

Play It Safe When Gaming Online

Online games span sports, strategy, puzzles, rhythm, first-person shooters, and role-playing. Kids can play on consoles (Xbox 360, Xbox One, Playstation, Wii), mobile phones and tablets, computers, portable devices (Nintendo DS), and social networks (Xbox Live, Facebook).

Kids play alone, with others in the room, or online—against the game itself or another person, with a team of players, or in games with hundreds of thousands of players at any one time.

Practical advice for safer gaming

Play with kids or sit with them while they play—you'll have fun and learn about their gaming, too!

Explore online games together

Check the ratings of the games kids want to play as you discuss the most appropriate games with each child or teen.

Stick to well-reviewed games or those from reputable sites like MSN Games, Xbox Live, Yahoo! Games, or iTunes to reduce the risk of viruses or scammers.

Review the game's terms of play. Find out how the game service:

- Monitors players and responds to abuse. Xbox Live, for example, helps gamers protect their identities and report objectionable content and behavior.
- Uses and protects kids' information. No privacy policy? Play elsewhere.

Agree on rules of play

Work with your kids to create guidelines that fit each kid's age and maturity.

- Should kids play only against the game? Only with friends? With just anyone?
- How many hours a day or week should kids play?
- Is your child or teen ready to use text, voice, or video features? If so, with whom?
- What can your kids see while they play? Players can create objectionable content within a game, so think about whether to limit these settings.
- Can kids upload gameplay with video or audio of themselves playing?
- Should your child be allowed to use real money within the game?

Games are great fun, but there are risks.

- If kids download games or apps from less-than-reputable sites, they may also be getting offensive content or malicious software.
- Some gamers play to harass and taunt other players or to cheat or attack them.
- Bad people may try trick a kid into giving their online credentials and then impersonate the child.
- Some adults try to earn the trust of gamers by pretending to be kids, sharing tips on how to win, or giving gifts such as game points. They may be trying to run a scam or angling for a phone call or an in-person meeting.

Rating games and apps

- **Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)**
United States and Canada
esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp
- **Pan European Game Information (PEGI)**
28 European countries and Singapore
pegi.info
- **Computer Entertainment Rating Organization (CERO)**
Japan
cero.gr.jp

Teach kids rules for safer gaming

Keep personal information, including passwords, a secret. Advise kids NEVER to share their real name, email or home address, age, gender, pictures, etc.

Protect game accounts with strong passwords that are at least eight characters (longer is better) and include a mix of letters, numbers, and symbols. (Learn how to create them at aka.ms/passwords-create.)

Have kids sign up as kids (not as adults) so they get a game experience tailored to their age and decrease the risk of exposure to inappropriate content.

Create smart gamer and screen names that don't reveal anything personal, aren't suggestive, and don't make kids easy to locate.

Help kids avoid online gambling. Have conversations about gambling addiction (it's highest for youth) and the costs, financial and otherwise. While most video games are legal for minors, gambling is not.

Get help from technology

Defend your devices against Internet dangers. Install reputable antimalware software. Keep all software and apps up to date, automatically whenever possible. Never disable the security features on your devices: don't turn off your firewall or jailbreak your phone. (Microsoft can help you protect PCs and tablets: microsoft.com/security/pypc.aspx.)

Use tools to set limits.

- Most gaming consoles allow a parent to set limits on the type of games and apps that kids can play based on the content rating, and limit who a child can play with.
- Many PC- and tablet-based games offer tools to help you specify the games your child can play (by rating), set time limits for play, and the like. (Compare Microsoft family safety tools: aka.ms/compare-tools.)



What to Do If There Are Problems

If the child is in immediate danger or someone threatens, harasses, or tries to lure kids into meeting in person, call the local police.

Teach kids to trust their instincts. Encourage kids to tell you if anything unsettling occurs. Make clear that you will not punish them or take away game privileges for telling you.

Teach kids how to respond to objectionable behavior by other gamers. They should ignore the behavior, or ask the player to stop, or block them. Kids should also report improper content and behavior to the game service. (For example, on Xbox Live you can use the **File Complaint** option.)