

1. Abide by the age restrictions.

There are a number of games with graphic violence, sexual content, drug use and concepts inappropriate for younger users. The designers of these games have considered this, as have various government agencies around the globe. They are there for a reason and games bearing age recommendations are not suitable for children. We particularly call attention to u12's playing 15+, 18 + games.

Examples of these include Call of Duty, Black Ops, GTA (Grand Theft Auto) and others.

2. Be aware of voice chat.

For a parent with a younger child playing online on Fortnite or Roblox disallow your child from using headphones when playing online. It is not only children that play these games and the voice chat cannot be moderated. To moderate the game your child is playing listen to the conversations they are involved in online.

3. Online gambling, and loot boxes

Be aware of games that offer in-game transactions where virtual items may be purchased online. Not all children are aware of the real money element here.

Trading skins

Skins are used to decorate one's character online. Some of these can cost thousands of dollars. And it is possible to trade these between the accounts of players. People have developed websites that allow players to wager their skins against another users. This IS gambling but avoids the legal definition that would make this illegal by not using real money, but instead virtual items that can later be sold.

Loot boxes.

These are randomised so content can never be guaranteed. The Belgian Government have declared these to be gambling. The major game industry describes users that purchase large numbers of these as whales. They are designed to be deliberately difficult to resist. These are linked to in- game purchases – charged to the credit card of whomever has set up the account; often linked to apple or google play accounts. These can be very addictive for younger users and children often do not realise the amount of money they are spending.

HINT

Set up an email that will flag purchases to your credit card. Use gift cards for purchases over entering in your credit card details or use a specific credit/debit card with a very low cash limit.

4. Be an active parent.

Discuss the online risks with your child and stay informed of what they are playing. Review what your child is playing and how long they are playing for.

Apply and stick to time limits.

Encourage breaks.

Always play a game with younger children before you allow them to play it by themselves so that you know how it works, who they can connect and chat with. Model good online behaviour they may learn from.

Research what your child wants to download.

Stick to legitimate websites.

Explain the risks to your child.

Know how to block and report at a minimum.

5. Learn how to install the safety features offered on each game and your console, and do so.

Set up the games account yourself – do not leave it to your child.

Set up the console yourself and install the family settings on the console.

Use any available parental controls and discuss with your child in age appropriate language why these are necessary and what they mean.

6. Keep the console in a shared family space.

Consoles and gaming devices in bedrooms or in a space where a parent cannot observe gaming activity for younger users are not recommended.

7. Regularly check the settings on your child's devices .

Children become tech savvy quickly. Your child may have learned how to adjust the limitations you have set, both on the console or their device. A regular, yet random check is recommended.

8. Gaming overuse.

Monitor your child's behaviour and note if they are obsessing about the game. Set time limits either in the game's settings, or yourself and stick to them.

For the Players

1. Protect your personal details

Never use real names or anything close to them.

Avoid sharing names with stranger in multiplayer games with voice chat.

Do not share any contact details such as email addresses or phone numbers.

Never reveal where you live or your location.

2. Use strong passwords

Use a combination of upper and lowercase letters with symbols. Do not share passwords with anyone.

3. Set your privacy settings to the highest ones available within the game

4. Consider using a VPN when gaming online to keep your wi-fi safe.

Create a guest network to limit access to the other computers on your network.

5. Use the block and report functions available.

6. Take regular breaks from the game.

7. Respect others when playing.

8. Never meet up with anyone you have talked to online in real life.

Should someone be pushing for this to happen, they should speak to a parent, teacher or another trusted adult. For under 13s, If someone tries to get them to follow them on another platform (like TikTok so you can use the video messenger function to communicate) they must tell a trusted adult immediately.

9. Use the available settings to build a group of real-life friends to play online with

10. Take care with downloading games online.

Only use trusted sites and do the research. There is a real risk of malware being bundled in with a game download that could compromise devices.



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