Online gaming information for parents and carers

Online gaming has many benefits

Gaming can be a way to:

- Have fun and be entertained.
- Relax and reduce stress.
- Keep the mind active.
- Develop creativity.
- Strengthen decision making and strategic skills.
- Connect with others.

For most gamers, playing is a casual pastime. But a growing number of people play or watch competitive gaming (or eSports) as individuals, teams or families. Many gamers belong to vibrant and active communities.

Gaming can be used for a range of other purposes. These include general school education, right through to specialist workplace training (for example, flight simulations and various defence and cybersecurity exercises).

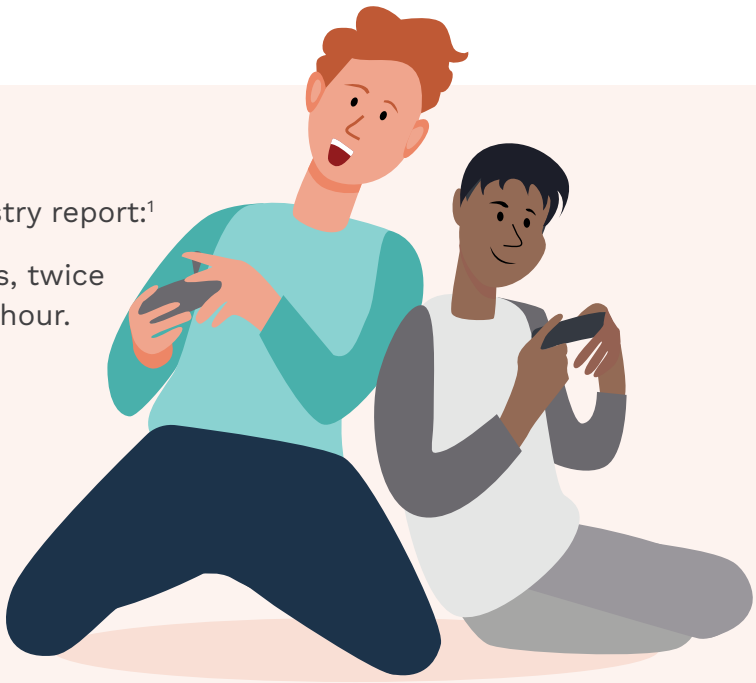
While gaming often has positive effects on the mental health and wellbeing of participants, it also has risks — like most online activities.

This information sheet provides practical tips and links to further information, so you can help your child reduce the risks and maximise the positive experiences of gaming online.

State of play

According to a major Australian gaming industry report:[1]

- Typical daily casual game play is 10 minutes, twice a day; typical daily in-depth game play is 1 hour.
- 47% of gamers are female.
- 78% of gamers are over the age of 18.
- The average age of an Australian gamer is 34 years old.
- Adult players have been gaming for an average of 12 years.



Competitive gaming, known as eSports, is a multi-billion dollar industry that includes many gaming genres and titles, such as *League of Legends* and *Counter Strike: Global Offensive.* Gamers also watch eSports to learn strategies to improve gameplay.

1. Source: Interactive Games & Entertainment Association

Gaming risks

It is important to take a balanced view and recognise that gaming, like everything online, has its pros and cons.

eSafety research has found that people playing online games can be exposed to risks including:

- Cyberbullying (for example threats, verbal abuse, ganging up, exclusion).
- Inappropriate language, age-inappropriate content, or access to pornography.
- Unwanted contact from others, including 'grooming' by a sexual predator.
- In-app purchasing.
- Themes or elements that may encourage young people to gamble now or later in life.
- Giving out too much personal data.
- Spending too much time online.



Many multiplayer games involve hundreds or even thousands of people playing at the same time. The gamers can communicate with friends and strangers through web cam, private messaging or online chat functions. This increases the risk of contact from online abusers or bullying from other players.

Managing gaming

The best way to help your child manage the risks is to take an active interest in their gaming.

Select the right privacy settings

Make sure your child only joins games suitable to their age and maturity. The privacy settings can also be restricted so your child only plays or chats with gamers they know.

Choose the right games

Collaborate with your child on game purchases — have them suggest the game they wish to play or purchase. Ask them to find out the recommended age, information about the content and how to use the privacy settings.

To identify if a game is beneficial, ask:[2]

- **Are there emotional benefits?** (Is it fun?)
- **Are there cognitive or learning benefits?** (Do you need to solve problems?)
- **Is creativity required?** (Do you build stuff?)
- **Is it a social game?** (Do you connect with other players and is the connection safe?)

Ratings and reviews

You can look up games on the Australian Classification website to check their rating and other information about the content, to help you decide if it is suitable for your child. Check out the video *Quick guide to Australian classification ratings*.

The eSafety Guide has information about popular online games, apps, social media sites and other digital platforms. The guide explains what the game is and how people use its tools and functions. It also provides the gaming company's age recommendation and links to key safety information, including how to report and block abusive players.

eSafety can direct an online service or platform to remove illegal content or ensure that restricted content can only be accessed by people who are 18 or older. Find out more about illegal and restricted online content.

Commonsense media provides parents with reviews of the latest games and apps (as well as movies, TV shows and books).

2. Dupon, S. (2016) Parents guide to gaming, Manningham YMCA

Get involved

Co-play

Many gamers watch video tutorials or 'walkthroughs' to help them play. You can watch these with your child so you can both understand the games better. Learn the lingo with your kids — you can search online together to check the meaning of terms like 'walkthroughs', 'first player shooter' and 'PVP'. Play the game yourself, or even get into the habit of co-playing with your child.

Listen and ask questions

Have a conversation with your child about common gaming issues using the eSafety kids and eSafety young people pages to guide them. You can workshop strategies to deal with upsetting or inappropriate behaviour and learn together how to report, mute and block abusive players.

Co-design rules

Kids are more likely to follow rules if they helped to create them. Part of the discussion and negotiating is explaining why a rule might or might not work.

One of the things that may help to manage your child's gaming is negotiating the time they are allowed to spend online — before they start playing. Together you could decide a limit on how many games or levels can be completed, or the length of playing time.

It's also good to establish rules about when and where digital devices and consoles can be used. For example, making it clear that games have to be played in open family areas not in bedrooms, homework has to be finished first, or screen time ends an hour before sleep.

Help regulate time online

You may be concerned that your child is spending too much time playing online games. There is no magic number for 'healthy' hours or minutes. If gaming is balanced with other activities and sleep, there is usually no need for concern. Many young people game a lot and still study, socialise and feel happy.

But if gaming starts to have negative impacts on your child or your family, you may need to encourage them to better regulate their time online. You can read more about the signs to look out for when your child is spending too much time gaming. It may be useful to get your child to reflect on the impact gaming is having on their life by helping them do a self-evaluation.

If you have serious concerns about your child and online gaming or gambling, seek professional advice from a doctor, psychologist or school counsellor. Gaming disorder has now been recognised by the World Health Organization as a mental health condition and there are practitioners who specialise in internet overuse problems. eSafety does not recommend any particular practice but there are listings on niira.

Responsible gambling Victoria has information to support conversations about gaming and gambling.

For other relevant advice and resources you can also check out our list of counselling and support services, or go directly to KidsHelpline, eHeadspace or Beyond Blue.



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