

Some guidance for parents whose children play games online

By Jane Stott (ELSA)

As a school and particularly in my role as ELSA, I find I am working with more and more children who are struggling with anxiety at school and at home. I know we have been through an unprecedented year with the disruption of the pandemic and home-schooling etc. but I wonder if we ever truly take on board how we may be adding to these stresses and anxiety when allowing our children unsupervised access to online gaming.














There's no arguing with the fact that most children like to play online games and if we let them, will spend many hours of their time in front of a screen. For lots of children and young people this will be ok and they will still be able to enjoy their other hobbies and interests, continuing to mix with their peers and have fun. But for many others this love of gaming can tip into being unhelpful and may eventually impact on their life in a damaging way.

TIPS TO CONSIDER

- It's a fun hobby – [but maybe use of a timer for screen time \(encourage other hobbies and interests\)](#)
- General voice and text chats should be disabled – [they can speak to their friends while playing using a separate application](#) - If you do allow your child to use voice chat – [remember any random internet stranger could be talking to them](#)

**Pan European Game Information (PEGI) is a European video game content rating system established to help European consumers make informed decisions when buying video games or apps through the use of age recommendations and content descriptors.*

Always check the PEGI rating – they are there for a reason – don't fall for the line 'all my friends are playing it'

Rating	Description	Icon	Content descriptor	Explanation
	Suitable for persons 3 and older. General audiences.		Violence	Depending on the age category, the game may contain scenes of people getting injured or dying, often by use of weapons, whether realistically, in a fantastical or cartoonish manner. May also contain gore and blood-letting.
	Suitable for persons 7 and older. Minimal parental guidance.		Bad Language	May contain profanity and all manner of slurs, insults, and epithets.
	Suitable for persons 12 and older. Some parental guidance.		Fear / Horror	May contain scenes and plot elements too disturbing, overly suspenseful or frightening to younger/sensitive players at PEGI 7 or horrifying content in the absence of violence at PEGI 12.
	Suitable for persons 16 and older. Strong parental guidance.		Sex	Depending on the age category, the game may contain nudity (sexualized or otherwise), sexual posturing or sexual intercourse.
	Only for persons 18 and older. Adults only.		Drugs	Depending on the age category, the game may contain references to alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs (or a fictional substance similar in effect to real-life illegal drugs)
			Gambling	May contain elements that encourage or teach gambling.
			Discrimination	May contain scenes, behavior, or references to cruelty or harassment to a group of specific people such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, ability, or sexual preferences.
			Online	Descriptor was discontinued by PEGI in 2015, with the majority of present-day games and all consoles allowing for online interactions. Still appears for games classified before July 2015.

I turned to my two grown up children Claire and Andrew to give me their take on gaming. I asked them to particularly focus on the game 'Fortnite' (*PEGI rating 11/12+), as a significant amount of primary school children are playing this game.

*"It's (Fortnite) been designed almost exclusively for children. It's really cartoon-ish and while it does contain lots of **violence** that violence is also cartoon-ish. There's no blood or gore or anything graphic. Just bright shiny giant **hammers, rocket launchers and machine guns.**" – Andrew*

Children up to the age of 12 learn through 'doing' and use stories to develop their values so the interactive nature of video games will have a big effect on them

"Fortnite' is an extremely popular online **competitive** game." – Andrew

"These types of games can put a lot of **pressure** on kids (to be good at the game, or become popular on streaming platforms). And also, they are potentially **unequipped** to deal with strangers saying or shouting mean things at them." - Andrew

Our society in general puts a lot of emphasis on our children to succeed and do well.

"In terms of **anxiety and depression**: Gaming is an **escapism**. If a child is struggling in school or at home, they might play games to relax and forget about the stress of the real world. As with anything, moderation is best. Because it is so easily accessible I think it is common for kids/young adults to over use gaming as a means of escape. I think in some instances it can **hamper social and emotional development** because it **allows you to hide from problems/conflicts** and **difficult situations** rather than having to deal with them." - Andrew

Younger children cannot tell the difference between reality and fantasy, especially if it is scary

"I think the real issue with the game is the way it promotes **addictive** playing and the live chat element. You could have a young child 6/7+ chatting online with someone much older, using lots of hurtful language or swear words." - Claire

Children are not as good at reasoning or critically evaluating things (e.g. knowing 'this is only a game' or 'I know X is 'OK' in the game but I must not do X in real life')

"My biggest worry with it all is **children nowadays do not know any different**. Me and my friends often say how lucky we feel to have known life before the internet, mobiles, social media and video games." - Claire

"I agree with a lot of the articles which link video games to **addictive** behaviour because of the ***dopamine** release it gives children. The same as excessive phone use." – Claire

"Fortnite specifically works by making you want to get better and better each time." - Claire

***Dopamine** is a chemical found naturally in the human **body**. It sends signals from the **body** to the brain. **Dopamine** plays a part in controlling the movements a person **makes**, as well as their emotional responses. The right balance of **dopamine** is vital for both physical and mental wellbeing.

Young children are less able to regulate their emotions if they feel scared or angry

According to experts, some of the most addictive online games are:

- Fortnite Battle Royal
- World of Warcraft
- Battlefield
- Farmville
- Call of Duty
- Minecraft
- Angry Birds
- Solitaire

When should I be worried about my child?

While there is no exhaustive list of signs and every child/young person is different, a child/young person may be negatively impacted by gaming if they are:

- Being regularly exhausted and disengaged at school – experiencing poor concentration, irritability and worsening academic performance
- Constantly thinking about and wanting to play the game, talking a lot about gaming to the point that they find it difficult to talk or think about anything else
- Not telling the truth about how much time they've spent playing or playing in secret (such as in the middle of the night)
- Only socialising online and finding in-person interactions difficult to manage, enjoy or feel interested in
- Not seeing friends as often or keeping up with hobbies that they used to enjoy alongside gaming

Please view links below for further information

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Vzxj6flcfM>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-gaming/#when-should-i-be-worried?>

<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/issue/gaming-addiction/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/online-gaming/>

I hope you have found this useful and if you would like to discuss anything mentioned further or have any worries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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