

Empowering young people with additional learning needs to connect safely online.

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# Gaming, risks and benefits

Gaming is a large part of all young people's lives and as it becomes more accessible and social it's important to understand how to help children play safely and get the best out of their experience.

Gaming - is it a win for my child or will they lose out on real-world life?

**We are all aware of the worries about gaming:**

too much gaming, isolated young people not learning social skills, being lured into gambling or being harmed by groomers, all the while snacking and becoming obese. This is a gloomy picture, but is it the whole picture? Media stories tend to focus on the negative. There is a lot more to it.

While all these risks exist, there are also risks in everything we do. How do parents keep calm and assess the situation? Maybe there are gains to be had from gaming that are less talked about?





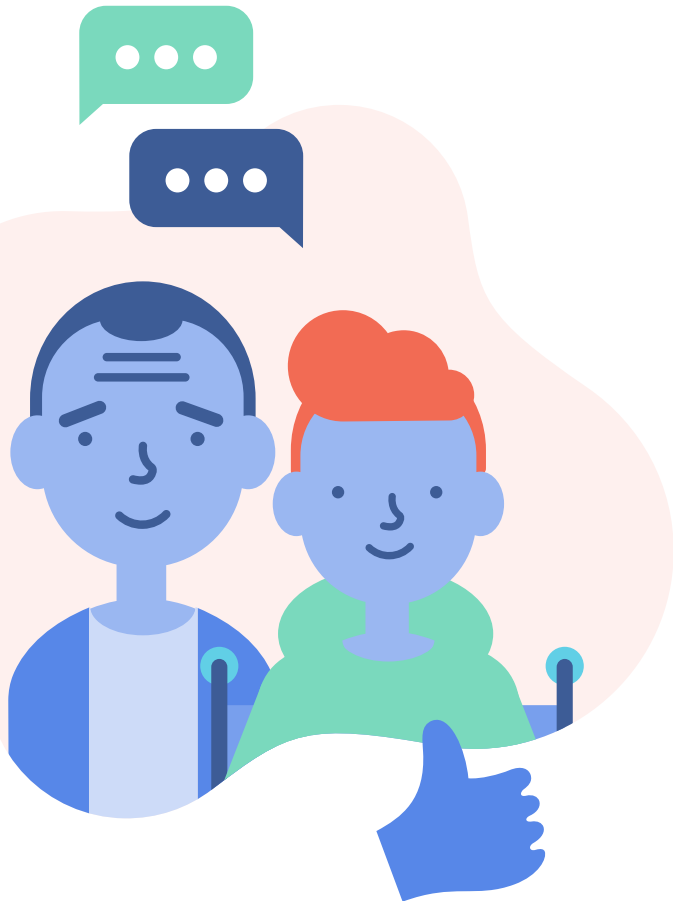
## Benefits of gaming

- **Gaming can help with socialising** - It's a key to real-world friendship because young people can chat about strategies and favourite characters, particularly if your child finds learning neurotypical social skills a bit like learning a second language.
- **Gaming can develop creativity** - It can inspire creativity, e.g. some gamers love to draw characters from games and learn anime and Japanese pop art styles and techniques.
- **Gaming can help manage moods** - For some young people, gaming helps them calm down or tune out the real-world worries that they face. 'I manage my anger by playing games' explained a 15-year-old in a UK survey. Another talks about escaping their worries at home where there are family and health problems. Having fun is good for our mental wellbeing. Casual games such as Angry Birds or Temple Run can offer short-term, immediate fun and relaxation to unwind stress. Video games can provide an alternate world.
- **Gaming development can be a career** - Your child might be developing skills that he or she can use in a future career or learn valuable skills. [AskAboutGames 'Thriving Futures: A Rough Guide to Game Careers'](#) gives good advice on what careers are available within the gaming industry.



## Risks of gaming

- **Physical impact** - Too much of anything can interfere with wellbeing and that is also true with gaming. The pull of it can be intense and managing a player's time is difficult. If your child's sleep, physical activity, learning and socialising are being impacted by their inability to stop gaming then there is cause for concern.
- **Gambling** - Some people argue that paying for in-game purchases when you don't know what they might contain is a form of gambling and puts young people on a pathway to gambling. Check the settings and make sure your credit card cannot be used without your permission. Talk to your child about the fact that it is real money.
- **Talking to strangers** - As some games try to improve safety for young people in the chat feature, impatient young users (in some cases) simply ask each other to chat in another app simultaneously while playing. This might be unmoderated, encrypted, or risky in other ways. Some apps do cooperate well with law enforcement if this becomes necessary, whereas others may be in countries where they do not have legal agreements. Startup apps seldom have large numbers of moderators.
- **Meeting up with strangers** - A young player might be invited to meet up by someone they chat to while gaming. They can present themselves as a young person. They often praise the young player's skills and offer to teach them new ones. It seems innocent.



## Tips to manage the risks

**Family life does matter and interacting with others is appealing – it is what humans do!** So it is a challenge for parents to strike a balance and there is no magic solution other than talking to your child, showing an interest in the games he or she plays and creating a balanced dialogue together about what is a healthy amount of gaming.

For games played on phones or tablets, you can give your child an alert 20 minutes before you plan for everyone to eat – giving them time to achieve the next level and stop then rather than being called at the moment they might achieve the level they're aiming at.

### Your child should agree to:

- **Never arrange to meet up alone** with someone they met in a game without telling an adult or someone they trust
- **To take someone along with them to the meetup** – an older sibling cousin or parent
- Only meet in a public place where there are **many people around**
- **Doing an online search** to try to find out more about this person and their social media profile

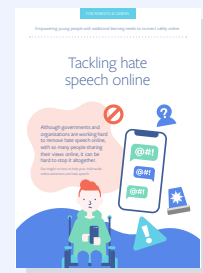
## Further support



[Advice on chatting to strangers](#)



[Advice on sharing nudes or sexting](#)



[Advice on extremist views and hate speech](#)

[See Internet Matters Gaming Advice Hub for more support.](#)

There is also advice for young people in [‘The Hard Stuff’](#) and resources within the section [‘Things To Do Together’](#).