Better conversations about gaming for families

When it comes to online gaming, there can be a disconnect between what children experience and what they hear adults saying. Bridging this gap will help children to have safer and more positive online experiences.

Key points

Children are more likely to seek help when a parent or carer:

- encourages them to talk with them if they have issues
- gets involved by playing games with them or shows an interest by asking open questions about the game they're playing
- learns about their gaming interests and how it benefits them.

How to have better conversations with children about gaming

See the benefits of gaming

What kids hear you say: 'I really don't like that game. Why don't you go find something better to do with your time?'

What we know: Children learn and grow through play. As a form of play, gaming offers a range of benefits. When children see their gaming is valued, they are more likely to share their experiences – both positive and negative.

Better conversations sound like: 'I can see you really enjoy that game. What do you like about it?'

1. Talk to them about the benefits they experience.

2. Get to know the games they are playing and help them find new games that match their motivations and skills.

Research* shows:

52% of children

32% of teens

want their **parents or carers** to **play with them**.

Connect through game play

What kids hear you say: 'Why don't you spend time with your family or friends instead of being glued to that computer game?'

What we know: Most online games provide opportunities to play with friends, find community and build social skills. Gaming can also be an opportunity for families to connect. Many children want to game with their parents or carers or would like them to game with them more. If you're not confident about gaming, or young people refuse to co-play, you can still connect by getting involved with the game they're playing.

Better conversations sound like: 'Who do you like to play with? Is there a game that we could play together? What character is your favourite?'

1. Get involved by watching or playing with them or show an interest by asking questions about the action or storyline in the game.

2. During gameplay, talk about the skills they are building and celebrate their achievements.

Choose the right amount of game play for your family

What children hear: 'All you ever do is play that game!'

What we know: Many parents worry about time online. The right amount will look different for every child and family. Focus on the quality of their play, as well as getting the right balance. What are they getting out of it? Are they getting enough time to sleep, be physically active or connect with friends offline?

If you're concerned about your child's mental health, you should seek support from a mental health professional. Get support before you decide to restrict access to games because this may impact their wellbeing.

Better conversations sound like: 'I found a game I think you would enjoy, but before we start, let's work out a plan together to make sure you fit everything in.'

1. Access game reviews on **Common Sense Media** to understand and select games with learning opportunities and values that best suit your child and family.

2. Work with them to find time for gaming. You might find **eSafety's Family Tech Agreements** helpful to create shared expectations.

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*Levelling up to stay safe: Young people's experiences navigating the joys and risks of online gaming. February 2024.

Manage risks and ensure safety

What children hear: ''Don't talk to strangers in-game!'

What we know: Instead of focusing on strangers, it's important that children know the red flags of unsafe contact, including someone trying to be friendly too quickly, asking them to go on a different platform or private space, or doing something inappropriate or sexual.

For young children, put in place safeguards that restrict risky features (like communicating with people they don't know). As they grow, build their skills so they can play with others and not miss out on the social benefits. Most gaming experiences are positive and children are often helping others.

Better conversations sound like: 'I'm glad you're having fun with friends online. Let's talk about safe and unsafe behaviours in games. And remember, I'm always here to help, even if you feel like you've made a mistake.'

1. Encourage your child to talk to you if they experience an issue while they are gaming. Let them know you are there to support them.

2. Read The eSafety Guide to get a better understanding of risky features in games. These can be managed via parental or user controls.