Keeping kids connected by playing online games

Playing online games can be a good way for children to connect with friends, siblings and other family when they are separated by distance. When added to in-person contact, online games can help children learn new skills, hand-eye coordination, to work with others and be creative.

Parents and carers may be worried about online safety or too much screen time for their child. Here are some simple tips to manage these concerns.

Tips for protecting children's safety online

Check privacy and safety settings

- Set parental controls and safety features on the device, app or browser. These controls can help restrict children's access to certain content and public users and limit in-game and in-app purchases.
- Privacy settings can also help limit who can see when children are online and who they can play or chat with.

Know who children are playing with

- Check who children are playing with online by helping them set up 'friends' lists using the instructions provided.
- Regularly check 'friends' lists to ensure contacts are only people known to the child.

Set up virtual play dates

- Discuss the social purpose of playing games online by scheduling virtual play dates with friends, siblings or other family members.
- Pick a time when you can watch the virtual play date and offer assistance.
- Organised virtual play dates also help children learn how to manage screen time.

Create safe usernames

- Some games require a screen name or username. Help children to create a name that does not identify them.
- Screen names and usernames should never include a child's full name, address, school, date of birth or phone number.

Guidelines for online games with children

Check age guidelines

- You can check the age guide of most online games when you buy them or at the Games Rating Authority *https://gamesratingauthority.org.uk/RatingBoard/ratings*
- If you are still unsure or would like further information about the game, consult reputable organisations such as **Common Sense Media** or the **NSPCC** has advice for keeping children safe online and helpline counsellors to offer support. **Childline** also has lots of information about online and mobile safely.

Stay involved and empower children

- Always talk to children about e-safety topics to build their understanding of what is private and what they need to do to protect themselves, such as avoid strangers, block suspicious links and malware, report other users, and handle online bullying.
- Teach children to tell you if a stranger, or anyone they are not sure they should be in touch with tries to contact them.
- Teach children they should always tell you if anyone tries to start an conversation that makes them feel uncomfortable in anyway.

ANIMAL CROSSING – POCKET CAMP

- G-rated community-oriented role-playing game for smartphone, where players are tasked with building a community.
- Players create and decorate their campsite and gather materials such as wood and cotton to trade for furniture.

BOARD GAME ARENA

- Website that hosts a selection of 175 board games, including traditional classics such as chess and checkers, as well as modern popular games such as Sushi Go, Race for the Galaxy and Bubblee Pop.
- Board Game Arena allows players to play board games with their friends and family members online.

LEGO LIFE

- Online community app where children can share their LEGO creations, get inspired and engage with other children and family members in a child-safe platform.
- Designed with children's online wellbeing and safety in mind, it includes messages that encourage respect and kindness.

JACKBOX GAMES

- Use the 'family friendly' setting within the game's setting menu to find a range of games that are fun and appropriate for the whole family to play together.
- Play online together using a video conferencing service such as Skype or Zoom.

MARIO KART TOUR

- Mario and all his long-time friends go global as they race around courses inspired by real-world cities in addition to classic Mario Kart courses.
- Players can compare scores with friends and race against up to seven other players in real-time.

MINECRAFT

- Players explore and customise their world to create nearly anything they can imagine.
- Relatively easy to pick up and play, but still complicated enough to challenge children when building more complex items and structures.
- Up to eight friends can play together online.

10 examples of child- and family-friendly online games

UNO!

- Competitive yet family-friendly, and easy to understand.
- Team up with friends and family members to play with more strategy and teamwork.
- Send voice messages to other players, yell "UNO!" when they are about to win or cheer on friends and family as a spectator.

POKÉMON GO

- Mobile game that allows players to discover and collect up to 500 hidden virtual creatures as they explore the world around them.
- Players can locate, capture, battle and train Pokémon as if they exist in the player's real-world location.

BOGGLE WITH FRIENDS

- After shaking lettered dice into a grid, players earn points for all the word combinations they can spot in the letters. The app keeps score and the player who earns the highest points wins.
- Play with friends and family members through a mobile device.

OVERCOOKED 2

- A chaotic cooperative cooking game where players must serve a variety of recipes to hungry customers in a series of unusual kitchens.
- Can be played with up to three friends either as a team or against each other.

For more information about these games

More detailed information, system requirements and age guidelines for each of these games, as well as general information about online gaming can be found in another resource in this series: "10 Child and Family Friendly Online Games"

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