Educate Yourself and Kids About the Risks

Video games span a variety of genres featuring rhythm, puzzles, strategy, sports, first-person shooters, and role-playing. Kids can play on consoles (Xbox 360® or Wii), computers, mobile phones, portable gaming devices (Nintendo DS), and social networks (Facebook).

Kids play alone, with others in the room, or online. They play against the game itself or another person, with a team of several players, or in games which may have hundreds of thousands playing at any one time.

And while games can be great fun, there are risks:

> **Kids may download the bad with the good.**
When kids download games from less-than-reputable sites or through links in email, instant, or text messages, they may also be getting offensive content, spam, or malicious software. Some "free" games may require an extensive profile, and then illegally rent or sell the child's data.

> **Kids may bump into bullies.** Some gamers play simply to harass and taunt other players using bad language, cheating, or attacking them inappropriately.

> **Bad people may befriend kids.** Some adults may try to earn the trust of gamers by pretending to be kids, sharing tips on how to win, or giving gifts like points. They may be trying to run a scam or angling for a phone call or an in-person meeting.

What to Do If There Are Problems

Teach kids to trust their instincts

Encourage kids to tell you if anything unsettling occurs—not to keep it secret or pretend it's okay. Make clear that you will not punish them or take away game privileges for telling you.

Teach kids how to respond to objectionable behavior

> If kids play with someone who is hostile, pressures them for personal information, or sends disturbing materials, they should ignore them, ask them to stop, or block them.

> Report improper behavior and content to the game service—for example, on Xbox 360 they can use the **File a Complaint** option.

> In the U.S., report content that exploits minors to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at **(800) 843-5678**.

Immediately report any serious threat

If the child is in immediate danger or someone threatens, harasses, or tries to lure kids into meeting in person, call the local police.

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> *Smarter Online = Safer Online*

Play It Safe When Gaming Online

> Explore online games together
> Teach kids rules for safer gaming
> Get help from technology
> What to do if there are problems

Practical Advice for Safer Gaming

As you follow the advice below, don't forget to play with kids or sit with them while they play–you'll have fun and learn about their gaming, too!

Explore online games together

Check the ratings of the games kids want to play

In the U.S. and Canada, most games sold at retail stores are described and rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). Use these ratings as you discuss the most appropriate games with each child or teen.

Stick to well-known games or those from reputable sites

If you use well-known sites like MSN® Games, Xbox LIVE®, or Yahoo! Games, you reduce the risk of downloading viruses or being scammed by the gaming site.

Review the game's terms of play

> Find out how the game service monitors players and responds to abuse. Xbox LIVE, for example, helps players protect their identities and report objectionable content and behavior.

> Read the site's privacy policy to learn how it will use and protect kids' information. No privacy policy? Play elsewhere.

Agree on rules of play

Work together to create family guidelines that fit each kid's age and maturity level. For ideas, see Microsoft's sample agreement, the **PACT**, at **xbox.com/live/family**.

> Should kids play only against the game? Only with friends? Are they ready to play with just anyone?

> How many hours a day or week should kids play?

> Is your child or teen ready to use text, voice, or webcam chat features? If so, with whom?

> Should your child be allowed to use real money to purchase items in a game?

Teach kids rules for safer gaming

Keep personal information a secret

Advise kids NEVER to share with other players personal information of themselves or family–their real name, email or home address, age, gender, pictures, and the like.

Protect game accounts with strong passwords

> Strong passwords are at least eight characters (longer is better) and include a mix of letters, numbers, and symbols. Learn how to create them at **microsoft.com/protect/fraud/passwords/create.aspx**.

> Cheaters and hackers most often gain access because they were given a password, so teach kids never to share passwords with anyone (except parents).

Make up a safe gamer name

Help children choose screen names and gamer tags (such as Kinect ID) that do not reveal anything personal, are not suggestive, and don't make kids easy to locate.

Play fair

> Treat fellow gamers the way they themselves would like to be treated.

> Don't use unlicensed copies of games; pirated games are illegal and more likely to contain malware.

Never meet an online "friend" in person without safeguards in place

Younger children should play only with family or friends you already know. Teens need to work with parents to create a safe plan for meeting someone, like bringing along a trusted adult and meeting in a public place, like a coffee shop or library.

Get help from technology

Defend your computer against Internet threats

Install antivirus and antispyware software. Never turn off your firewall. Keep all software (including your web browser) current with automatic updating. Microsoft can help you do this: **microsoft.com/security/pypc.aspx**.

Use family safety settings to help protect kids

These tools enable you to specify the games your child can play (by rating), monitor who children talk to and how, set time limits for play, and control what they see and share. For example, compare those Microsoft offers at **microsoft.com/protect/tools/childsafety/compare.aspx**.

Learn how to enable these controls on your kids' devices. Explain to kids what each setting does and how it helps protect—not spy on—them.

More helpful information

Help kids avoid online gambling. Have open conversations about the potential for gambling addiction (it's highest for youth) and the costs, financial and otherwise. While most video games are legal for minors, gambling is not.

Get in the game. Find out about the latest family safety tools and get expert tips and advice for safer gaming at **GetGameSmart.com**.

Game ratings. For information about game ratings in the U.S. and Canada, visit **esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp**.