The safe use of video games

Consoles, tablets and smartphones offer parental controls so that adults can be in control of what, how and for how long children play games.

There has been a shift from most games being played by one player and on one computer or games console, to games being played online and with other players from multiple devices. Perhaps particularly useful for younger children, you can change the settings on your tablet or smartphone to 'airplane' mode. That way, they can play the game offline without making accidental purchases or connecting with someone they don't know

The following website provides an excellent step-by-step guide for activating parental controls around the home. The website details information on the following broadband systems: BT, Sky, Talktalk and Virgin Media. It also details information for the following devices and online platforms: Apple Iphones, Apple ipads, Android phones, Android tablets, Google, Netflix, YouTube, iTunes, BBC iPlayer and SkyGo. There is detailed information on how to control access with the following mobile networks: EE, Vodaphone, Three, O2, Tesco Mobile, Virgin Mobile and TalkTalk. Finally, the link also provides information and instructions on activating parental controls on PS3, PS4, PSVITA, PlayStation Network, Xbox 360, XboxOne, XboxLive, Wii, WiiU, Nintendo 3DS, Nintendo Network and Miiverse.

https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/interactive-guide/
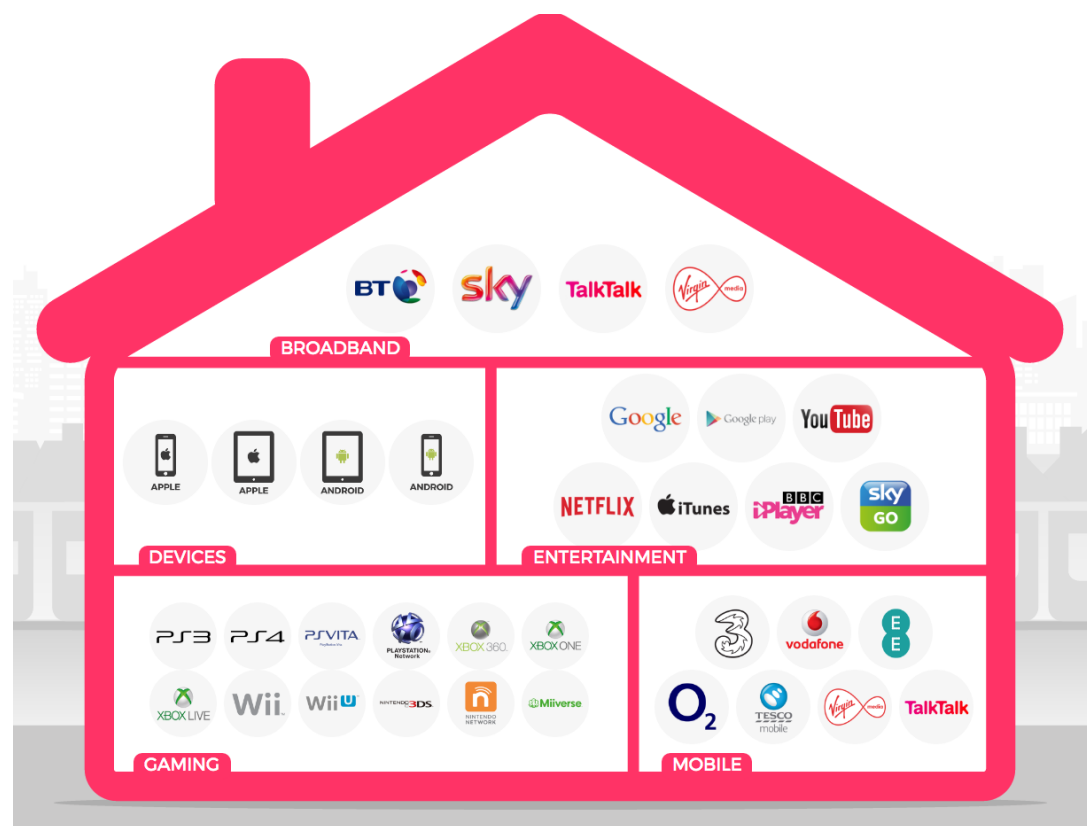


The following website (http://www.askaboutgames.com/) can also provide advice on safe and sensible gaming, parental controls, information on the new Nintendo Switch and information on Kindle Fire for Kids.

Games are played by people of all ages and not just children and are now a mainstream activity similar to music and films. For this reason, every game published in the UK has a PEGI (Pan-European Game Information) age rating clearly displayed on the packaging – to help to ensure that the right games are enjoyed by the right players.

A guide to the PEGI age labels:

**PEGI 3**

The content of games given this rating is considered suitable for all age groups. Some violence in a comical context (typically Bugs Bunny or Tom & Jerry cartoon-like forms of violence) is acceptable. The child should not be able to associate the character on the screen with real life characters, they should be totally fantasy. The game should not contain any sounds or pictures that are likely to scare or frighten young children. No bad language should be heard.

**PEGI 7**

Any game that would normally be rated at 3 but contains some possibly frightening scenes or sounds may be considered suitable in this category.

**PEGI 12**

Videogames that show violence of a slightly more graphic nature towards fantasy character and/or non graphic violence towards human-looking characters or recognisable animals, as well as videogames that show nudity of a slightly more graphic nature would fall in this age category. Any bad language in this category must be mild and fall short of sexual expletives.

**PEGI 16**

This rating is applied once the depiction of violence (or sexual activity) reaches a stage that looks the same as would be expected in real life. More extreme bad language, the concept of the use of tobacco and drugs and the depiction of criminal activities can be content of games that are rated 16.

**PEGI 18**

The adult classification is applied when the level of violence reaches a stage where it becomes a depiction of gross violence and/or includes elements of specific types of violence. Gross violence is the most difficult to define since it can be very subjective in many cases, but in general terms it can be classed as the depictions of violence that would make the viewer feel a sense of revulsion.

There are also descriptors shown on the back of the packaging which indicate the main reasons why a game has received a particular age rating. These include: bad language, gambling, violence and inappropriate scenes.

Tablet and smartphone gaming

Due to the growing popularity of playing games on tablets and smartphones, it is important to understand age rating systems for iOS (Apple systems), Windows, Android (include Google devices) and Blackberry devices as well as PEGI ratings.

**Apple** rates games based on their content to specify the appropriate age group. If you go to Settings > General > Restrictions > Allowed Content: Apps, you can control access to particular rated games.

**Windows** Phone 7 system parental controls are controlled through the Windows Live account that is linked to the phone. You can set up Parental Controls on your PC and log in with their account through this the first time you use the device. You can set time limits, age restrictions and block specific programs.
The Windows Store rates game content as follows: 3+, 7+, 12+, 16+, adult content.

The **Android** store rates games in line with the Google Play system, which consists of four levels: Everyone, Low maturity, Medium maturity and High maturity. Parental controls in the phone settings can alter this.

**Blackberry** App World applies an age rating system. You will be able to control usage of content by opening Blackberry App World > My Account > Content Controls. Here you can select restrictions from the following: Adult (18+), Mature (17+), Teen (13+) and General (suitable for all ages).

Top Tips for parents:

- When you buy a game console make sure you ask about its online capabilities. Know what the equipment is capable of.
- Especially for younger children, change the settings on your tablet or smartphone to 'airplane' mode. That way, they can play the game offline without making accidental purchases or connecting with someone they don't know
- Think about the location of the game console. Keep it in a common area if possible. A family room is best for monitoring and supervision.
- Discuss the risks with your child. Ensure they have privacy settings activated and help them to understand why this needs to be done.
- Gaming sites often have ways of reporting abusive chat and blocking unwelcome contact from other users. Familiarise yourself with how the gaming sites work and make sure that your child knows how to report anything that makes them feel uncomfortable. Ensure they know that they should report it to you also.
- Play the games yourself to test them for appropriateness, or simply use the PEGI guidelines to inform your judgement.
- Ask your child what they are playing. Take an interest in your child's gaming life – just as you would if they were in a football team in the real world. Watch them playing and always keep lines of communication open.
- Encourage your child to play fairly and treat other gamers with respect.
- For many parents it is useful to agree time limits on gaming with their children.
- Playing games online can leave computers/devices open to risk of a virus. Protect your computer by ensuring you have up to date anti-virus software in place.
- Ensure your child knows how to report or block other players who engage in online harassment or any other unsuitable behaviour.

Top tips for staying safe with online games:
1. There is nothing wrong with losing – sometimes you will win sometimes you will lose
2. Respect other players, don't upset others
3. Keep an eye out for game ratings
4. Don't spend all of your time gaming
5. Don't use personal information; use a nickname and an avatar as your picture.
6. Block people who make you uncomfortable and make adults aware of what you are doing so that they can help you.

Useful links:

https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/interactive-guide/

http://www.askaboutgames.com/

support.xbox.com/en-IE/xbox-one/system/how-to-block-player

support.us.playstation.com/report-inappropriate-or-abusive-users