Tips to stay safe in online games

Guide for neurodivergent teens

Video games give people who are neurodivergent many opportunities to connect and learn. But there are also risks.

In this guide, see how you can spot these risks to protect yourself and enjoy gaming safely online.

Benefits of playing online games

We can practise socialising with others.

Games can help us calm down or feel less stressed.

Some games help us improve our coordination skills.

We can also be creative with some games.

Games can also help us learn new skills.

Spot the risk:
Too much time playing games

Spending time playing video games can be a good thing but too much can be unhealthy. Here are some warning signs to look out for:

You miss out on offline activities, school work or chores because you are playing video games.

You feel tired, angry, anxious or annoyed when playing a video game that usually makes you feel good.

What should you do?

Set a timer when you start playing. When the timer runs out, turn off the game and do another activity you like. Ask a trusted adult for help setting timers.

Take a break and do something different offline like learning a skill, going for a walk or playing a sport.
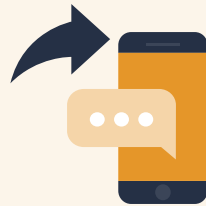
Spot the risk:
Harmful contact from others

**Not all strangers want to harm us, but some do.
So, look out for these warning signs:**

They ask for an item or to trade a rare item for a common one. They ask for passwords or account information because 'that's what friends do'.

They want you to chat out of the game in other apps or in video calls. Or they tell you to keep it secret from other people like your family.

They ask you to share your private information like your real name, your phone number, the school you go to or where you live.

What should you do?

Tell a trusted adult like a teacher, parent, carer, grandparent – any adult who helps you stay safe offline.

Block the stranger so they can't message you anymore.

Report the stranger in the game or on the platform so they can't harm you.

Spot the risk:
Getting scammed

Cyber criminals target people in all types of games and on all types of platforms. Protect yourself by looking out for these warning signs:

Someone you know sends you a strange and unexpected message, asking you to follow a link or send them something.

A user promises a useful cheat code to help you in a game but asks for something in return like an item or for you to follow a link.

You get an in-game message from someone who says they're a moderator and tells you to take action to keep your account.

What should you do?

Never click random links or go to unknown pages. These are called phishing scams which can lead to your account and private information being stolen.

Report scam messages in-game to keep yourself and others safe.

Remember: Moderators will never send an in-game message about your account, login details or personal information.

Spot the risk: Overspending

It is easy to spend money in video games without knowing how much those purchases are. So, look out for these warning signs to help you:

The game or app lets you buy items without needing a parent or carer to check first.

You don't think the game is fun unless you spend money to buy items or expansion packs.

You don't know how much the in-game currency is when compared to real-life currency.

What should you do?

Set up spending limits in-game. You can see if there are these settings in your favourite game with these how-to guides.

You can also remove the payment card or only use gift vouchers to make purchases. A trusted adult can help you make these changes.

Think about if you really enjoy a game if it isn't fun without purchases. You might not actually want to play it.

Ask a trusted adult before you make a purchase so they can help you understand the real price.

Spot the risk:
Seeing something inappropriate

Images or videos that are sexual or violent can cause anxiety and confusion. Here are some warning signs:

The video games that are recommended to you feature violent or sexual thumbnails.
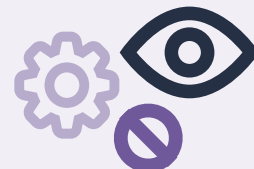
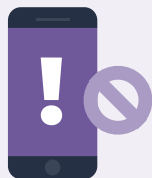Someone sends you a message with an unexpected photo or video.

What should you do?

Be honest about your age when signing up. If you are under-18, many games will automatically hide inappropriate content.

Set up limits in-game. You can hide content that you don't want to see and set age limits for the game suggestions you get.

Don't open messages with unexpected photos or videos. Instead, ask a trusted adult for help.

Talk to a trusted adult about your worries or if you see something you don't want to see. They can help you set up restrictions and report content.

Summary

No matter what you do online, there are actions you can take to keep safe. If something worries or confuses you, you can:

Tell a trusted adult like parent, carer, teacher, grandparent – any adult who helps you offline.
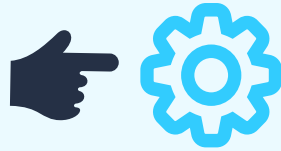
Set privacy and safety controls in games to help limit harm.

To set these up, go to your games settings ⚙

Block and report any users who make you feel uncomfortable or break the game's rules.

More resources

CEOP

If something goes wrong online, report it to CEOP with a trusted adult so they can investigate.

Childline

Talk to a counsellor and other people your age or get support for your worries.

Ditch the Label

Get advice on different issues you might face, and talk with others your age.

Crisis Text Line

Text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK to get support if you feel like you are experiencing something that is overwhelming or scary.

Roblox Safety

If you play Roblox, learn how you can stay safe and use in-game tools.

Safe Communication Guides

Get support with cyberbullying, talking to strangers and more to stay safe online.

internet matters.org

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