Safe online games for children

The world of online gaming can be a minefield, so how can you tell which games are safe for your child to play?

Exploring the world of online gaming can be a minefield, and knowing which games are safe for children to play is not always easy for parents to determine. As well as content and concepts that may not be appropriate, trolls, online bullies, and online predators are ever-present, and both parents and children need to be aware of these risks before the game is downloaded. Here's how you can assess which games are safest for your child.

Check for built-in safety features and turn off chat

Before allowing your child access to an online game, check to see whether it is safe and age-appropriate for them to play. To help, we have an extensive list of app and game reviews written by our online safety experts. When making your assessment, look for built-in safety features, and if the game has a live video streaming or chat function consider switching it off.

Although having the ability to communicate online with other game enthusiasts may seem like an exciting feature to your child, chats and live streams are often unmoderated and can lead to negative experiences such as online bullying, exposure to online predators, or unwanted contact from strangers.

Communicate openly

Talk to your child often about their gaming world, and ensure they know if they see something unusual or a stranger contacts them online, they must come to you for help. Explain the importance of blocking friend requests from people they don't know and make sure they are aware they should only accept requests from friends you have approved.

To keep the conversation open, ask your child what they like about the game as well as their challenges and accomplishments. Try playing the game yourself so you can understand how it works, or play alongside your child. Gaming with trusted players significantly reduces the online safety risk.

Continuous, non-judgemental communication helps build trust, which will ensure if there are any issues, your child is more likely to come to you for help. If and when issues do arise, don't immediately resort to cutting them off from the game or taking it away altogether. Doing so is one of the key reasons children don't report online incidents to trusted adults.

Check for hidden costs in free games

Many online games are free to download but contain hidden costs that may not be immediately obvious, so it's worth talking them through with your child.

Games often feature exciting looking limited-time offers to purchase items such as gems, coins, or energy for a 'special' price. Discuss in-app purchases with your child and consider disabling them on their device to avoid temptation. Some games also contain gambling elements, where children can be tricked into spending money unknowingly.

Even if the game doesn't have a built-in store, many free games display full-screen pop-up ads that are difficult to close. If tapped on accidentally, the ad may take the player to a website or app outside the game with a built-in store.

When gaming, it's not always possible to turn off ads or avoid in-app purchase temptations altogether, so it's important parents teach their children how to identify and navigate these tricky monetisation tactics.

Ensure content is age-appropriate

Following the app store's age recommendation may not be enough to determine if the game's content is appropriate for your child. Consider playing the game yourself to get a feel for how the game works, how the content is presented, and what's included in the game. In addition to the game itself, be aware of the pop-up ads found in most 'free' games. Unfortunately, much of the ad content shown in games aimed at children isn't regulated; therefore, there's a good chance it won't be age-appropriate.

Additionally, many ads contain social media links that, if accidentally clicked on, could direct a young child out of the game and onto the applicable platform.

Safety first

Compromise is required in most parenting challenges; however, when negotiating which games your child is allowed to play, safety should always come first. By becoming actively involved in your child's online gaming interests, you will help reduce the risk of online bullying, trolling, exposure to online predators, inadvertent in-app spending, and excessive screen time.

Visit ySafe's [Online Safety Hub](#) to read our App & Game Reviews