

A Parent's Guide to Minecraft



Minecraft has been around for more than a decade, and it's still a huge hit with kids everywhere. But that doesn't make it any less mysterious for grown-ups who haven't played much themselves.

Why are kids so enthralled? And what do parents need to understand about the game? Read on.

What exactly do you do in the game?



Minecraft is mainly about building cool stuff. Wielding virtual chunks of wood, stone, and other materials, you scamper around a blocky virtual landscape and piece together whatever you can imagine—castles, amusement parks, underground hideouts, spaceships, you name it.

Players can also craft items for their cute in-game avatars—anything from simple shovels to suits of armor made of diamonds.

Is there a social aspect?

Over the years, *Minecraft* has evolved from a mostly solitary experience to a more social one. Players can team up online to construct sprawling cities, engage in *Hunger Games*–style battles, or just hang out and build together in a shared virtual space.

Got it. How do you play?

That depends on the mode!

Survival mode plops you into a randomly generated wilderness where your goal is to explore, gather resources, and stay alive. Harvest raw materials—chopping down trees, mining rocks, and so on—build shelters, and craft weapons to fend off computer-controlled critters, such as *Minecraft*'s iconic Creepers.



Two of *Minecraft*'s trademarks: vast structures and limitless possibilities.

In the free-form Creative mode, there's no need to worry about mining for stone or fighting spiders. Players have infinite resources to build whatever they want and can team up with others to bring huge structures to life. You can even defy gravity and fly around at will!

There are also privately run *Minecraft* servers—elaborate online worlds capable of hosting thousands of people at a time. Many of these are home to robust communities and action-packed mini-games, like defending a castle against a dragon attack or battling other players on a set of islands floating in the sky.



Is any of this violent?

Though players can fight monsters—and one another—with swords, bows, and other simple weapons, combat is cartoonish and bloodless. When players die, they often simply respawn at the spot where they entered the game.

Getting killed and losing a sweet stash of hard-won valuables can cause no small amount of anguish, though—especially for younger players. That’s why building secure places to store goodies is a big part of the *Minecraft* experience. However, with our Harborside Students Realm, they keep all of their items to keep everyone happy!

Will my kid be talking to strangers?

By default, players sharing the same *Minecraft* world can send messages using an in-game chat window. People tend to be friendly in the world—particularly on the more popular servers—and a filter blanks out most offensive words.

The chat window has a handy toggle in the upper right corner that will mute all other players with a single tap. Once mute is turned on, it stays on until manually switched off again, even if your child starts a new game.



Players use items stored in their inventory to build, craft, and survive.

How much does it cost to play?

The game cost varies depending on which platform is being used. Here are some current cost that fluctuate from time to time: Mobile versions cost \$6.99. PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and TV versions cost **\$19.99**. The Windows 10 and Nintendo Switch versions are the most expensive, costing \$26.99.

Once purchased, playing *Minecraft* is free. However, dozens of optional add-ons are available for purchase from the in-game store, like sets of “skins” that change a character’s appearance (superheroes and monsters are popular picks) and massive prebuilt worlds with unique structures.

These add-ons are bought using a currency called Minecoins—available as an in-app purchase—which are usually a few dollars apiece.

Though it's free to have up to four people join a game, a monthly subscription allows you to host your own private realm. These persistent worlds are accessible to invited guests even when the host isn't online. In Harborside Students, we have our own private realm for the students to safely enjoy at no cost to you.



Should I play too?

Absolutely! One of the best ways to learn about *Minecraft* is to jump into a game as a family and build something awesome together. Maybe an underwater mansion or mountaintop sheep farm? The sky's the limit.

OK, I'm convinced. How can I connect with my child? 3 Simple steps:

1) Start a conversation!

The first, and easiest, way is to ask your child questions about what they are doing in the game. Gamers love to talk about their experiences. There is just something great about sharing stories. You can use this to your advantage by asking him about his experiences in Minecraft.

Here are some questions to help get the conversation started.

What inspired you to play? As I mentioned earlier, your gamer was probably inspired to start playing Minecraft by a build they saw or heard about. This is a great starting point for the conversation.

Follow-up questions – What about it was inspiring? Where did you hear about it?

What are you building right now? If your gamer is playing Minecraft, they probably have something they are building. It might be recreating the castle from Frozen or designing a huge piece of art. We've even seen students try to build the new church building! Whatever it is, they will probably enjoy talking about it.

Follow-up questions – How far along are you? How long have you been working on it? What has been the hardest part of building it?

What is the coolest thing you have built? They probably have at least one big build they are really proud of. This question will give them a chance to show off and you the chance to praise them.

Follow-up questions – How long did it take you to build? Where did you get the idea? Why are you most proud of it?

What is the coolest thing you have seen? You might start out with, “Hey I saw this amazing recreation of the Starship Enterprise in Minecraft. What do you think about it? What other cool things have you seen?” This will show your gamer that you are paying attention.

Follow-up questions – What is so cool about it? Do you think you could duplicate it? Why/why not?

2) Letting Your Gamer Show Off

The next step after talking with your gamer about Minecraft is letting them show it to you. You can suggest this as you are having the conversation. After they have told you some about what they are building, ask to see it.

Minecraft players love to show off what they built. This is one of the reasons it is so huge. A player creates something amazing then uploads either pictures or a YouTube video of it. This inspires other players to create something of their own. Your gamer will take pride in their creations and be excited to show and explain them to you.

3) Play with them

If you want to really connect with them, then ask if you can play with them. Simply download *Minecraft* to a device other than the one your child is using, then link up through the in-game friends list. (This step requires setting up a free Xbox Live account, as *Minecraft* is owned by Xbox-maker Microsoft.) After that, the two of you can play together in the same world.

Unlike action-heavy games that require sharp reflexes, *Minecraft* can be a slower, gentler experience—one that stimulates imagination and creativity. Once you make your first diamond-encrusted suit of armor, you might become a fan yourself. There is a LOT to learn, and our students are some of the best teachers!



All of our students use our Discord Online Community to talk to each other over voice while playing the game. Even some of our leaders have jumped in to participate. For example, Tom Shill, our incredibly talented blind singer, has joined the realm to help get to know the students more in this time!

Currently, each Monday at 3PM the students gather online to play and hangout in our private Minecraft Realm.

To help your child get connected to our online community go to <https://www.harborsidechurch.org/discord-guide/>

Excited to partner with you,

Stephen Law

Student Pastor

