



Your child has taken part in a *Be Strong Online* session, helping young people to support each other with some of the challenges they face online. One of the topics we've discussed is digital gaming.

In 2015 Ofcom's report on children's media use found that on average, young people aged 12 to 15 spend more than 12 hours per week gaming. With Minecraft¹ increasingly used in education and Pokémon GO² making near-constant headlines when launched in July 2016, digital gaming is a massive part of many children's lives. So it's normal for parents to worry about things like the amount of time children spend gaming, the possibility of in-game spending, whether their child's favourite games will expose them to inappropriate content or contact with strangers.

Gaming has also been linked with lots of benefits, from better memory³ and problem-solving skills⁴ to improved coordination⁵ and creativity⁶. With your support and guidance, it can be a wonderful hobby for your child. Here are some top tips on helping your child play safely.

 About an hour a day seems like the ideal amount of time to spend gaming, but there's no evidence that anything below three hours is harmful⁷. It's generally best to intervene if your child's gaming interferes with other things, like homework, offline friendships or getting enough sleep.

 When trying to decide if a game is appropriate for your child, the PEGI (Pan European Games Information) rating is a good place to start. Have a look at the descriptors that come with the rating for more detail. If you're

¹ http://www.pcgamer.com/mincraft-recreates-the-great-fire-of-london/?utm_content=buffer255b1&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=buffer-pcgamertw

² <http://parentzone.org.uk/article/pokemon-go-parents-guide>

³ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/media-spotlight/201410/can-action-video-games-boost-short-term-memory>

⁴ <http://education.uconn.edu/2013/05/29/well-designed-video-games-can-enhance-problem-solving-skills-and-make-learning-more-effective/>

⁵ <http://www.techtimes.com/articles/18125/20141019/study-finds-that-video-games-boost-eye-hand-coordination-skills.htm>

⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/8868033/Video-gaming-children-more-creative.html>

⁷ <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2014-08-04-little-video-game-playing-linked-better-adjusted-children>

still not sure, it might be worth reading some reviews or having a go yourself to see what's involved.

-  Lots of games involve opportunities for spending or in-app purchases. It's best to agree a policy with your child – are they allowed to spend any money? Do they need to stay under a set limit? You can also use parental controls to disable or require permission for purchases.
-  Remember to mention gaming when you discuss staying safe online. Talk about things like not downloading suspicious files disguised as cheats, as well as the risks of oversharing and contact with strangers. Lots of games have moderators and tools for blocking/reporting, and it's a good idea for your child to know what they are and how to use them.
-  Make sure your child knows they can talk to you if they're ever worried or upset by anything. If they do come to you with a concern, try to resist banning games completely – this can feel like a punishment and discourage asking for help.

You can get more information on safer gaming here:

parentzone.org.uk/article/gaming-parents-guide

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