

# PARENTS: WHAT YOU WISH YOU KNEW

A Parent's Guide to Video Games,  
Parental Controls, and Online Safety



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# Table of Contents

Letter from the CEO	3
The Dangerous World of Online Gaming	4
How Real Are the Risks?	6
What You Can Do	7
ESRB Ratings	8
7 Tips to Give Your Gamer	9
7 Tips for You	9
Parental Controls and Resources	10
Resources and Links for Parents	10
Top Trending Games of 2020	11
Glossary of Gaming Terms and Slang	12

Legacy Health Endowment is a nonprofit healthcare grantmaking foundation that works solely within Merced and Stanislaus Counties in the California Central Valley. LHE is not a hospital or healthcare services provider.

## LETTER FROM THE CEO



Dear Parent,

**Like many activities in which children and teens engage,** gaming poses potential dangers. We have created **What You Wish You Knew: A Parent's Guide to Video Games, Parental Controls, and Online Safety** to help parents and guardians better understand these dangers. Advanced game consoles coupled with high-speed internet allow your children to play games online with people all over the world. Many games feature social and interactive elements such as chat or online competitions; others can be expanded or altered by downloading player-created content on the Internet. In addition, gaming can often affect young people's mental health, lowering self-esteem and self-efficacy, and increasing anxiety, aggression, and even clinical symptoms of depression and anxiety disorders.

**While video games feature built-in,** adjustable safety and privacy settings, there is always the risk of bullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and online predators. By educating, monitoring, and limiting video game use, your child's mental, physical, and emotional health can be supported and maintained. Video games can be a great source of entertainment and learning for the whole family, but it's important for parents to fully appreciate what the experience of playing games today encompasses.

**As a parent myself,** helping others protect their kids from potential threats to their health, safety, and well-being is a particularly meaningful part of my work. It's up to us to be informed about what and how our children play and to make appropriate choices on their behalf. Fortunately, there are many tools and resources we can use to better understand the games we bring home, as well as to help ensure that the gameplay experience our children are enjoying is a safe and secure one. **The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB®)** rating system is one such tool, providing helpful guidance about the content and age-appropriateness of computer and video games. Parental controls are available on all new video game platforms, letting us exercise even greater control over the games our children play. And when it comes to games played over an Internet connection, knowing the tools at our disposal can be crucial to ensuring our kids are safeguarded from inappropriate content and encounters with other players they would be better off avoiding.

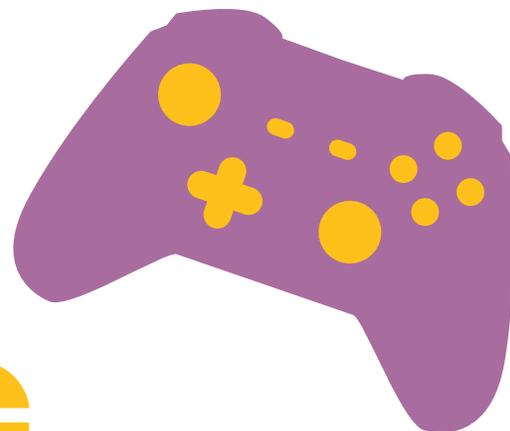
**If you have any questions** or comments about safe, positive, age-appropriate gaming, please email me at [jeffrey@legacyhealthendowment.org](mailto:jeffrey@legacyhealthendowment.org)

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jm', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jeffrey Lewis  
President and CEO  
Legacy Health Endowment  
[jeffrey@legacyhealthendowment.org](mailto:jeffrey@legacyhealthendowment.org)

# THE DANGEROUS WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING



Once considered an exclusively adult pastime, online gaming is now a mainstream hobby among younger generations. There are new and advanced gaming systems such as the **Xbox** and **PlayStation**, as well as new hand-held gaming systems like the **Nintendo Switch** and even cell phones. Online gaming can be an enjoyable experience, but young gamers should use caution since online gaming presents many of the same dangers associated with Internet use.



## POTENTIAL DANGERS

### ONLINE PREDATORS:

To play online with other gamers, your child must set up an online account. Players are not required to reveal their ages or real names to other gamers. While this may aid in protecting your child's identity, it may also protect child predators who search the Internet for underage gamers by posing as a teen or child. Most online games allow real-time conversation via microphone headsets during online play. Predators can use this communication to arrange in-person meetings with your child, who may not know that the "other kid" they've been playing with is really an adult.

Your child's personal information is only as personal as your child chooses it to be. A stranger may try to earn your child's trust and coax him or her into divulging dangerous information, such as the location of your home and whether you, the parent or guardian, are in the house. Predators may use tactics to gain your child's trust such as giving pointers on how to win a game or even offering them gifts.



## MORE POTENTIAL DANGERS OF ONLINE GAMING

### SCAMS:

Your child may purchase “virtual” goods, such as in-game upgrades or game add-ons that enhance their gaming experience. Parents have the option of connecting their bank accounts or credit card accounts directly to their child’s online gaming account to pay for these goods. However, scam artists may pose as software suppliers in order to get your account number, so beware of downloading from less-than-reputable sites. Always do a quick online search to verify the quality of a website or service.

### ADULT GAME MATERIAL:

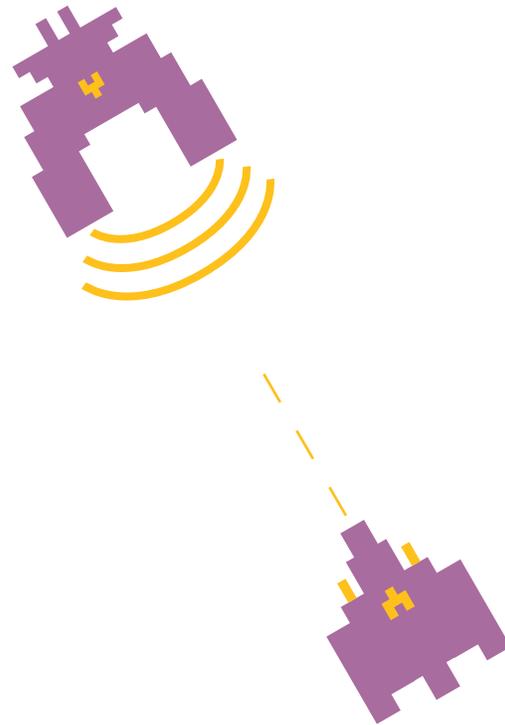
Video games have a rating system for a reason. Many adult-themed games feature images of drugs and prostitution, and contain adult language and images that may be unfit for children. Many games also feature graphic displays of blood, gore, and violence that rival movies in terms of realism.

### MENTAL HEALTH:

Games with violent, sexualized, or highly realistic content (including augmented reality and virtual reality games) can also have an emotional impact on children, especially the younger kids. It’s a controversial area with conflicting research but some studies have linked violent video games to aggression in young people.

### PORNOGRAPHY:

A gaming console system is basically a computer system without a keyboard and mouse. Most contain a hard drive capable of storing data, just like a computer. Your child is able to download inappropriate photos and footage if they are in the correct format. “Xvid” is one video format required by both the Xbox and PlayStation consoles to play videos, and hundreds of pornographic sites offer videos in this format. Predators also have the ability to send inappropriate content to your child.



### CYBERBULLIES:

Computer gaming can be an intense hobby, and passions run high when the virtual action is underway. Cyberbullying is a serious and growing problem, and it can be just as real and as hurtful as traditional bullying. Be mindful of the warning signs that your child is the target of cyberbullying, and be sure your child knows and uses proper “netiquette” when playing games online. Cyberbullies may harass fellow gamers with name-calling and “trash talk” that can at times be racist, homophobic, or just inappropriate. Typically, the vulgar language comes from adult gamers who may not realize they are playing with a juvenile. These profanities can leave your child with mental injuries and broken self-esteem, as well as premature exposure to adult topics and conversation. This doesn’t mean you have to force your child to stop gaming completely, but rather be aware of the types of video games they are playing and the ESRB rating.



# HOW REAL ARE THE RISKS?

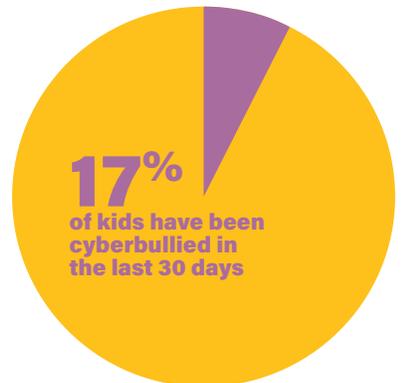
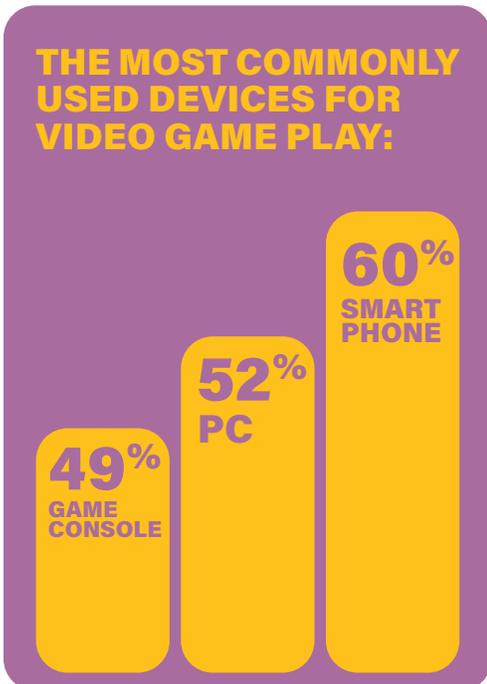
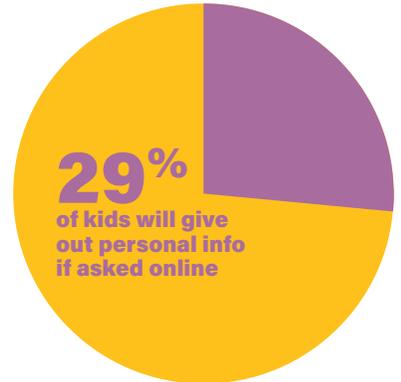
**8.5%** of American youth gamers (ages 8-18) are clinically addicted to playing video games



THE FBI ESTIMATES THAT THERE ARE **BETWEEN 500,000 TO 750,000 SEXUAL PREDATORS** ACTIVE ON THE INTERNET ANY GIVEN DAY

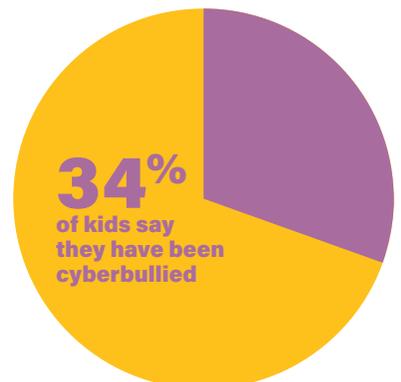
**ONE IN FIVE KIDS HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY SOLICITED ONLINE**

- 13% of kids online are victims of sexual advances
- 75% of youth who were approached online did not tell their parents
- Warning signs of interaction with a predator: secrecy, sadness, withdrawal, distraction, and abrupt mood swings



**PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS OF ADDICTION TO VIDEO GAMES:**

- ANXIETY
- FEELINGS OF EMPTINESS
- DEPRESSION
- MOOD SWINGS
- FEAR
- IRRITABILITY



## SOURCES:

<https://www.theesa.com/esa-research/2019-essential-facts-about-the-computer-and-video-game-industry/>  
<https://www.vpnmentor.com/blog/the-ultimate-parent-guide-for-child-internet/>  
<https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/internet-safety-kids>  
[https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter\\_article/violent-video-games-and-young-people](https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/violent-video-games-and-young-people)  
<https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/news-blogs/expert-advice-on-gaming-addiction-in-young-people-and-children/>  
<https://www.commonssensemedia.org/>



# WHAT YOU CAN DO:



## EDUCATE

Explain to your child the possibility of their online buddies being somebody other than who they say they are. Many predators pose as youths and they can use devices to make their voices sound younger. Frequently remind your child to never share personal information, even with friends.

## BE CAUTIOUS

Never connect your child's online gaming account to a bank account or credit card account. Most reputable game-hosting communities allow parents to purchase for their child a set number of "game credits" with which the child may purchase add-ons and additional game content.

## BE AWARE

Ask your child to give you a tour of their online gaming, and see for yourself if you are happy with the online company with which he or she associates. You can also closely monitor video footage stored on the game system and search for questionable content.

## BE INVOLVED

Keep your game console or PC in a common area of the home so you can keep an eye and ear on the action. Ask what they are doing and with whom they are playing online.

## LOOK OUT FOR MODS

Some games offer players the ability to modify their content, sometimes in ways that are not consistent with the ESRB rating. These changes can be made by using a special cheat device or a free downloadable program called a "mod" that any other player can download for free.

## DON'T DISCLOSE

Make sure that your children know not to divulge personal or financially sensitive information about themselves or other family members when completing profiles, purchasing items, or interacting with others online.

## SET LIMITS

Set and discuss limits on what your children can do on the Internet. Establish rules with which you are comfortable.

## STAY INFORMED

Educate yourself and your children about the virtual world they're exploring, be it in a video game or on a social networking website. Use resources like the ones noted in this guide to learn more about how you can help keep your family safe.



# ESRB RATINGS

The **Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)** ratings provide information about what's in a game or app, so parents and consumers can make informed choices about which ones are right for their families.

**Ratings have three parts:** Rating Categories, Content Descriptors, and Interactive Elements. ESRB ratings make it easy for parents to be informed about the video games their kids play, but there's more parents can do to stay involved and up to date. Learn how to set parental controls, start a conversation using the [ESRB discussion guide](#), download the ESRB mobile app, and more.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

Titles rated **EC** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.



## EVERYONE

Titles rated **E** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



## EVERYONE 10+

Titles rated **E10+** have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and/or minimal suggestive themes.



## TEEN

Titles rated **T** have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.



## MATURE

Titles rated **M** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, and/or strong language.



## ADULTS ONLY

Titles rated **AO** have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity. Microsoft does not support AO titles on Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE or as part of the Games for Windows branded program.



## RATING PENDING

Titles listed as **RP** have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.





# 7 TIPS TO GIVE YOUR GAMER:



- 1.** Be aware of voice-masking features. While masking can be a safety feature, predators can use it to pretend to be someone they are not.
- 2.** Beware of strangers. We advise that gamers, under 15 years old, play only with people they've met in person and that are parent-approved.
- 3.** Use a screen name (gamertag), not their real name.
- 4.** Never give out personal information to anyone online.
- 5.** Kick (ignore/block) out any players that make them feel uncomfortable.
- 6.** Report cyberbullying, abusive, or inappropriate behavior to you.
- 7.** Remember that games and other technology are a privilege, not a right.



# 7 STRATEGIES FOR YOU:



- 1.** Review games, apps, and their ratings before you download or buy to make sure they are age-appropriate. The Internet is a parent's best friend for getting up-to-date information on safety, tools, and gaming features.
- 2.** Play the game alongside your child to learn about it. Kids love to teach parents and will enjoy the interaction.
- 3.** Have regular conversations with your child about the games they are playing, their gaming experiences (both good and bad), who they are talking to, and how they can stay safe.
- 4.** Set and save parental controls provided by the game or gaming app.
- 5.** You also will need to set the parental controls on the gaming platform: Xbox, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation, Windows 10, or iOS.
- 6.** Your child could be gaming on multiple devices (consoles, phones, tablets), so set parental controls on each device.
- 7.** Keep your parent password private. Believe it or not, some parents ask their kids to set up parental controls.



# PARENTAL CONTROLS AND RESOURCES

## BASIC GUIDELINES FOR SETTING PARENTAL CONTROL TOOLS:

- Gaming can be addictive, so set boundaries for when and how long your child can play.
- Determine if your child is mature enough for voice chat. If not, turn it off. Be aware your child may hear profanity or other unwanted language.
- Consider setting controls to require your parent PIN on purchases. You can also use your PIN to restrict access to games, including free games in the online store.
- Limit the players with whom your child can play to parent approved players, i.e., kids you and your child know.
- Consider limiting access to web browsing, which gives your child unrestricted Internet access.
- Consider disabling the webcam while gaming and use an avatar instead, especially for gamers under the age of 14.
- Consider disabling voice-masking technology.
- Be aware that there are numerous blogs, YouTube videos, etc. that show kids how to disable parental controls.
- Keep up with new gaming functions introduced by the game that could put your child at risk. For instance, a new feature was added to Fortnite Battle Royale allowing users to connect with strangers through both text and voice chat. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) reported that one in four users age 11 to 18 had been contacted on Fortnite by someone they did not know. Visit the websites of gaming developers like Microsoft and Epic and sign up to receive updates on changes to gaming functions.
- Keep all software current to protect against viruses and spyware.



# RESOURCES AND LINKS FOR PARENTS

### ESRB

<https://www.esrb.org/tools-for-parents/>

### Commonsense Media

<https://www.common sense media.org/parents-ultimate-guides>

### PlayStation

[https://support.playstation.com/s/article/PlayStation-Safety-for-Parents?language=en\\_US](https://support.playstation.com/s/article/PlayStation-Safety-for-Parents?language=en_US)

### Xbox

<https://www.xbox.com/en-US/community/for-everyone/responsible-gaming>

### Nintendo Switch

<https://www.nintendo.com/switch/parental-controls/>

### Windows/PC 10 & 11

<https://news.microsoft.com/en-in/features/windows-10-parental-controls-feature/>

### Twitch

<https://www.common sense media.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-twitch>

### YouTube

<https://support.google.com/youtubekids/answer/6172308?hl=en>



# A LIMITED LIST OF TOP TRENDING GAMES OF 2020



**CALL OF DUTY:  
BLACK OPS 4**



**MINECRAFT**



**SUPER SMASH BROS.™  
ULTIMATE**



**CALL OF DUTY:  
MODERN WARFARE**



**ROCKET LEAGUE®**



**TOM CLANCY'S  
RAINBOW SIX® SIEGE**



**FORTNITE**



**RED DEAD REDEMPTION II**



**GRAND THEFT AUTO V**



**SPIDER MAN**



( A-G )

# GLOSSARY

To communicate with your child about safe gaming, you have to speak the same language. This glossary will help you understand any verbal or text conversations your child may be having with other gamers.

## **1337**

Elite or leet.

## **143**

I love you.

## **1174**

Nude club or meet in person.

## **ADN**

Any day now.

## **ADR**

Address.

## **AFK**

Away from Keyboard. This means you are not playing for some time.

## **AIMBOT**

Type of hack in which you automatically aim at opponents, usually their heads. It should not be confused with aim-assist on consoles.

## **AIM-ASSIST**

In first-person shooter games, the system helps players shoot moving targets when using a controller on PC.

## **ASL**

Age/sex/location.

## **BOTS**

In games such as Counter-Strike, you have an option to play against computer-controlled opponents, often referred to as bots.

## **CAMPER**

A person who hides in a corner to get easy kills by surprising others. It involves no tactics and is frowned upon in fast-paced games like Overwatch.

## **CD9 - CODE 9**

Parents are around.

## **EASTER EGGS**

This term is used to describe some elements of a game (or a movie) that are not vital yet hold a special value. For example, you'll often see "A113" in Pixar movies. A113 is the name of the classroom where most Pixar employees studied.

## **FARMING**

The act of collecting supplies needed in the game.

## **FPS**

Frames per second is the number of times a computer updates the on-screen image. A game that runs at low FPS gives a bad experience.

## **FWB**

Friends with benefits.

## **GHOSTING**

The act of spectating another player to learn their tricks to beat them.

## **GRINDING**

Grinding is the term used to define the repetitive actions performed in a game to earn a reward. Take the example of a highly expensive car in Gran Turismo. You need to play the same races over and over again to accumulate the money needed to buy that car.



( G-W )

# GLOSSARY

## **GNOC**

Get naked on camera.

## **HACKER**

A person who uses an exploit or a modified version of the game to gain an unfair advantage over others.

## **KPC**

Keeping parents clueless.

## **MIRL**

Let's meet in real life.

## **MOS**

Mom over shoulder.

## **NERF**

When the game developer thinks a particular item/character in the game is too good from a balancing perspective, they reduce its efficiency. This is termed as nerfing.

## **NOOB**

Slang for newbie and used to describe a person who is new to the game or who doesn't know how to play.

## **NO SCOPE**

In games, sniper rifles are made such that you need to use their in-built optics to shoot properly. If you kill someone without looking through the scope, it is termed as no scoping.

## **P911**

Parent alert.

## **PAW**

Parents are watching.

## **PAL**

Parents are listening.

## **PING**

While playing an online game, your computer exchanges information with the server to which you are connected. The time it takes for the cycle of sending and receiving data is called ping. It is measured in milliseconds. A high ping could lead to problems like rubberbanding.

## **PIR**

Parent in room.

## **POS**

Parent over shoulder or piece of sh\*\*.

## **RAGE QUIT**

When a player is not able to perform well and ends up quitting the game in anger.

## **REZ**

Short for resurrection. The term is used frequently in PUBG while reviving a fallen teammate; you are "Rezzing" them.

## **RUBBERBANDING**

In multiplayer games, when your character or vehicle is continuously springing here and there due to lag.

## **TROLLS**

A person whose main motive is to act in a way that offends other players.

## **WYRN**

What's your real name?