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.

**Check age guidelines**
- You can check the age guide of most online games when you buy them and on the Australian Classification Board’s public database: www.classification.gov.au
- If you are still unsure or would like further information about the game, consult reputable organisations such as Common Sense Media and the Australian Council on Children and the Media for expert and parent reviews of games.

These reviews can often provide useful information about games that are based on the experiences of parents and their children, along with knowledge from experts.

**Guidelines for online games with children**

**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 tries to start an uncomfortable conversation.

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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 the Research Centre for Children and Families factsheet '10 simple child and family friendly online games' available to download here: https://bit.ly/rcf-usyd

For more information
Research Centre for Children and Families, Sydney School of Education and Social Work
email: rccf.research@sydney.edu.au

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