

# What I need to know about online gaming

Young people can use technology for many reasons. One of the main reasons is to play games to have fun. Games can not only be played on consoles such as Xbox, PlayStation, Wii but also on iPods, smart phones, tablets or computers. The term online game refers to the user connecting to the internet to play the game.

Many online games contain options for the user to create passwords, create an account, pay money and connect with other users within the game and communicate.

There are a multitude of games available, some recommended for children and some not. The term 'games' carries a feeling of appropriateness in that it's people having fun. This may not be the case with all online games. For this reason it is important that you make informed choices when your child becomes part of this online activity.

Online games are not all bad. Computer type games, if managed properly can be fun and may develop skills such as team work and creativity. But be warned, if not managed, can create issues not only with your child but also relationships within your family.

Some games classified as 'online games' can be played off line (not connected to the internet) which removes the possibility to communicate with other users but should still have measures in place like 'time limits'.

Not all games are appropriate or healthy for our children. Some games revolve around extreme and graphic violence, committing crimes, sexual content and topics that fall outside family morals, values and ethics.

Communication within online games is generally done through text based messaging or through the speaker and microphone of the device, often through a headset. *All be aware, if your child is using headphones you will not know who is communicating with your child or what they are saying.*

## Some considerations for parents:

- Is this game age specific for my child (Does the game have an age classification)
- How violent is the game

- Is my child required to create an account (and how much information are they asked to provide)
- Are there any costs involved in joining or continuing to play the game
- Is the essence of the game consistent with the morals or values of our family (Does it contain topics including theft, assault or law breaking)
- Does the game have the ability to connect my child with others to communicate or chat

#### Suggested rules for children gaming online:

- I stick to the time limits
- If something feels wrong or it upsets me I must talk to a trusted adult
- If I don't like how people are behaving I report them
- I treat others in the game with respect
- I only communicate with friends from the physical world
- I only download or play a new game if I check with my parents first
- If the game charges or asks for money I check with my parents first
- I never share personal information with others in games

#### Advice for parents:

- You as a parent should have the password to the online gaming accounts of your children
- Firm time limits must be set in place to help your child control the amount of time they are playing (don't rely on self-regulation – the games are designed to keep your child in that position for as long as possible)
- All children are different, however, as a guide, 7 to 10 hours per week, of age appropriate games, is classified as medium usage. Current trends suggest this is not excessive and should not have a negative effect on the user.
- If you feel your child is becoming obsessive with a game or behaving differently or inappropriately step back and examine why this is happening (The type of game, length of play or exposure to inappropriate content may be a cause)
- Report abuse to the game owners should there be a problem with another user (Most sites have the ability to report through the game via a message)
- Clearly state and reinforce the rules, what's expected, the language they and others can and cannot use or who they are allowed to connect and play with

- Reassure your child that they should always come to you if they feel uncomfortable, if something has upset them, or they've made a mistake
- Don't forget to google search new games to find out about them or use the Easy Guide link which explains online games.

It is not normal in our society for others who are not part of your child's generation to want to get to know your child, befriend them and ask them for their information

Most adults with poor intentions do not bother to disguise their age. They relate to your child as a sympathetic, supportive, enthusiastic, and encouraging adult. They set out to 'befriend'. Be aware of your child's interactions within the game.

### Game design

The online game market is forecasted to reach in excess of US\$35 billion by 2017 (previously approximately US\$19 billion 2011)

Gaming is BIG business. Games are designed to be addictive. They are hard enough to be challenging but not so hard that children give up. Success feels like it is just there, just out of their reach, but possible in their next attempt (sounds a lot like gambling addiction doesn't it?)

Technology improvements and improved broadband access has given rise to MMOG (massively multiplayer online games) – allowing 100 000's of players to play together at the same time.

### Connection - supports addiction

Many of these games have chat functions and require teamwork. They have a common enemy or goal. This can make it hard to leave the game as the child feels responsible, involved and needed.

### Addictions

- Single player games – to complete the mission (at the expense of all else in their life. They become fixated.)
- Multiplayer games – escape, connect, a place where they feel accepted.

### Games are amazing

Online games provide opportunities to visit new worlds, learn about history, cars, geography, fashion, and millions of other things. The graphics are amazing. You feel like you are right there in this imaginary world and you have a role to play. You are rewarded for your successes and there is always a chance to start over. Instant gratification. Beautiful design. Realistic environments where your child can be... well whatever they want. Help them do this responsibly.