HOW TO STAY SAFE
Gaming devices

Gaming devices provide a variety of interesting activities and ways for young people to engage with their friends and families. However, it is important to be aware of what these devices can do and how you can talk with your child to help them to use this technology in safe and positive way. All modern gaming devices offer parental controls to help you manage how your child uses their device, but these do need to be set up in order for them to be operational.

Three steps for parents:

1. **Understand the capabilities of gaming devices and how you as a parent can support your child to be smart and safe in their gaming.** To help, read the FAQs below. If you are buying a gaming device, why not print our Shopper's Checklist[1] and ask these questions in the shop?

2. **Find out about the parental controls available - it helps if you are the one to set up the gaming device so you are in control of these.** Gaming devices have parental controls to help parents manage their children's gaming, for example, to prevent internet browsing or restrict access to age-restricted games (see our tips for Nintendo[2], Xbox[3] or PlayStation[4] devices). Find out about PEGI age ratings[5] to help you decide which games are appropriate for your child's age.

3. **Talk with your child about safe and responsible gaming and agree a set of family rules.** Perhaps you could agree rules with your child about how long they are allowed to play for, how they should behave towards other gamers and agree rules about not meeting up with people they have only met online. See our Family Agreement[6] for more ideas. Remember that gaming devices like the Xbox 360, Wii and PSP connect to the internet, so the same advice and rules for keeping safe online apply.

FAQs: Your questions answered

Gaming

How do I know which games are appropriate/ suitable for my child?

The Pan European Game Information[7] (PEGI) age rating system exists to help parents make informed decisions about buying computer games, similar to the BBFC ratings for films. The rating on a game confirms that it is suitable for players over a certain age, but is not indicative of the level of difficulty.

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1 http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/a-parents-guide/gaming-devices/shoppers-checklist/

2 http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/resources/ParentTechBriefing/tech/Parent_tech_briefing__Nintendo_devices.pdf

3 http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/resources/ParentTechBriefing/tech/Parent_tech_briefing__xbox.pdf

4 http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/resources/ParentTechBriefing/tech/Parent_tech_briefing__playstation.pdf

5 http://www.pegi.info/en/index/id/33/

6 http://www.digizen.org/digicentral/family-agreement.aspx

7 http://www.pegi.info/en/index/id/33/

PEGI age labels appear on the front and back of games packaging. Additional 'descriptors' shown on the back of the packaging indicate the main reasons why a game has received a particular age rating. Parents should be particularly aware of the 'online gameplay' descriptor which indicates whether a game can be played online.

Encourage your child to only access online games that are appropriate for their age and always check the age rating on any game before buying it for your child, as well as considering whether it has an online component. Games consoles have parental controls so that you can restrict your child from accessing games which are not appropriate for their age.

How long should I let my child play games for?

Consider what is appropriate for the users in your house and their gaming needs. This may depend on the type of game they are playing, for example, quest based games are unlikely to be completed within half an hour. Talk with your children about family rules for playing games online, which could cover safety considerations as well as play time limits. You may find it more appropriate to set a weekly quota for their internet use or to agree that certain games should only be played at a weekend. Some games consoles, like the Xbox 360[8], have a timer so that the console switches off after the allowed time. UKIE[9], the body that represents the interactive entertainment industry in the UK recommends that all games should form part of a healthy and balanced lifestyle and recommend that games players should take five minute breaks every 45–60 minutes.

Internet access

How can my child access the internet using their gaming device? Can I control this access?

Gaming devices can connect to your home internet or wifi hotspots to support a range of functions, from playing games online with people, watching films and browsing the internet. It is helpful to find out all of the online functions that the device has and consider any parental controls that might be relevant. You can speak to your home internet service provider to see if they have options for filtering the internet on devices accessing your home internet. For example, TalkTalk customers can activate HomeSafe[10] to help filter the internet on all connected devices. Teach your children our SMART rules[11] for internet safety, which apply to online gaming as well as any other online activities.

Communication

How might my child communicate with people using their gaming device?

Many games offer users the ability to chat with other gamers while playing. Players can 'talk' by using Instant Messenger style messages which are typed during the game and they can often use voice chat (made possible through in-built microphones or headsets, depending on the console) which is similar to talking on the phone. Some consoles even have video chat functions. It

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[8] http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/resources/ParentTechBriefing/tech/Parent_tech_briefing__xbox.pdf

[9] http://www.ukie.info/

[10] http://www.talktalk.co.uk/security/homesafe-demo.html

[11] http://www.kidsmart.org.uk/beingsmart/

is always a good idea to find out what chat functions are available, so that you understand how your child could be using their console.

Parental control tools are available, which can limit certain functions in games, including chat. Make sure your children know how to protect their privacy; advise them never to give out any personal information, pictures of themselves, or agree to meet someone in person, either when using online chat or sharing information in their user profile. If your child does play against people they don't know, make sure they know how to block and report other players and use the mute function which can disable chat in many games.

Encourage your child to use an appropriate screen or character name (also called gamertags) that follow the rules of the game. These names should not reveal any personal information or potentially invite harassment.

In addition to chatting within a game, many gamers chat on community forums and content sites related to the games they are playing. Gamers use these sites to exchange information about the games as well as to provide tips and hints to others. It is important to encourage your child to remember to respect their privacy on these sites too and make sure they know how to report any issues they encounter.

What should I do about inappropriate behaviour by another user? What does my child need to know in order to stay safe?

Help your child communicate safely

Because of the interactivity of gaming devices, the same advice that you give your child about keeping safe online also applies. Speak to your child about the importance of not giving anyone any personal information, such as their phone number, school or address, or meeting up with anyone they don't know in real life. Encourage your child to tell you if anything makes them uncomfortable or upset. Make sure that they know how to block and report other players and use the mute function which can disable chat in many games.

What to do about inappropriate behaviour by another user

While many young people experience gaming and the internet as a positive and integral part of their life, be aware that cyberbullying by 'griefers' can occur when playing games. If your child is being harassed by another player on a game, follow the game's grief-reporting guide to report this behaviour to the game provider and encourage your child to block that user.

There is no single solution to the problem of cyberbullying, but there are steps that you can take to help prevent cyberbullying and support your child if they are experiencing cyberbullying. Read our advice for parents and carers on page 5 of the Cyberbullying leaflet[12] and talk to your child, using the seven key messages for children and young people as a starting point.

If you suspect that your child is or has been the subject of an inappropriate sexual contact or approach by another person you should report this to Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre at **www.ceop.police.uk** in the UK, or internationally at **www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com**.

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[12] http://www.digizen.org/downloads/cyberbullyingOverview.pdf

Films, music and TV

How can my child access music, films and TV using their gaming device?

Some gaming devices can be used to watch DVDs and listen to CDs as well as access films, TV and music online. Some of the content available may not be suitable for children, so gaming devices often have parental controls to allow you to prevent your child from accessing material that has been rated inappropriate for their age.

Costs

How can I ensure that my child doesn't run up a big bill when using their gaming device?

Gaming devices with online networks, such as Xbox LIVE or the PlayStation Network, allow you to make purchases online. This may include games, game add-ons or films. It is helpful to understand how your child could spend money on their device. You should talk to them about agreed spending limits or use parental control settings to restrict spending as necessary.

In the news: Boy, 11, runs up £1,000 bill on mother's debit card playing Xbox online[13]

What else should I consider?

As well as staying safe when playing games, it's also important to stay legal. It may be tempting to purchase or download copied games but this is unlawful and also requires you to make changes to your console in order to play these games – which can of course damage your console and expose you to unsuitable content and viruses affecting your device.

'Phishing' scams can target users of gaming devices and it is a good idea to talk to your child about this. A recent phishing scam on the Xbox LIVE network, saw Xbox LIVE users receiving an email which pointed them towards a website offering free Microsoft Points. Victims of the scam entered personal details to be awarded these points, and this allowed the cybercriminals to access and spend money on their accounts.

In the news: Internet fraudsters target Xbox LIVE users in latest phishing scam[14]

Top tips for young people:

- Don't give away any personal details (particularly logins and passwords) unless you are certain that the site is authentic.
- If the deal looks too good to be true, it probably is!

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13 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-12393233

14 http://www.metro.co.uk/tech/882566-internet-fraudsters-target-xbox-live-users-in-latest-phishing-scam