



Teaching and Learning  
in a supportive environment  
where all  
feel valued, happy and  
successful.

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

## **Navigating Online Gaming with Children**

Keeping Online Gaming Fun, Safe, and Balanced for Your Family.

Many children may have unwrapped new gaming devices, sparking excitement and enthusiasm for online gaming. While this is an exciting new hobby for your child, it also brings challenges that parents must navigate carefully to ensure the experience is enjoyable, safe, and conflict-free.

Here are some practical tips and insights to help your family embrace online gaming responsibly:

### **Understand the Spill-over Effect into School Life**

Conflicts or toxic behaviour in online games often spill into school relationships. This can result in:

- **Strained Friendships:** Arguments or misunderstandings online can lead to disputes in person.
- **Distractions in Class:** Conversations about gaming during school hours can detract from learning.
- **Unresolvable Conflicts:** Schools are often ill-equipped to mediate issues that originate in online gaming.

To prevent this, maintain open communication with your child and monitor their interactions. Encourage them to discuss any gaming-related issues they face and help them resolve conflicts constructively.

### **Establish Healthy Boundaries from the Start**

- **Set Time Limits:** Define clear rules around when and how long your child can play. This can help prevent gaming from interfering with schoolwork, family time, or sleep. Tools like parental controls on consoles or apps like Google Family Link can help enforce limits.
- **Create Device-Free Zones:** Designate certain areas or times of day as gaming-free to encourage offline activities and quality family interactions

## Prioritize Safety and Privacy

- **Review Game Content:** Ensure the games your child plays are age-appropriate by checking their ratings (e.g., ESRB, PEGI) and researching in-game features like chat or user-generated content.
- **Enable Parental Controls:** Use built-in settings to limit online interactions, block inappropriate content, and manage purchases.
- **Teach Privacy Awareness:** Emphasise the importance of not sharing personal information, such as their real name, address, or school, with strangers online.

## Address Toxic Behaviour

- **Discuss Online Etiquette:** Talk to your child about treating others with respect online and recognizing inappropriate behaviour.
- **Monitor Chat Features:** Be aware of in-game communication channels. Consider disabling voice or text chat in games known for toxic communities.
- **Know How to Report:** Teach your child how to block or report players who engage in unacceptable behaviour.

## Stay Engaged

- **Ask Questions:** Show interest in what they're playing. Ask about their favourite games, what they enjoy, and any challenges they face.
- **Stay Informed:** Familiarize yourself with the games your child is playing, including their potential risks and benefits.

# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about IN-GAME CHAT

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Video games are continuing to grow in popularity – including, of course, among children and young people – and the emergence of gaming communities has been accelerated by the inclusion of chat functionality across many different titles. While in-game chat isn't inherently a bad thing, it can create some concerns about online safety and the people that children might be interacting with.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHAT

There are a number of ways that gamers commonly chat with one another online. As the name would suggest, in-game chat happens within the game itself. There's also party chat: a group voice conversation that console users can have with anyone on the same platform. This tends to be more commonly used by players who already know each other. Finally, many gamers – especially on PC – will chat via a third-party app such as Discord.

## CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

Whether it's text- or voice-based, in-game chat is frequently open to all players to use. Many games default to making it an opt-in function, but some don't: meaning a child could start seeing messages within the game from people they're playing with, regardless of whether they know those individuals or not. While most strangers won't necessarily have ill intent, there are some who may behave inappropriately when chatting to a child – intentionally or otherwise.

## DANGER OF GROOMING

It's been reported that some young gamers have encountered older players online who pretend to be a lower age to manipulate children, sending gifts in exchange for chatting and sending photos. Just as on any messaging platform, it's good to advise young people to avoid speaking to strangers; emphasise that they shouldn't accept gifts from anyone online that they don't know.

## BULLYING AND ABUSE

While some in-game chat can turn toxic because of how a match plays out, others turn that way because of people who engage in trolling – in essence, behaving in an offensive and abusive way simply to cause pain or get a rise out of whoever they're talking to. These 'trolls' often lean on racial slurs, anti-LGBT sentiment and other hateful rhetoric; they normally feel most confident preying on younger, more impressionable gamers.

## POTENTIAL FOR PRIVATE CHAT

If a player would like a re-match with a stranger after meeting them in the game, they can send a friend request, or use the party chat together in the future. For the most part, this is harmless – but it might lead to messages being exchanged in private. This could then escalate to the sharing of private information, and potentially attempts to manipulate or scam younger players.

## COMPETITIVE ATMOSPHERE

Certain games are very competitive, and players can sometimes get upset if they feel a teammate is underperforming, an opponent won unfairly, or they're just a bad loser. This can lead to unpleasant messages that stray away from playful 'trash talk' and wander into the territory of bullying. Some players have been known to get incredibly abusive in situations like this, and the impact of this on a young gamer's emotional wellbeing could be severe.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### LOCK-DOWN IN-GAME CHAT

In-game chat can often be disabled in the game's settings. This allows children to play without risk of contact from strangers – but it will need to be done in each individual game. Text chat appears in the corner of the screen in many titles, so it's normally easy to take a quick glance and see what's being said. With voice chat, explain to children what behaviour is inappropriate, so they can spot the dangers themselves.

### REPORT POTENTIAL OFFENDERS

Most games offer a robust means of reporting other players, so you can flag an account as potentially harmful. This normally leads to the account not being matched with yours in the future and, if that person's conduct breaks any of the game's rules, they may be banned from playing entirely. This is done within the game itself, so each title has a slightly different process, but these tend to be designed for simplicity.

### CONSIDER OTHER CHAT OPTIONS

If a child wants to play with people they know, consider using party chat or a third-party service like Discord. This allows everyone involved to chat on a private server and even enjoy each other's company while playing different games. It's also far more secure, as anyone looking to join will need to request and be granted access – normally by whoever is hosting the chat.

### COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Make sure children understand the differences between being competitive and being abusive. Talk about what constitutes unusual or inappropriate behaviour from strangers online. Be clear that if anything ever concerns or worries them, they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible. Empower children to identify the risks of in-game chat for themselves and reassure them they won't get in trouble for seeking help if anything goes wrong.

## Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is the Editor in Chief of GCRecon and has been working in the games media industry for five years. He's also a parent and therefore understands the importance of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his work has been published at sites including IGN, TechRadar, and plenty more.



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