

Get to Know Gaming – Safety and Wellbeing

Audio transcript

Games are classified by PEGI age ratings. There are five categories which range from three to 18 years old and are legally required on games sold in stores, as well as being internationally recognised like the ones they use for movies.

These cover games from young children through to adults, and they're based on suitability for an age range and not on enjoyment or how difficult they might be. That content might be swearing or graphic violence, so do check the ratings and make an informed decision to avoid children playing games that they're not old enough or ready to play.

It's not just age appropriate content to understand. As you know, it's a huge opportunity for socialising, that so many of us are still unaware of. Knowing a bit about how kids connect through gaming can really help you to help them.

In those groups or parties, generally the conversations are about games, but sometimes they can include conversations about anything at all. Some games allow children to challenge other players, and in order to do that, they might invite them into spaces called groups or parties, and they can do this by voice or text. Now in theory, the conversations are generally about gaming in those spaces, but in reality, they could be about anything.

That socialising can lead to kids spending a lot of time gaming, but understanding the dangers and benefits of this can ensure we can guide them to more balanced behaviour.

Games are designed to be exciting, fun, and challenging. And of course, this can lead to children wanting to spend more time on games. Now to date, there's no evidence that

gaming is addictive like substance misuse. However, when it begins to interfere with daily life, we do call that problematic, so for you as a family it's about finding the right balance.

Don't worry too much about them spending time online with their friends. Remember, they're forging new friendships and finding new ways of interacting, which could be a big help in their adult life.

It's important children do socialise online because this helps them develop skills like turn taking and fairness, and of course, knowing how to block people is important because bullying can occur online just as it can in real life situations like school. And it's important to have conversations with your children about their safety online and ask them questions like who are they playing with? What kind of games are they playing? So that you get a grasp of what they're doing.

Because gaming is so popular, it's creating celebrity gamers and streamers with huge followings, and this comes with some issues too.

Let's play videos, walkthroughs, or streaming, as they're sometimes known, ways for a person, usually an influencer to stream a game live in order to increase their followers, potentially get tips, and also to give watchers tips and tricks about the game. Now often on these platforms, there are no restrictions as to who can watch, and that means that strangers can speak in the chat rooms along with your children, and it also means that your children might tip or spend money on that streamer. It's worth spending some time watching these streams with your children, and it's not about censorship, it's about understanding the risks and dangers and explaining these to your child.