



Online gaming at home- what you need to know:



Online gaming can offer many positive experiences. It can give children and young people the chance to escape into a virtual world, to learn, and to connect with others. However, there is a risk of children and young people viewing inappropriate content in games and being contacted by adults seeking to exploit them.

Online games are really popular amongst children. 69% of 5-15 year olds play online games, as games like Fortnite, Minecraft and Roblox become increasingly important part of their social lives. Whilst playing games online is often great fun and a good way to chat, there is a chance that your children will play with people they don't know who may use in-game chat inappropriately to expose them to harm or risk.

That's why Think U Know have put together a guide to help you understand why your children will chat online, what risks there are and what measures you can take to protect them while they're playing their favourite games.

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/in-gamechat/?utm_source=Thinkuknow&utm_campaign=176d7bc4c3-TUK_ONLINE_SAFETY_AT_HOME_30_06_20&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0b54505554-176d7bc4c3-55062985

Why do players talk to each other in online games?

Online games are social activities. Some are co-operative, encouraging players to work together to achieve their goal. Others are competitive, pitting teams or players against one another to emerge victorious. And then there are games designed with socialising in mind to allow people to connect and have fun.

In all these games, talking is either key for achieving objectives in game or for allowing that social interaction to take place. This is what usually happens and, for the most part, children are able to have safe conversations with their friends.

But, as with any space for talking online, there is a possibility that the chat tools used to bring players together can be abused. That's why it's important to take an interest in any online game your children play to identify risks.

How does in-game chat take place?

Every game is different, which means that there are different ways of talking in game. There are a few common ways of talking though:

- **Built in open chat functions.** Using the game's built-in chat functions you can talk through voice (via a headset) or text (by typing on a keyboard) with other people in the game

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- **Quick chat functions.** A 'quick chat' function has set phrases, so you can send short automatic messages to a team mate or player. For example, sending 'Nice shot!' to a team mate who scores a good goal.
- **Platform messaging.** Some gaming platforms let you send voice or text messages to other players, just like a messaging app or social media. For example, PlayStation Network or Steam Friends & Chat. Players give this number to their friends and other players so they can add them to the game and chat with them.
- **'Ping' systems.** Some games use non - verbal communication to 'talk'. A 'ping' is where you can alert other players to a useful item or hazard by 'pointing' at it and pressing a button.
- **Chat or messaging apps.** Players can also use external apps like Discord, Twitch or WhatsApp to talk to each other during the game. This chat can be voice, video or text. Some apps can even be set up to look like they are part of the game (called in -game overlay).

Players can also talk to each other outside of the game. This might be on social media apps, through the platform messaging or in other online forums and chat rooms.

What are the risks of in-game chat?

- **Chatting with people they don't know.** Gaming is different to social networks, as players often play against people they don't know. This may include adults.
- **Inappropriate or unmoderated chat.** While many in-game chat functions are monitored, and players look after each other, chat is live. In some games swearing and insults are common, especially when a player hasn't performed very well. Mean comments or insults can hurt, and competitive criticism might feel like bullying for some children.
- **Requests to chat in private.** Some people online genuinely just want to chat about gaming. But once they move to private chat, your child could be exposed to greater risks. They might share personal information or feel pressured to do something that they don't want to do. If the chat is happening on a different chat room, messaging app, etc. it will no longer be monitored by the game developer's moderation tools or community team.
- **Offering gifts or trades.** Some people may offer to trade - or give - your child in-game items or currencies to earn their trust and persuade them to have a separate





conversation outside of the game. Remember, once they're out of the game and into a private space, then it will no longer be monitored by the game.

Safer in-game chat

Games platforms and developers have put in a lot of settings to help manage or protect children from inappropriate chat.

- **Family controls.** Games platforms have in-built family controls to let you limit in-game chat to friends list only or turn it off completely. This means children can either only talk to people they know or not communicate at all.
- **Customised chat.** Most games allow players to customise chat options, including letting players turn off voice chat, text chat and limiting conversation to people they know.
- **Monitoring and reporting systems.** Games also use artificial intelligence (AI) moderation systems to filter or identify inappropriate chat. They also have reporting systems to let players report anyone behaving abusively, which can lead to temporary or permanent bans from the service.

However, these settings only work after they've been set. That's why we recommend spending a little bit of time with your child the first time they go into a new online game. It'll help you work out how they talk in game and help you work out what settings you may choose to turn on to keep them safer.



Teach Your Kids Online Safety

S Personal information is a **secret**

M Never **meet** anyone from the internet without a parent or carer

A Never **accept** messages, emails or requests from unknown people

R Remember **reality** Not everyone tells the truth on the internet. Some people lie about who they are.

T If anything or anyone online is worrying you **TELL** a parent or carer.

www.facebook.com/ActionAgainstAbuseUK

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What can you do to help your child with safer in-game chat?

Fortunately, there are also a few practical steps you can take too.

- Play, or watch your children play, online games to understand how they talk online, who they talk to online and what you're comfortable with.
- With older children, who may not want you to play with them, have regular chats about the games they play, who they talk to and how.
- Use family controls and in-game settings to manage, limit or turn off in-game chat to make sure that you are confident interactions are right for your children.
- With primary aged children, keep games devices in a shared space in the house (for example, the living room) and use settings to limit screen time to help children to manage their time.
- To catch potential problems early, encourage your children to report inappropriate chat in game and to tell you if anything in the game makes them feel worried or uncomfortable.

If your child enjoys playing games, remember that there are plenty of games that aren't online that your children can play at home with you, or friends to help you manage interactions further.

What else can I do to protect my children when they're playing games?

There are resources that can give you advice on wider safe play practice, including:

- www.askaboutgames.com, which features advice about safe play including using family controls to limit who children talk to, how much they spend in game and time spent online.
- [The PEGI rating site](http://www.pegi.com), which gives information about the age rating system operating in the UK.
- The Family Game Database - www.taminggaming.com - which provides information on a range of games, including good games to play online for families.
- You can find out more about staying safe online and how you can protect your child at: www.thinkuknow.co.uk
 - [Thinkuknow site for 5-7 year olds](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)
 - [Thinkuknow site for 8-10 year olds](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)
 - [Thinkuknow site for 11-13 year olds](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)



Is there such a thing as Good Gaming?



We tend to think of video games as an activity involving children sitting in dark bedrooms for hours barely moving - but gaming is often an active experience as well. Here are our top picks for games that will get your child moving while they play.

How does it work?

Active gaming is particularly helpful for fitness as most people won't even consider it an exercise session. In a sense, it's a form of 'stealth' exercise, and your child might well enjoy it in addition to getting some 'real' exercise outside.

Most active games work by matching the player's motion to the character's on-screen movement. As you do something, the character does the same thing, whether that's running, jumping or anything else.

Sometimes this is achieved by holding a motion-sensitive controller or by standing in front of a connected camera such as PlayStation Eye or Microsoft's now-discontinued Kinect. But often, you don't need anything more than a normal controller or smartphone to get fit and play.

What to play

The genre was born with Wii Sports in 2006, which introduced a generation to the joys of virtual bowling, tennis, boxing, golf and baseball, but it has continued to develop since then. This list of games offers many ways to get children, teenagers and adults moving while they partake in their favourite pastime. Here are some popular examples you may not have heard of:

Bounden is a smartphone-based game that you play with one other person. You both hold the phone and have to move in different ways in time with the music. What starts as something like Twister soon turns into a fun challenge about movement and dance.

GPS Pong is another smartphone game, this time based around the classic Pong. Unlike the 1970s original, you play this version outdoors and need a data signal to do so. The screen displays a standard Pong game, but you and your opponent control the bats by moving in the real world. It's perfect fodder for a park or garden, cleverly translating running around to bat-and-ball strategy.

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Jump Rope Challenge is a free Nintendo Switch game in which you hold the controllers and skip to earn points. The game tracks your progress each day and offers incentives to increase your performance. It's simple and fun and will appeal to the whole family.

Ring Fit Adventure is an exercise adventure for the Nintendo Switch in which you progress by performing different activities. It comes with two new accessories - a circular controller called the Ring-Con and a leg strap - and in order to win you'll need to exercise your arms and complete balance challenges. It's lots of fun and gives you a surprisingly good workout.

Just Dance is a dancing game for Sony PlayStation, Microsoft Xbox and Nintendo Wii and Switch in which you move in time to the music to score points. Learning the required dance moves increases your score, with the game detecting your movement via motion controllers or cameras. There's even a version you can play on your smartphone.

Setting boundaries

Whatever games your child is playing, it's important to talk to them about balancing their screen time with sports and outdoor fun. It's a good idea and helpful to agree and set time limits around specific games. This creates an open conversation where both you and your child can agree on how long to play each day. Although parents and carers often expect children to want to play older rated games, or play for long periods, most children are sensible if you have this conversation with them. For younger children, it can be helpful to write the agreed rules down or pin them on the fridge so you have something to go back to.

Configure Automatic Rules



The limits you agree together can then be automatically set in the console. This enables you to specify the PEGI age rating they can access as well as how long and what times of day they can play.

It's important that these settings are seen as the door to a conversation rather than roadblocks. A PEGI rating limit is important, not only so they don't play inappropriate games, but so that you can have a conversation with them about any older games they would like to play. You can then make an informed decision about that particular game for your child.

More help can be found at: <https://useboomerang.com/2018/08/02/set-time-limit-gaming-console/>

Happy holidays to all our Fairway families, stay safe and see you all again on 3rd September 2020!