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Safer Online Gaming

What Parents Need to Know About Online Video Games

By: Daniel Sherwin, December 2020

You're dedicated to keeping your children safe. That's why you send your kids to Boys and Girls Clubs of the Coastal Bend. It's also why you teach important safety rules like "don't talk to strangers" from a young age.

But while there's a lot parents can do to protect children from real-world threats, keeping kids safe online is harder to do. That's especially true when it comes to online gaming, where children can be exposed to cyberbullying, online predators, and other threats through in-game chat.

Some parents have taken the extreme approach of banning online gaming, but video games offer a lot of [benefits](#) to children and teens. Rather than cut kids off from a source of connection and learning, use these tips to help your children game safely.

How to get started with online gaming

New to gaming? A positive gaming experience starts with the right equipment. Here's what you need to set your kids up for gaming success.

- **Gaming system:** PC, Xbox, or PlayStation? Consider the games your child wants to play when choosing the best gaming system. If opting for PC, research the [baseline hardware](#) your child's games require to buy a desktop that's up to the task.
- **Computer monitor:** High-quality graphics call for a high-definition display. Gaming monitors tend to be pricier than standard computer monitors due to their high framerate and response time, but parents can [find sales](#) with a little shopping around.
- **Headset:** Multiplayer gaming is a noisy affair. A [comfortable headset](#) with clear sound quality keeps your kid in the game — and you out of it.
- **Controllers:** Parents can opt for first-party controllers like the Nintendo Switch Pro Controller or a third-party gamepad. If buying a [third-party controller](#), look for brands known for quality.
- **Internet connection:** Online gaming requires a lag-free internet connection. Online games like Fortnite need faster speeds than your average remote worker or Netflix viewer. Fiber optics offer the [gold standard](#) of internet connections thanks to its high upload and download speeds.

Parental controls for online games

Set parental controls before giving kids free rein over your new gaming equipment. Most modern gaming systems include robust [parental controls](#) that let parents set time limits and curfews, blacklist and whitelist games, block spending and loot boxes, and restrict communication, friend requests, and user-created content.

Beware of "free" games

On the surface, free video games sound like a budget-conscious parent's dream come true. However, parents should be wary of any game that's free to play. Many free-to-play or "freemium" games push in-game purchases known as [microtransactions](#) in order for players to advance.

Microtransactions are most common in mobile games but consoles aren't immune from this predatory tactic. To keep kids from draining their college funds on freemium games, use parental controls to block in-game purchases or purchase a limited amount of in-game currency so kids can upgrade games without going overboard.

The problem with in-game communication

Online video games aren't just fun — they're also social. But while gaming is a great way for kids to connect with friends, especially during the pandemic, in-game communication is risky business for kids.

Cyberbullying, cybercrime, and online predators are all concerns for [in-game communication](). Rather than block chat features entirely, parents can limit voice and text chat to friends. Kids should also be educated on the risks of sharing personal information like their full name, age, or credit card information online.

The risks of online gaming go beyond too much screen time. But while video games aren't without risks, they also have a lot to offer kids. Rather than write off online video gaming, use these tips so your children can game safely.