

Online Gaming

Over the last couple of decades, advancements in technology have changed the way in which youth are able to connect to video games. Not only have we seen innovations in game design and special effects but the need to be in the same room as a requirement for playing games with friends and others has been eliminated due to online gaming. An online game is a video game that is either partially or primarily played through the internet. They allow players to play in real time with other individuals. Games range from simple text-based environments to the incorporation of complex graphics and virtual worlds and can be played on a computer, game console, tablet or a smartphone.



There is conflicting research regarding the pros and cons of video gaming.

For example, aside from being fun, online gaming can build friendships, encourage team work, enhance creativity and develop competency skills. At the same time, there are risks involved that parents should be aware of which include:

- Not all games are suitable for all ages
- Inappropriate or offensive language, aggressive behavior or bullying in games that allow text, voice or video communication with other users.
- Breaches of privacy- the risk of sharing personal information or meeting unknown fellow players outside of the game.
- Links to websites where content may not be suitable for young people.

Currently, one of the more popular online games is Fortnite Battle Royal. Despite the fact that Fortnite is made up of cartoon graphics, the violence has earned the game a rating of T (for Teen), meaning it is not advised for kids under the age of 13. Kids report there is a social draw to play Fortnite because they can play with a friend or a squad of friends. In this trending game, up to 100 players can battle to the death, with the winner being the last player standing. It is similar to another popular online game, Minecraft, in that part of the object of the game is construction. Players can build forts from materials they find in their environment and loot supplies and equipment from defeated players. While the game itself is free, watch out for in-game purchases that can add up quickly. Fortnite has been known to draw the attention of youth for long periods of time if not monitored. Finding a healthy balance of video gaming and other activities is important. A healthy allotment of screen time is one that doesn't disrupt developmentally important parts of a youth's life including:

- Seeing friends and interacting with them in real life.
- Participating in extracurricular activities.
- Keeping up with academic classes and doing homework.
- Building positive relationships with family members.
- Getting enough sleep.

Whether playing Fortnite or another gaming platform, it is advised that parents take time to be informed about the games their children are playing and the safety settings and features of the devices they are playing games on. Below are some online gaming tips that can help keep our youth safe.

- Pay attention to the age appropriate ratings of games. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) evaluates video and computer games and provides a rating system similar to film ratings so parents can make informed decisions about the appropriateness of each game.
- Explain to your children that they should not give out personal details to other players (last name, location, etc.)
- Tell your children that they should not meet other players offline unless accompanied by you.
- Monitor your children's activities on gameplay websites (better yet, play with them)
- Encourage and remind your child to report issues such as bullying, threatening or bad language, the display of unwanted content or invitations to meet outside the game.
- Cease communication or change your child's online ID if anything within the game or the way it evolves makes you feel uncomfortable.

References: www.common sense media.org; www.connectsafely.org; www.cyberwise.org; Pew Research Institute