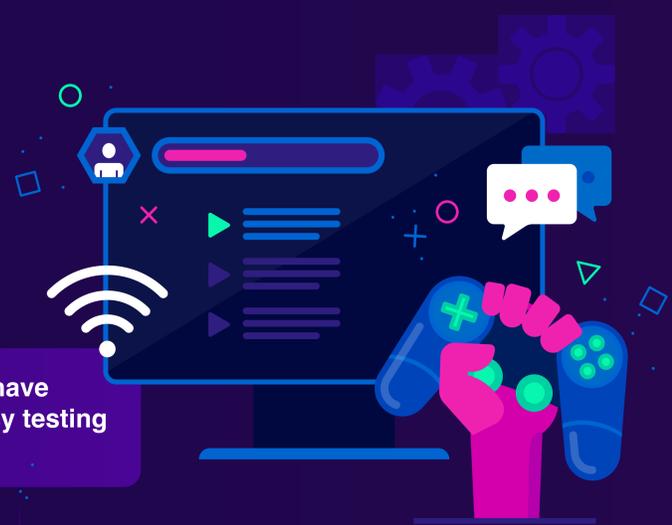# 5 Ways to Keep Children Safe Whilst Gaming

Gaming continues to be one of many children's - and parents! - favourite pastimes. However, many parents have concerns over how to keep their child safe while gaming. Here at Ineqe Safeguarding Group, we've been busy testing consoles and games to identify areas of risk to promote a safer gaming experience for children.

Video games are fun and remain popular among **young and old** users alike.

Research by Ofcom showed that approximately **62% of adults in the UK** were reported to have played videos games in 2020, propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and the stay-at-home restrictions.

With all this fun, it's important to remember that playing video games comes with **risks.**

Our online safety experts have compiled the following top tips to promote a safer gaming experience for children.

Some have **in-game purchasing** while others contain **age-inappropriate** content. These risks can significantly increase when a child is playing and interacting **with other gamers online**.

1 Choose the right child-friendly game

Choosing the right game for the child in your care can be difficult. Some parents and carers feel pressured to buy a game which might not be age-appropriate.

12 To help you make the choice, we have explored the PEGI age rating system and highlight the designated ratings of the most popular games around.

You can use the **PEGI** *(Pan European Game Information)* labels found on **all major games** to help inform your decision. PEGI is the video game content classification system used for evaluating games based on their themes. It is broken down into the following levels:

3	Suitable for all ages.
7	Includes content with scenes and sounds which might frighten younger children.
12	Slightly graphic violence which is non-realistic/fantasy.
16	Violence included which is similar to real life, bad language, and the use of drugs tobacco, and alcohol.
18	Includes motiveless and gross violence, the glamourisation of drugs, and explicit sexual activity.

The PEGI rating system also includes content descriptors which are symbols that quickly tell you the themes included in a game. Categories include:

VIOLENCE   BAD LANGUAGE   FEAR   GAMBLING   SEX   DRUGS   DISCRIMINATION   IN-GAME PURCHASES

For help with teaching children about PEGI ratings, use our free lesson plan on oursaferschools.co.uk.

PEGI Ratings for some of the most Popular Games around:

- Minecraft – **PEGI 7**
- Among Us – **PEGI 7**
- FIFA 22 – **PEGI 3**
- Call of Duty Black Ops: Vanguard – **PEGI 18**
- Spiderman; Miles Morales – **PEGI 12**
- Fortnite: Battle Royale – **PEGI 12**
- Mario Kart Live: Home Circuit – **PEGI 3**
- Call of Duty: Warzone – **PEGI 18**
- Minecraft – **PEGI 7**

Always remember, PEGI ratings focus on in-game content and not communication between players in online games. Children and young people in your care may be exposed to offensive or inappropriate language from other players via their headset and live chat functions in many games.

Using PEGI ratings and online safety advice can help promote safer gaming for children and young people in your care.

2 Begin the conversation about gaming safety settings and in-game purchases

Whether the children and young people in your care are new to gaming or are experienced gamers, **it's important to have conversations regarding the risks and benefits of gaming.**

This is also the perfect time to talk to them about safety and privacy settings.

You might be met with **opposition** but talking about why privacy and safety settings are important can help keep the gamers in your care onside. You might want to talk about what might happen if these aren't enabled.

Feel free to use the top tips in this article to help **guide your conversations.**

The gaming world and its risks evolve all the time, and naturally so will your conversations about keeping safe while gaming.

It's important not to feel like this is a thankless task or pointless conversation when explaining the importance of safety and privacy while gaming. Enabling these settings is something you and the gamer in your care can do together.

Explaining why safety and privacy are important will help support a child or young person's understanding and respect for these decisions.

It can help to focus on how restrictions on games will change as they grow older. This will give you a perfect opportunity to encourage the gamers in your care to continue talking to you about safety and privacy online.

Check out our Console guides on **ineqe.com**

Loot Boxes have been compared to gambling. This is because gamers pay for items with real-life currency and in-game currency without a full understanding of the risk and reward of these purchases.

Games now provide warnings on their labels if they include in-Game purchases.

Games that have in-game purchases include:

- Fortnite
- Grand Theft Auto 5 (GTA5)
- Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales
- Call of Duty Black Ops: Cold War
- Call of Duty: Warzone
- FIFA 21
- Roblox
- Among Us

Remember, if a child or young person in your care wants to play online, they may have to pay for a subscription service if they are using a PlayStation, Nintendo or Xbox console.

3 Usernames: Keep it random to keep kids safe online

When using consoles and games, users are required to create a username, which is sometimes called a 'Gamer Handle'.

This is the name you are identified by on your online gaming accounts *(PlayStation Network or Xbox Live)*. Whether they're playing Fortnite Chapter 3 or Call of Duty: Vanguard this Christmas, children and young people in your care will need a username.

Xbox and PlayStation assign random usernames and we advise that you keep them.

When the children in your care use a random username, they are less likely to be identifiable online.

If the gamer(s) in your care wants to personalise their username, make sure they avoid using any personal information, such as first or second names, football teams, or school names.

4 Know when to take a break from gaming

Many of the top games this Christmas such as Fortnite are created to engage their players. One of our online safety experts refers to this as *the Pringle Effect – i.e once you pop you just can't stop.*

Many of the most popular games are designed to form strong gaming habits. Game designers use persuasive design tools that work to encourage gaming sessions that can last hours on end.

Encourage the gamers in your care to take a break or use our resources to set a time limit on gameplay.

5 Make sure the child in your care knows where to go for help with gaming

Gaming is **fun** and can have real benefits for children and young people. But it's not without risks, as highlighted above.

Gamers may interact with strangers via online games, where they might be exposed to age-inappropriate content, or experience bullying and harassment.

Make sure the gamer(s) in your care knows where to go for help if they need it.

This can be you or any other trusted adult. It's important that they have someone to talk to if they have any interaction which makes them feel uncomfortable while playing games.

To help the children and young people in your care have a safe and fun gaming experience, visit **Ineqe.com to find more resources and useful information.** By doing this together, you can be part of their gaming journey, positioning yourself as someone who they can go to for help.

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