



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



A family guide to talking about online gaming

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Introduction

Online gaming is big business. Worth £3.77 billion in 2019, it accounts for almost half of the UK's entertainment market. The variety of games on offer alone is staggering, with simple, colourful beginner games for very young children through to complex multi-player video games for older age groups. And while those under 18 make up less than 25 per cent of active gamers, they are getting younger, with 17 per cent of 3 to 5-year-olds now playing games online.

This guide looks at the positives and negatives of online gaming, how you can talk to your child about it, and the practical steps you can take to make it a safe and healthy activity.

Who plays video games online?

The frequency of gaming among 3 to 15-year-olds has stayed relatively consistent since 2016. What has changed, however, is how children and young people are choosing to game. They're increasingly using smartphones, tablets and laptops to game online, rather than hand-held games consoles or those connected to the TV. Online gaming is also now more popular amongst girls, with almost half aged 5 to 15 playing regularly.

What are the benefits of online gaming?

While some parents and carers might feel sceptical about online gaming in general, there are positives. It can:

- encourage problem-solving skills
- sharpen visual processing and enhance memory
- help young people develop multitasking and social skills (for example, teamwork)
- provide a sense of fulfilment and achievement.

What are the risks around online gaming?

There are, of course, a number of risks attached to gaming and being part of online gaming communities. These are centred around the following areas.

Safety

- Playing games with strangers, which may increase the risk of grooming or inappropriate contact.
- Coming across players who deliberately seek to bully other players, and/or who use abusive, offensive language.

Health

- Regular exposure to violent or extremely graphic content, which may be distressing or upsetting, particularly to underage players – this can create mental health and well-being issues or exacerbate existing ones.

- Being unable to successfully self-regulate and set time limits, leading to excessive use and a sense of being 'addicted', as well as physical problems such as back/neck pain and headaches.

Finance

- Lots of games now have the option to link to a credit/debit card or a PayPal account, so players can buy in-game items/features (for example loot boxes, additional levels, etc.). If children sign up to these extras, even with the parent or carer's consent, it can be very expensive.
- Purchasing third-party software (such as Discord) to enable voice chat and messaging for games that do not contain those features, meaning that children and young people may be chatting with others, even if the game doesn't include this feature.

How can I help my child stay safe when gaming?

If your child plays video games, there are lots of practical steps you can take to keep them safe.

- **Check for age ratings**

All console video games and PC games, and all apps on Microsoft Store and Google Play, will have a recommended age rating from Pan European Game Information (PEGI), as well as information on the themes the game portrays. Consoles have restrictions that can be enabled to allow only age-appropriate games to be installed and played. Some games will have restrictions that can be enabled within the game account in a browser or console.



- **Equip them with strategies**

Show your child how to block and report abusive players, as well as other things they can do if they're not enjoying a game. For example – don't retaliate. Instead, turn off or mute voice chat. Encourage them to show respect for other gamers, and to speak to you or a trusted adult if they see/hear anything worrying or upsetting.

- **Restrict in-game purchasing**

Get to know the settings on your child's console or device to restrict purchase of in-game items. You can usually lock these options with a PIN/password, giving you much greater control over what can be bought.

What should I talk to them about?

- **Staying safe around other gamers**

Gaming is an activity in which children and young people can add other players to their contact lists, or come into contact with a large number of strangers through Massive Multiplayer Online games (MMOs) such as *Fortnite*, *Roblox* and *Apex Legends*. Remind your child that it can be fine to chat with and play alongside these players, but that they should be very careful not to give out personal information. They should never agree to chat with a player on another app/service (particularly a private one) or meet up in person.

- **Setting clear time limits for playing**

It can be easy for children and young people to spend a lot of time on their favourite games – some take hundreds of hours to explore or complete. However, it's important to agree on a sensible length of time for gaming sessions and to encourage your child to take regular breaks. If they're a bit older, you may want to discuss how too much gaming can impact their physical and mental health.

- **Different gaming cultures**

Some games have positive communities attached to them, others are known for high levels of competition, 'banter', name-calling or other potentially harmful behaviours designed to disrupt a gamer's concentration. Remind your child that they don't need to be part of a negative community to enjoy a game, and help them find alternative servers or games to keep their gaming experiences positive.

- **The good stuff!**

Showing an interest in what sorts of games your child enjoys will encourage them to talk to you, as will playing the game with them. This will also give you an insight into how and why they play different types of games and the gaming content they're seeing regularly.

How can I start a conversation about online gaming?

Here are a few questions you could ask your child to get a conversation going.

- What are your favourite games to play online?
- What positive feelings (happy/proud/brave) do you have when playing online games and why?
- What negative feelings (unhappy/angry/sad/shocked) do you have when playing online games and why?
- Do you think you have the right balance of time online and offline? If so, why?
- What happens when you've been playing online games for too long? Does it affect your mood? Do you think it's a good idea to only play games for a short amount of time?

For more resources and information about online gaming visit:

Hwb – [A parent and carer's guide to the benefits and risks of online gaming](#)

Hwb – [Gaming and Screen Time](#)

Hwb - [Roblox video guide for parents and carers](#)

Hwb - [Roblox – what parents and carers need to know](#)

[Ask About Games](#) – [where you can ask questions, find resources and check PEGI ratings](#)

[Common Sense Media](#)

NSPCC – [Net Aware](#)

Help and support:

[Meic](#) – A confidential, anonymous, and free bilingual helpline service available to children and young people in Wales up to the age of 25.

[Young Person's Mental Health Toolkit](#) – A variety of online resources – websites, apps, helplines and more, which support mental health and well-being for young people aged 11 to 25.

[Childline](#) – A free, private and confidential service available to anyone under 19 in the UK. Whatever the worry, they are there to listen.

[NSPCC](#) – A national charity working to protect children and prevent abuse, the NSPCC offers a dedicated helpline with professional counsellors.

[CEOP](#) – The Child Exploitation and Online Protection website is where you can safely and securely report any concerns about online sexual abuse.

[Report Harmful Content](#) – A national reporting centre designed to help everyone report harmful content they see online.

[Action Fraud](#) – The UK's centre for fraud and cybercrime where you can turn if you've been the victim of a scam, fraud or cybercrime in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.