

ONLINE Gaming

Session 5

Learning context



Online gaming can be very discreet. It also appears in many ways, from simulations and games targeting the very youngest children, to games with chat forums and more sophisticated adult orientated games. We must begin by establishing that gaming on a 16 or 18 rated game, will no doubt have an adult online community. Often these games can be violent and so we could begin to think about the kind of people who may play them. The reason why they are certificated is so that the users can fully understand the content and can manage themselves appropriately. Although, once again we cannot assume that all gamers are trustworthy. Many children can be vulnerable through headset chat and discussions, which could lead to serious consequences. It could also be very unpleasant to hear bad language, racism, aggression or even bullying. These games are now common, convenient and often free on smartphones, let's make sure we stay one step ahead.

Key points and content



We need to make sure that we do not accept, tolerate or become influenced by inappropriate online behaviour. In this context, we have to be smart and to use what we know about online safety to look after ourselves. An increasing number of people play video games. Currently, around 700 million people play online, which demonstrates that not only is gaming big business, but in particular online gaming. If we take this statistic and apply it to society, we could assume that whilst a significant number of these people will be well behaved and honest, there will be a sizable number who are not. The possibility of coming across such people can be likely and once again there could be hidden agendas or trust issues.

This is important because



Online gaming is now a part of everyday life for many people. The prospect of playing games and being connected is something that has significantly increased and will continue to do so. But has our understanding of safety in this area evolved at the same rate? As technology and gaming becomes more sophisticated, do the people who use it understand how they can play safely and without danger. Do families know how contact can be established through gaming and what the consequences could be? Do we know who we are playing with and can we reduce any risk? Before we play online, we must make sure that we can stay safe. As always with online safety, there should be no secrets.

Investigate



To begin to look at any online gaming, it's good to investigate why people play games online. What is the attraction of interacting in this way and who plays with who?

Let's investigate in groups - why do people play online games. Can we scribe together all of the reasons that people may have.

Once we have a good selection of reasons, can we see that some of the reasons are fair and honest, and do we have others that are not? What are these reasons? If we take 700 million gamers, could we assume that some of these reasons could be at the heart of their activity?

The risks



This is a story about a boy who met someone online whilst gaming. The boy was 14 years old and had been spending more and more time playing online games. His family and friends had noticed that he was becoming more and more withdrawn but did not assume that he was in any danger because he was a very calm and sensible person. What they didn't know was that he had met someone online. The person that he had met was deliberately influencing the boy. He had been making references to family, friends and god amongst other things and had slowly begun to confuse him. The young boy stopped going to church and began spending the evenings staying up late and talking to people through his headset. The games that he played were worldwide and often involved violence.

Soon the boy made plans to meet the person that he had met online. He lied to his family and told them that he would be staying with a friend. Meanwhile, he bought train tickets and travelled alone.

The boy was tragically murdered by the person that he had met online. The person who had groomed him, knew what he was doing. He knew a lot about the technology involved and the kind of person who would play. He was highly persuasive, and had managed to influence the young boy over time and to the young boy he appeared friendly and likeminded. He was also a young 18 year old male, which did not necessarily fit the stereotype.

Activity



Give the children a make believe game title and blurb. Let's begin to look at who the game is targeting. Let's also look at how the chat is facilitated. By understanding these dynamics, we can then think about safe practice and risk assessment. After our assessment of each game, we must conclude by having our own risk assessment.

Questions to answer about each game: Who is could the game appeal to? Who could be at risk? Is this game appropriate and if so, what needs to be done to stay safe?

Block Buster: A colourful and crazy puzzle game that involves sequencing rows of blocks. The game claims to be the ultimate addiction, with lots of funky tunes, bright flashing icons and cool, shiny features. The game also links to other social network platforms.

Chat: The game has a text chat feature and actively encourages play between users across social networks, game types and leader boards.

War Zone: A strategic battle game where users build their army and battle other users. The content and graphics do not depict detailed violence, although the content by nature is violent. It's all tactical warfare, you have all the weapons, explosives at your hand and you need to use the firepower to destroy your enemies. You can chat with your friends and also see how you are doing on the leaderboards.

Chat: The game has a text chat feature and actively encourages play between users across platforms, game types and leader boards. Gamers can play in teams, invite others or join teams.

Survivor: A first person, split screen game where the player is left survive a derelict city. All of the characters in the game are other online users and they can talk and interact. 'This is one of the most amazing looking games you will ever play on your Android device'. The online multiplayer is all about teaming up with other players and going all out on the enemy team.

Chat: Players can talk directly to each other through their device.

Unite: The Board Game: A classic card game that comes to a whole new level on the Android platform. You can now play this amazing game with all your Facebook friends, just upload your photo and player profile and away you go. The rules are still the same but you can also try other modes for something more unique and challenging. You can participate in tournaments or just go all out against your Facebook friends in a classic Unite match, it's all up to you.

Chat: Players can chat using a text app as the game progresses, with profiles matched to Facebook for further discussion.

Rabbit-Dash: If you're looking for a cute, funny, and fun racing game then Rabbit-Dash is the game you should choose. This is a side-scrolling racing game with furry animals. You can match up with other players or challenge your friends to a furry race. Run and jump to avoid obstacles, also make sure to finish the race before anyone else does. You can play with up to 4 players in a real time race. Win it to become the racing champion. Invitations can be sent and received via all major social networks.

Chat: Players can message gamers direct or be involved in multi-player game rooms. Chat is available via text or spoken.

Summary



As we have learned, online gaming continues to become more and more sophisticated. We have begun to see that no matter how clever the games or the technology, we must apply some real consideration and awareness to stay safe. We must be very careful not to put ourselves in a position where we could be vulnerable. We now know how manipulative some people can be and these are the platforms where it can be initially very easy to strike up a conversation with a stranger.

Ultimately, we must have no secrets. We must make sure that we play the right games with the right people and always communicate with our parents. Playing with friends can be safer, although we need to be aware if any friends of friends join groups. Our parents should also be involved in managing our online activity and so they must be included in setting up any gaming along and age restrictions.

The benefits



Playing brain-teasing games for just two hours a week may help slow the degree of mental decay associated with the natural aging process, according to a study this year from the University of Iowa.

A study of 681 healthy individuals ages 50 and older revealed that playing 10 hours of a specially designed video game was able to stall the natural decline of different cognitive skills by up to seven years, in some cases.

Over five to eight weeks, one group of seniors was given computerized crossword puzzles while three other groups played a computer game called "Road Tour." The game involves matching pictures of vehicles while remembering the location of a particular road sign as more and more "distractors" appear as the player advanced. The experience is meant to mirror the difficulty older drivers have when they have to process information from multiple points of view at an intersection.

For people who may be getting older, these games can help to maintain good mental health. This is because exercising your brain is like exercising your muscles - the more you exercise, the healthier you can be.