



ADVICE FROM CEOP - CHILD EXPLOITATION ONLINE PROTECTION

PREPARED BY FREEDOM FROM ABUSE

GAMING

The popularity of gaming

Gaming is a popular past-time for many children, young people and adults across the world. There are a variety of games available aimed at various ages: from mission-based adventure to animation and sports themed. For most children and young people, gaming is a fun way to spend time with friends and create opportunities to develop teamwork, concentration skills and problem-solving. Many games have adopted an interactive online element- whether it's playing against other users, chatting or making purchases.

Chatting within gaming

Gaming is a type of social network. Many games have a chat function enabling users to interact with one another. Dependent on the privacy settings chosen, gamers can be contacted by people they may or may not know, or play against 'bots'. A bot is a character or player that is controlled by a computer, created by external sources, to send messages to gamers. Often, these messages contain links to external websites which are inappropriate for children and young people; showing violent or sexual content. Bots can sometimes be hard to spot as their messages can seem very realistic. If your child receives a message from an unknown user, ask them to not respond or click on any links contained within the message. Report these users directly to the site.

Often the communication within gaming is to coordinate multi-player game tactics, although it can be just to chat as gamers play. Messages can take the form of instant messenger (similar to texting) or voice over internet protocol (VoIP). VoIP allows gamers to talk to one another (usually through a headset) in a group conversation during the game. Some game consoles also allow young people to leave voice messages for other users and to chat even when a game is not in play.

Gaming can offer offenders a platform to communicate with children:

This communication can present as a risk to young people as gaming platforms can be used by adults seeking to harm young people. Playing games can be exciting and consuming and sometimes this can mean that children can become a little less guarded when considering who they talk to and what they share. It may also be seen as ‘normal’ to talk to adults in a game – especially if children can learn from them – than it would be to talk to an adult on another social media platform. Some offenders seek to exploit this and encourage children to chat with the aim of building a relationship with them. Offenders may also try to encourage a child to move from a game to a private messenger platform to have one-to-one conversations with them. These platforms help offenders to build a relationship with a young person quickly, and are often harder to moderate than group chat within games.

The precise functionality of each game varies however there are some ways to support children to stay safe if they chat whilst gaming:

- Have ongoing conversations with your child about who they are talking to online. Questions about whether they know them in real life and what they share are vital to support your child to be safer in gaming.
- Take time to explore games with your children. Ask them to show you what they like about the game and take an interest. Speak with them about making their profile private if possible and talk with them about information that is safe to share e.g. nicknames as opposed to full names.
- Be aware of the chat platforms your child is using. Ask your child about what they would do if someone within a game asked to talk to them in private, whether that’s on another platform or within the game. Help your child to identify this warning sign and explain what they can do can help them to keep safe.
- All young people need support to make safe decisions online. It is recommended that primary aged children remain under adult supervision whilst gaming, for example ensuring an adult is within earshot of VoIP conversations and able to see any chat taking place.

Offenders can give ‘gifts’ via gaming platforms:

Some games and apps allow users to make purchases. Gamers can buy tools that can be used in the game to give them an advantage such as weapons, coins or cheats. Many children do not have access to money to make purchases in games, so it can be tempting to accept ‘in game currency’ to help them progress. Offenders use gifts in gaming to encourage children to trust them. They may offer gifts asking for nothing in return, this can be part of the grooming process and can help to build a close relationship with a young person. Others may try to use gifts as ‘leverage’ to persuade young people to do something such as moving to a different online platform, going on webcam or taking a photo of themselves.

Talking to your child about gifts within gaming:

- Speak with your child about bribery and ‘too-good to be true’ offers. Encourage them to question anything they are offered online from someone they do not know offline, and remind them that it’s always better to check in with a parent or carer if they are unsure what to do if offered a reward or gift.
- Speak to your child about ‘warning signs’. Talk to your child about the feelings they might get when something doesn’t feel right, or be specific with examples. These might be inappropriate words that someone could use in a conversation (e.g. sexually explicit language) or behaviours such as asking for lots of personal information.

- Young people can sometimes feel complicit in abuse if they have chatted with someone they feel they shouldn't have or accepted a gift and something has gone wrong. Reassure your child that no matter what might have happened you are always there to confide in and it is never their fault. Ongoing reminders that it's never too late to get help are important.

Read more about the signs of [online grooming](#) here.

If you are worried that a child is being groomed in a game, or on any other online platform you should seek support. You can contact your local police or [report to CEOP](#). If you believe a child is in immediate danger call the police on 999.

If you would like to talk to a professional about any other online concerns, please call the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000.

Top tips for gaming:

- Explore parental controls on games consoles. Most games consoles enable parents to apply settings that can help to manage a child's online activities. For more information on enabling parental controls visit [Internet Matters](#).
- Familiarise yourself with the blocking and reporting functions on the games your child plays, and ensure they know how to use these. It's helpful to sit with your child and go through this together.
- Continue to have conversations with your child about gaming and their online activity. Reassure your child that they can always talk to you about anything that makes them feel uncomfortable- whether it's the game content or something they've heard when chatting with other users.
- Learn more about gaming and the [PEGI age ratings](#).
- Bullying is never okay. If your child is experiencing name calling or harassment while gaming, visit [Childline](#) for helpful advice on getting help and support.

PHOTOS

Are you a 'sharent'?

For many children online life begins before birth, when their excited parents-to-be post ultrasound images on social media. A recent report stated that 42% of parents share photos of their children online, with half of these parents posting photos at least once a month (Ofcom, 2017). For parent bloggers the frequency of posting photos is likely to be more.

The internet can provide fantastic tools for sharing special moments from your child's early years with family and friends. And online parenting forums, networks and blogs often provide valuable support and reassurance through parenting's ups and downs.

But before you share, you should give thought to exactly who can see photos and comments featuring your child, and how this online footprint might affect your child in years to come.

What should you consider?

- **Who's looking?** When did you last check your privacy settings? On most social networks the default is that any other service user can access your pictures, which may also appear in internet search results. Remember that anyone who can see a photo can also download or screenshot it, and could go on to share it.
- **What else are you sharing?** You might be sharing more than what's in the post. As default, many cameras, phones and apps tag posts and photos with 'meta-data' which can include location details and other identifying information. This is potentially risky for any child, but poses particular risks for vulnerable children such as those who have been fostered or adopted and could be sought online by members of their birth family.
- **Ownership** Under the terms and conditions of most social networks, when you share a photo you licence the network to use and reproduce your image, and grant it the right to licence it for use by third parties. It could be used for commercial purposes, a point deliberately highlighted by the Danish company [Koppie Koppie](#), which sold mugs featuring freely downloaded pictures of young children. Another online activity which has distressed parents and carers is the '[Baby Role Play](#)' game played by some Instagram users, who repost photographs of other people's children and create fictional identities based on them.
- **Their digital tattoo** Every publically accessible image or comment featuring your child contributes to a public image which will follow them into the future. That apocalyptic nappy incident might make for a hilarious tweet now, but if it comes to light when they're older, how could it affect the way they feel about themselves, or you, or how others see them? Could their online childhood become an issue if they are seeking a job, or a relationship, or even election to public office?

Your child's right to privacy Psychologist Aric Sigman has [expressed concerns](#) about the impact on children of the eroding boundaries between private and public online: "Part of the way a child forms their identity involves having private information about themselves that remains private."

LIVE STREAMING

What makes live streaming risky for children and young people?

Reduced inhibition online – Children, like adults, can feel more confident when they are online as they feel somewhat protected by the screen. This can result in children engaging in behaviour that they would not otherwise do in 'real life'.

Your child's developmental stage – dependent on their age, your child will need different levels of support. Children's brains are continuously developing and your advice will need to grow as they do. In their offline world, children are often taught from an early age to do as they are told and follow adult instruction e.g. parents, teachers,

family friends. Some offenders within live streaming platforms rely on the acceptance of this 'rule' and use young people's trust in adults to abuse them.

Live streaming is 'in the moment' – Children and young people often do things in the heat of the moment and act on impulse without thinking of the consequences – just like offline. For example, they may share personal information when asked or do things that in another situation they wouldn't do, such as share something private or even sexual. Our work with young people has shown that they often do not see live streaming as something tangible and so they may share things that they wouldn't share via a photo or pre-recorded video.

Tactics such as trickery and flattery – Offenders use tactics to try and get children to do things that they otherwise may not do. Trickery can be used in the form of games that often start off 'innocent' and then build up to trick a child into taking their clothes off. Live streaming platforms also often allow users to 'gift' emoji's such as love hearts and coins that can be exchanged for real money, and this can enable adults to manipulate young people into doing things through flattery and the promise of gifts.

Affirmation in abundance – Lots of positive comments and compliments can make children feel good. Loneliness and low self-esteem can be an issue for children and offenders will exploit this. Primary aged children tend to want to please others and can be tricked into doing things by the threat of losing their followers (the people watching and commenting on their live stream). Affirmation and acceptance is also very important to children developing a stronger individual identity as they move into their teenage years.

How can you help your child stay safe when live streaming?

There are some practical steps you can take to help keep your child safe if they are using an app or website with a live streaming function.

Stay involved in their internet use – Talk to your child about what they are doing online; what they are enjoying, what they are learning, who are they interacting with and the new things they have discovered. Parental engagement in the positive aspect of being online and not just the risky things will help your child to talk more openly about their internet use, including anything that worries them. Having these discussions often is more effective than having 'one big chat'.

Use webcam and devices in public spaces. As young people develop, they often seek more privacy and autonomy in both their online and offline world. However, it's important to consider whether children are developmentally ready to be left unsupervised using devices. Young children do not have reasoning skills to keep themselves safe independently, especially when overpowered by the intelligence and manipulation of offenders. A known risk factor is when children use live streaming platforms in their bedroom or bathrooms unsupervised. Therefore, it's important that if primary aged children are using apps with any communication function that they are being supervised by an adult and are not in a private space.

Privacy and safety settings - If your child is using an app with a live streaming function go through the privacy and safety settings together, setting them to make sure only the friends they know in 'real life' can view their profile.

Be wary of requests to chat in private – Offenders may try and move children from a public area of an app to a private area to have conversations that are likely to be less moderated. Remind your child to be wary of people they meet online who want to chat to them in a private away from other people.

Build resilience - You can help build your child's resilience and self-esteem through conversations and activities that are not based on validation from online 'fans' or views. For primary aged children this can include highlighting when your child has been nice or kind to a sibling or friend.

Safe and trusted adults and advice - Help your child to identify adults that are there to help from ones who they do not know or that may want something in return. As your child gets older they may look to the internet for information and advice. Support them to identify trusted sources on the internet, versus places where they should be more cautious. Reinforce the idea that on the internet, adults should be offering advice and supporting young people to make their own choices, usually via professional and well known organisations.

Make sure your child knows where to go for support and where to report - Children can sometimes feel they are to blame if something goes wrong online. Remind your child that they can always speak to you or an adult they trust if they are worried no matter what may have happened. Talk to them about reporting directly within the app or platform they are using and that they can report to CEOP if they're concerned about contact from an adult.

PARENTAL CONTROLS

What do parental controls do?

These controls are designed to help parents and carers manage their child's online activities. There are various types, some of which are free but others which can be bought. However, nothing is totally fool proof so they don't replace the need for adults to support and advise children using the internet.

For detailed guidance on all the different types of control, you can use this [online tool from Internet Matters](#). This gives you the chance to set up a personalised list of the controls used in your home on all your different devices. There is also advice on how to use all the various controls, with videos and step-by-step instructions.

What can controls be used for?

Controls can either be for a device like a games console, or for a network such as your home broadband.

The way to access device controls can vary according to the manufacturer. They can offer varying types of protection, from filtering out adult content from search results to preventing your child from buying things when playing games. You can generally find instructions on how to set these controls up on the manufacturer's website or use the Internet Matters app for help. These settings will apply whether the device is being used in your home or outside – but it's easy for them to be switched off, so talk to your child about trust and responsibility, making sure they understand the importance of why you have put the settings in place.

Most games consoles come with settings, which can be put in place for either the device itself or the games platform. It's easy to forget that games consoles allow players to connect to the internet and talk to people all over the world so setting controls on devices and the platform itself (such as X Box) is important.

Broadband and network filters generally come free with your service. These can be used to prevent material coming into your home. For example, you could restrict anything with a horror or sexual content being accessible via your home broadband. Instructions for accessing these filters can be found on the service providers' websites – look at the bottom of the page to find the “help” or “security” page.

Online controls

Search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing allow users to filter out certain types of search results. This means you can reduce the risk of your child seeing adult content like pornography, or set limits on the time they spend online. Look for the cogwheel “settings” symbol where you will find the options for each provider. You can also encourage your child to use safer search facilities, such as SafeSearch Kids from Google.

Social media and other websites

As with search engines, social media and sites like YouTube have privacy and security settings. These can prevent your child from being contacted by strangers or from seeing inappropriate material. It is important to remember that content filters cannot prevent other people from sending offensive or inappropriate messages or comments to your child's account, so controlling who can contact your child is a key step.

Buying controls

It is also possible to buy filter programmes. These can be either solely for filtering purposes, but some virus protection software also offer filtering options.

What next?

Controls are not a single solution to staying safe online; talking to your children and encouraging responsible behaviour is critical. However, controls are a vital first step to helping to protect your child online, and here seven simple things you can do to use them effectively:

1. Set up home broadband parental controls and make use of controls on your home broadband.
2. Set controls on your search engine; encourage your child to always use child-friendly search engines, and activate and lock the safe search settings on the browsers and platforms they use.
3. Make sure every device is protected. Controls should be installed on every device your child uses, such as their mobile phone, tablet and games consoles (both home and handheld).
4. Use privacy settings. Activate the safety measures offered by different sites; social networking sites like Facebook have privacy settings that will help prevent your child seeing unsuitable advertising or sharing too much with other people.

5. Block pop-ups. If you're worried about your children accessing inappropriate content though accidentally clicking on adverts in pop-ups, follow the advice from BBC Webwise on how to stop these.

6. Find good sites and agree on them as a family. By talking to your child about their interests you can help them find suitable sites to visit and apps to use. Review these sites as they get older.

7. Manage their use and access. Children may be very worried that your response to a problem will be to take away their internet access. Whilst this may be an appropriate response in some cases, the threat may be a barrier for a child who needs help. Be aware of this when talking to them about their internet use, and reassure them that they can talk to you or a trusted adult whenever they need to.