



# Computer Gaming

Gaming (playing computer games) has developed in leaps and bounds over the last few years. Now, many games consoles can access the internet, enabling users to keep up-to-date with the latest games, downloads and tips and tricks. Games can also be played online through a PC, laptop or mobile phone, including those that are age inappropriate.

## What are the risks?

Online gaming carries many of the risks that other online activity carries. The games often involve many other players, meaning your child could be interacting with strangers in an environment they feel completely comfortable and at ease in.

Many games sites will also allow the user to create a profile, using personal information, and without the proper safety precautions this could be open for all to see (much like a profile).

Online games also often involve a chat function; this may be text chat or voice chat. The same risks that apply to general chat rooms therefore apply in gaming situations– particularly with regard to personal information and inappropriate conversations / language.

## Top Tips:

- When you buy a game console make sure you ask the vender about its online capabilities. Know what the equipment is capable of.
- 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. Don't wait for something to happen before you talk to your child about the potential risks of gaming online. 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. Games often come with an age rating and while this should be used as a guide, you should also test the game yourself or play with your child to make sure you are happy for them to use it.
- 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.