

A photograph showing a man with a beard and a young child sitting on a sofa in a bright, modern living room. Both are holding video game controllers and looking towards the right with expressions of enjoyment and focus. The man is wearing a red hoodie, and the child is wearing a grey t-shirt. The background features large windows, indoor plants, and a contemporary interior design.

A parent and carer's guide to the benefits and risks of online gaming

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Online games range from simple, colourful beginner games for younger children, to complex, multi-player action video games for older age groups. Online gaming can offer children and young people an entertaining and fun environment, but there are potential risks. Parents and carers need to help children and young people minimise these risks and stay safe when they game online.

According to the recent [Media Use and Attitudes report from Ofcom](#), the frequency of use of gaming among 3- to 15-year-olds has not changed between 2016 and 2017. What has changed is how they choose to game. Instead of using games consoles, children and young people are now increasingly likely to use smartphones and tablets to game online.

This guide explains:

What the benefits are of online gaming?

Games can be a great way to develop particular abilities. For example, they may improve problem-solving skills, sharpen visual processing, increase processing speed and the ability to multi-task, or enhance memory power. Online gaming also provides a moment of diversion and play, whether the game is educational or not. Children and young people who play multi-player



games may also improve their social skills as they create and live in an online world.

What risks are involved?

The [NSPCC](#) provides advice on the risks children and young people may encounter when playing online games, such as:

- violent or dangerous content
- playing games with people they do not know, which may place them at risk of grooming or inappropriate contact
- making them vulnerable to grooming or inappropriate contact
- playing with abusive players who destroy their creations, use offensive language or bully them in other ways
- being unable to self-regulate and set time limits on game play, leading to excessive use
- playing games excessively which may cause health problems such as back and neck pain, blurred vision, headaches and near-sightedness.

Helping children and young people stay safe

You can take steps to ensure your children enjoy the benefits of gameplay, while minimising the risks. Here are some tips on how to support your children when online gaming:

- check the game content by reading reviews
- play the game with your child (or children) to understand the content
- know how to block and report abusive or anti-social behaviour
- help them to understand why they can't trust everyone they meet online and that they shouldn't arrange to meet in person anyone they have met online unless they have spoken to you
- activate any available safety settings
- help your child choose games appropriate to their age
- talk with your children about the games they play
- watch how your children interact when gaming and intervene if necessary
- [guide your children to set their own limits and ensure balanced game time.](#)



How to choose age-appropriate games

You should verify the age rating and content of each game. The app store where you purchase the game or download for free will have ratings, but it's important to check with other reliable sources such as:

- [PEGI](#): European game rating with clear, age-related labelling
- [Common Sense Media](#): provides reviews on games by parents and carers, children and young people
- [International Age Rating Coalition](#): global rating system that reflects cultural differences among nations and religions
- [Entertainment Software Rating Board](#): this North American rating system is helpful since many apps and games come from North America.

For further information on gaming and safe use, you can take a look at the guide on an [introduction to online gaming](#).

You can also consult the [Gaming and Screen Time resource](#) on the [Online Safety Zone](#). This explains more about gaming and includes tips on how to talk with your child to help them play in a safe and positive way.

