

SUMMER SAFEGUARDING BULLETIN 3

Introduction

The Achieve and Learn Trust believes that nothing is more important than safeguarding the young people in our schools.

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Online games are really popular amongst children and games like Fortnite, Minecraft and Roblox are becoming an increasingly important part of their social lives.

Whilst playing games online is often great fun and a good way to chat, there is a chance that your children will play with people they don't know who may use in-game chat inappropriately to expose them to harm or risk.

This bulletin, based on information from CEOP, is designed to help you understand why your children will chat online, what the risks are and what measures you can take to protect them while they're playing their favourite games.

Why do players talk to each other in online games?

Online games are social activities. Some are co-operative, encouraging players to work together to achieve their goal. Others are competitive, pitting teams or players against one another to emerge victorious. And then there are games designed with socialising in mind to allow people to connect and have fun.



In all these games, talking is either key for achieving objectives in game or for allowing that social interaction to take place. This is what usually happens and, for the most part, children are able to have safe conversations with their friends.

But, as with any space for talking online, there is a possibility that the chat tools used to bring players together can be abused. That's why it's important to take an interest in any online game your children play to identify risks.

How does in-game chat take place?

Every game is different, which means that there are different ways of talking in game. There are a few common ways of talking though:

- **Built in open chat functions.** Using the game's built-in chat functions you can talk through voice (via a headset) or text (by typing on a keyboard) with other people in the game
- **Quick chat functions.** A 'quick chat' function has set phrases, so you can send short automatic messages to a team mate or player. For example, sending 'Nice shot!' to a team mate who scores a good goal.
- **Platform messaging.** Some gaming platforms let you send voice or text messages to other players, just like a messaging app or social media. For example, PlayStation Network or Steam Friends & Chat. Players give this number to their friends and other players so they can add them to the game and chat with them.
- **'Ping' systems.** Some games use non – verbal communication to 'talk'. A 'ping' is where you can alert other players to a useful item or hazard by 'pointing' at it and pressing a button.
- **Chat or messaging apps.** Players can also use external apps like Discord, Twitch or WhatsApp to talk to each other during the game. This chat can be voice, video or text. Some apps can even be set up to look like they are part of the game (called in – game overlay).

Safe & Secure Gaming		
 Know what kinds of games your kids are playing.	 Set their profile to private & choose a fun username.	 Understand the games' ratings and suggested age range.
 Monitor their in-game interactions with others.	 Adjust the parental controls & privacy settings accordingly.	 Keep an ear and eye open for changes in speech and behavior.

Players can also talk to each other outside of the game. This might be on social media apps, through the platform messaging or in other online forums and chat rooms.

What are the risks of in-game chat?

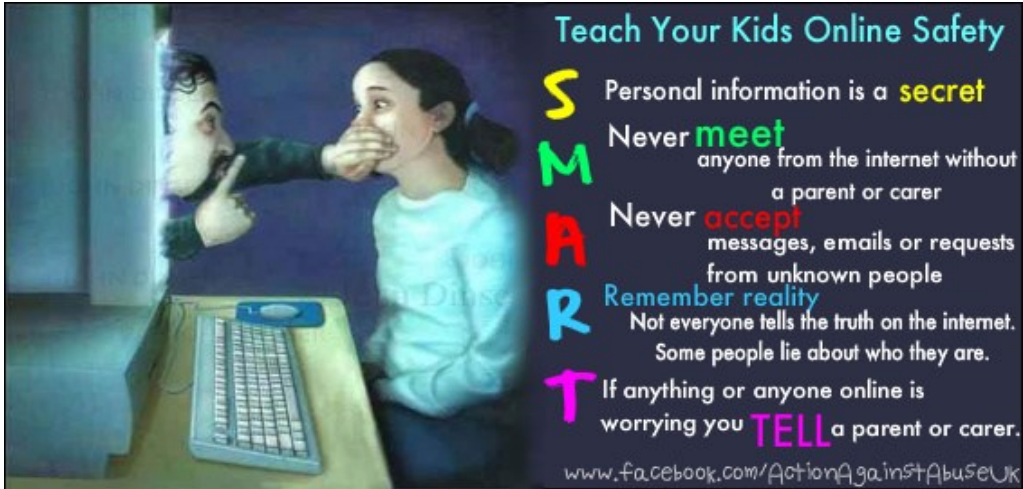
- **Chatting with people they don't know.** Gaming is different to social networks, as players often play against people they don't know. This may include adults.
- **Inappropriate or unmoderated chat.** While many in-game chat functions are monitored, and players look after each other, chat is live. In some games swearing and insults are common, especially when a player hasn't performed very well. Mean comments or insults can hurt, and competitive criticism might feel like bullying for some children.
- **Requests to chat in private.** Some people online genuinely just want to chat about gaming. But once they move to private chat, your child could be exposed to greater risks. They might share personal information or feel pressured to do something that they don't want to do. If the chat is happening on a different chat or messaging app, then it will no longer be monitored by the game developer's moderation tools or community team.
- **Offering gifts or trades.** Some people may offer to trade – or give – your child in-game items or currencies to earn their trust and persuade them to have a separate conversation outside of the game. Remember, once they're out of the game and into a private space, then it will no longer be monitored by the game.

Safer in-game chat

Games platforms and developers have put in a lot of settings to help manage or protect children from inappropriate chat.

- **Family controls.** Games platforms have in-built family controls to let you limit in-game chat to friends list only or turn it off completely. This means children can either only talk to people they know or not communicate at all.
- **Customised chat.** Most games allow players to customise chat options, including letting players turn off voice chat, text chat and limiting conversation to people they know.
- **Monitoring and reporting systems.** Games also use artificial intelligence (AI) moderation systems to filter or identify inappropriate chat. They also have reporting systems to let players report anyone behaving abusively, which can lead to temporary or permanent bans from the service.

However, these settings only work after they've been set. That's why we recommend spending a little bit of time with your child the first time they go into a new online game. It'll help you work out how they talk in game and help you work out what settings you may choose to turn on to keep them safer.



What can you do to help your child with safer in-game chat?

Fortunately, there are also a few practical steps you can take too.

- Play, or watch your children play, online games to understand how they talk online, who they talk to online and what you're comfortable with.
- With older children, who may not want you to play with them, have regular chats about the games they play, who they talk to and how.
- Use family controls and in-game settings to manage, limit or turn off in-game chat to make sure that you're confident interactions are right for your children.
- With primary aged children, keep games devices in a shared space in the house (for example, the living room) and use settings to limit screen time to help children to manage their time.
- To catch potential problems early, encourage your children to report inappropriate chat in game and to tell you if anything in the game makes them feel worried or uncomfortable.

If your child enjoys playing games, remember that there are plenty of games that aren't online that your children can play at home with you, or friends to help you manage interactions further.

Digital Stranger Danger

People you only know online are strangers. Not everyone on the Internet is who they say they are, so it's important to be careful when talking to people online.



Beware of Strangers

Any person online who you have not met in real life is a **stranger**.



Some strangers use the Internet to gain the trust of children and take advantage of them.
This is called **grooming**.

Strangers online can:

Change their location to pretend to be from your school or area

Use a fake name or username to appear to share your interests

Use a fake age to seem like a child you could be friends with

Use avatars (images or characters that represent online users) to hide who they really are

Pretend to be interested in the same things as you by asking questions about your interests or hobbies

Live Streaming



Live streaming is when two or more people have live video conversations on social media or online streaming apps.

Live streaming can be dangerous because strangers may target sites such as Snapchat, Facebook Live, Periscope and Omegle, to groom or abuse children.



Staying Safe Online

To stay safe online, make sure you:

- Never accept friend requests from people you don't know.
- Never use a webcam or live streaming app with strangers.
- Never share photos of yourself with strangers.
- Never meet with anyone you've only ever talked to online, unless you're with a parent or guardian.



If a stranger has contacted you inappropriately, tell a trusted adult (such as a parent or teacher).
If you feel as though you're in danger and need help straight away, call the police on 999.



daydream
BY PARENTS

What else can I do to protect my children when they're playing games?

Finally, there are resources that can give you advice on wider safe play practice, including:

www.askaboutgames.com, which features advice about safe play including using family controls to limit who children talk to, how much they spend in game and time spent online.

The PEGI rating site, which gives information about the age rating system operating in the UK.

The Family Game Database – www.taminggaming.com – which provides information on a range of games, including good games to



Meet Susan...

a 42 year old man posing as a 15 year old girl online.

"Susan" and your 13 year old just made plans to meet at the park.