Gaming – A parent's guide

Video games have come a long way. Children today don't have to choose between wildly violent first-person shooters or dull educational titles. There are tons of exciting and engaging games that can enhance what children are learning in school and help them develop skills for future life and work success.

That said, the positive aspects of gaming also come with some risks. Many video games have violent themes, and some studies link children's' exposure to violent video games with increased aggression and lack of empathy.

The PEGI system is a universal way of categorising the content of games, much like the age limits we associate with DVD's. The PEGI system gives an age rating and a content descriptor to help parents understand the content contained in any game and how appropriate it is for their children to play. Ideally within a primary school, children should be playing games rated 3 and 7 although we understand, with checks or supervision, you may be happy for your child to play a 12.

PEGI has five age categories.

- **3**: Suitable for ages 3 and older. May contain very mild violence in an appropriate context for younger children, but neither bad language nor frightening content is allowed.
- **7**: Suitable for ages 7 and older. May contain mild or unrealistic violence (e.g. violence in a cartoon context), or elements that can be frightening to younger children.
- **12**: Suitable for ages 12 and older. May contain violence in a fantasy context or a sporting action, profanity, mild sexual references or innuendo, or gambling.
- **16**: Suitable for ages 16 and older. May contain explicit or realistic-looking violence, strong language, sexual references or content, gambling, or encouragement of drug use.
- **18**: Unsuitable for persons under 18. May contain extreme or graphic violence, including "violence towards defenceless people" and "multiple, motiveless killing", strong language, strong sexual content, gambling, drug glamorisation, or discrimination.

Tips for all children

- **Make sure games are age-appropriate.** Know the content of what your children play, both at home and at friends' houses.
- **Establish limits.** Be firm from the beginning about how much time children can play. Some parents set an overall daily media usage time and let children decide which of the many forms of media they wish to use on a given day. And, of course, be very clear about what games your children can play
- **Find good stuff.** While it might seem like childrens' video games are all about shooting, you can find games that provide rich, engaging experiences that broaden kids' horizons. Common Sense Media is a great place to [start finding these games](#).
- **Get screen savvy.** Games are available on every device that has a screen -- including phones; screens are everywhere. Count that screen time toward your children's total game playing for the day.
- **Be aware of multiplayer options.** Games often involve some form of player interaction, multiplayer gaming, or player-generated content that children can upload and download. Watch out for open chat and user-generated content that isn't monitored.

Tips for older children

- **Watch language.** The language in multiplayer games can get pretty intense. If you aren't comfortable with what you hear, use the parental controls that disable online play.
- **Be on the lookout for violence.** Violence ramps up quickly in many games. Check what your children are playing, and limit those games that you feel are excessively violent.
- **Be aware of highly addictive games.** Games like *[Call of Duty: Black Ops II](#)* let children play against others anywhere in cyberspace. They're designed to take up tons of time, and it's up to you to curb it. As with any battle you may have with your children, you have your work cut out for you.
- **Stay involved.** Continue to talk to your child about their gaming lives, and look for games that help reinforce your family's values.
- **Watch spending.** Games are expensive, and many offer in-game purchases. Talk to your teens about how much money they're spending on gaming and whether that money could be better spent elsewhere.
- **Don't assume all online games are suitable for children.** Some are suitable only for adult players and may contain adult themes, imagery and language so check the age rating of what they want to play.