

**MEDIERÅDET
FOR BØRN & UNGE**



CHILDREN AND GAMING

— a guide for parents



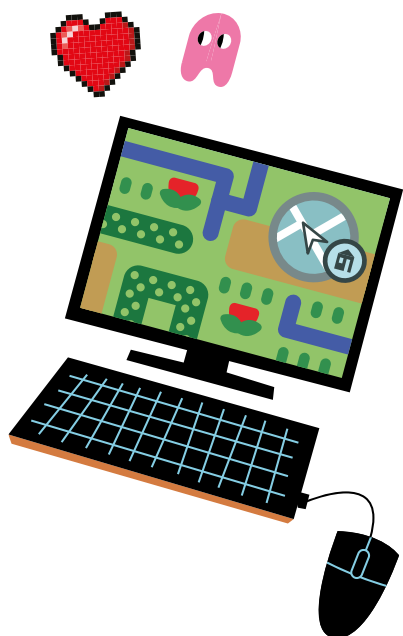
WHY DOES MY CHILD PLAY VIDEO GAMES?

The biggest reason why children play video games is because it's entertaining. They also play to improve or to learn new things, to meet friends, to compete and to be part of a community.

Single-player games are mainly used as entertainment. They are often played on mobile phones, when you need a break or as a distraction when riding the bus. Multiplayer games are typically longer in duration and are played at home on a gaming console or a computer.

Talk to your child about

- Which games they are playing – show a genuine interest and take the time to find out about the games your child is playing.
- Why they play – what makes it fun and what do they get out of it?



“Gaming” refers to all forms of digital games, both online and offline. Video games can be played on a console or a computer as well as via apps on a tablet or a phone.



LANGUAGE AND TONE IN GAMING

Offensive language is far from unusual in gaming culture. Aggressive language or even bullying can occur in gamer communities involving people you may know from school or after-school care. Children and young people can also encounter it in online games in interactions with people they do not know off-screen. This can sometimes feel distressing, and it is never acceptable to discriminate on the basis of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability.

Multiplayer games are often dominated by boys. Girls sometimes experience that they are not welcome or are talked to derogatively because of their gender, when playing such games. This can result in girls avoiding these types of games or that they feel the need to adopt an anonymous, gender-neutral username.

Talk to your child about

- How language can sometimes be harsher online than it would be in person.
- How to disable audio and block/report people in the game or on communication platforms like Discord.
- That bullying or excluding others is unacceptable behaviour. This includes bullying on the basis of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability.
- That the child can come to you or another adult if they think it is too overwhelming.



You can use the settings in most games and external apps like Discord to limit who is able to contact your child. This is something you ought to do if you do not want your child to send and receive text or voice chat messages from people they do not know in person.

SCREEN TIME AND HEALTH

Just like many other hobbies, gaming can be time-consuming. Involving yourself in how much time your child plays is perfectly legitimate. It is, however, also important to remember that gaming is a social activity and a way of spending time with friends. Screen time alone cannot measure the well-being of a child. Remember that, as the child's parent, you know them better than anyone. You should take action if you are concerned about your child's well-being. Possible courses of action may be to seek advice at your child's school, after-school club or through discussions with other parents.

Sometimes, video games are about improving as a player or defeating adversaries. Other times they can be about discovering new worlds and even universes. Many games are designed to entertain, challenge and reward players as they progress and achieve victories.



- Games played alone are called “single-player” and are often less time-consuming than multiplayer games. “Multiplayer games” involve playing with other people, either alone against other players, or as part of a team competing against another team.
- Girls are more likely to play games alone, while boys tend to play with others. This can be one of the reasons why boys often spend more time on video games than girls.



Screen time considerations

- Ensure that there is balance between your child's digital life, social life, exercise, diet and sleep.
- Be understanding about your child's interest in gaming. Recognise that it can be a fun activity, even if you do not fully understand it.
- Ask questions about the game your child is playing. This will help you understand the nature of the game. Make agreements about when it's time to end a gaming session.
- It is a good idea to make sure that gaming activities are over well before bedtime.
- Make agreements with your child and insist that they stick to them. Use the game as the basis instead of following the number of minutes. "We'll end it when the match is over" or "We'll end at the next save point" are often better than "We'll end in 10 minutes."
- Share experiences and advice with the parents of the children your child play games with.



The Danish Health Authority has published a number of recommendations about screen time, where they recommend, for example, spending time away from screens and being physically active, or making agreements about screen use within the family. This also applies to gaming.



FREE GAMES AND IN-GAME PURCHASES

Lots of games are “free-to-play”. This means that while they are free, game companies earn their money in other ways, such as by showing in-game advertisements or by enticing players to buy features like *loot boxes*, *battle passes* or *skins*. Game publishers can also earn money by collecting data and sharing it with third parties.

Free games can also require the purchase of extra levels before the game can proceed. Some games use virtual currency, which can be purchased for real money or earned by playing the game. It can sometimes be hard for children to distinguish between the value of real and virtual currencies.

Talk to your child about

- Which games they are downloading. Are they free of charge or do they cost money?
Are there in-game purchases?
- The consequences of clicking on an “offer” in a game and how it can end up costing real money.
- The maximum amount of money they are allowed to spend on games (perhaps a weekly or monthly amount).
- The value of various items, such as a pair of wings on Roblox.





- Most phones, tablets and online game stores can be set to disable new purchases and in-game purchases, unless a password is provided.
- The purchase of games and in-game purchases in an online store like App Store use the payment card associated with your account. Sharing the password to your account is the same as sharing the pin code to your credit card.
- New content can become available for a game after the game was purchased. This can also cost money. This is often called “downloadable content” or “DLC” for short.
- Quality content costs money. Paying for a game from the outset often means that the product you have bought is of better quality and more transparent. Free games often deploy opaque business models, and they may end up costing more because of all the in-game purchases.



RETENTION MECHANISMS IN GAMES

Some games are designed to be hard to switch off. You just need to find one more item and on top of that you should ideally log in every day to score the daily bonus. Children and young people can feel anxious if they realise that they forgot to log into a game for the daily bonus. Video games can be designed to keep users coming back or to keep playing for extended periods of time, and children can find it hard to set limits for themselves. As a parent, you can help your child by setting limits for them if they are finding it hard to manage the amount of time they spend gaming.



What should you be aware of?

- Some games award a daily bonus for logging on every day.
- Some games make it harder to exit the game between battles/levels.
- Remember that you sometimes end up playing for longer than intended because it is so much fun.

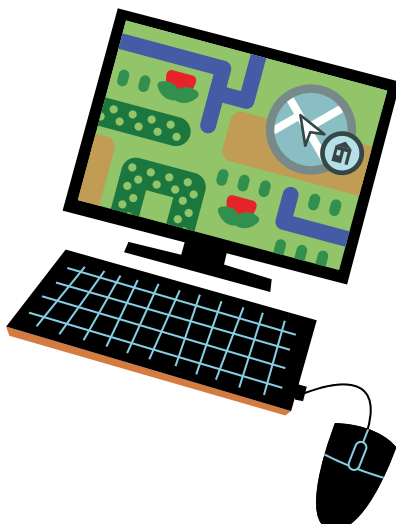


Talk to your child about

- Whether the child is playing longer than planned and why that might be.
- Whether the child ever feels pressured to remain in-game or to log in at specific times.



Some free games offer so-called “season passes” or “battle passes”. These usually cost money. It can be difficult to assess what you are actually getting for your money. A “season pass” or “battle pass” requires you to be active in the game, some times daily. This means that the player must invest increasingly more time in the game to unlock all the content that they have already paid for by purchasing a “season pass” or “battle pass”. In other words, you are paying with time and money just for the opportunity to win something in the game.



TYPES OF GAMES AND DIGITAL DEVICES

Games can be purchased through online stores, and can be played on various digital devices such as mobile phones, tablets, computers and consoles.

There are countless genres of games. Perhaps you have heard of MMOG, battle royal, sandbox or FPS? Ask your child what they are gaming, whether they have a favourite genre, and what characterises the genre.

In general, most children also have other things going on while they are gaming. This includes watching TV, streaming videos, listening to music or using social media. This becomes more common as the child gets older.

GAMING INFLUENCERS

For many gamers, games are not just something you sit and play for yourself. Many children like to watch others play their favourite games or even a completely new game on the various streaming and video services. Such video content can be entertaining, can show tips and be of inspiration for your own gameplay. You can watch videos or live streams on YouTube, Twitch, Kick and many other places.

If you follow a specific gaming influencer, you can also be part of their regular group of followers, which often involves meeting and communicating about common interests via Reddit or Discord.

What should you be aware of?

- Gaming influencers may show sponsored content, and it can be difficult for children to discern which content is actually advertising.
- Platforms like YouTube and Twitch allow viewers to donate money, for example through single donations and subscriptions. Some viewers can feel pressured into spending money.
- Platforms like Twitch have a wide range of elements that keep users engaged. For example, you earn points as you watch live streams. Those points can then be used to trigger various small rewards.
- With some gaming influencers, you may experience a harsh tone among users in a live chat or an influencer's Discord community.



PARENTAL CONTROLS

Consoles, online stores and some games may have special parental controls. Parents can, among other, things set limits for their child's options when it comes to purchasing and accessing elements in games. There are differences in what settings are available on the different platforms, and how easy they are to use.

Talk to your child about

- What parental controls are and configure them together. This will help your child understand when and why there are limited options for some games on consoles and in online stores.

Common parental settings options

- Limiting ability to make purchases, including in-game.
- Set an age limit for access to games.
- Limiting communication with others.
- Setting screen time limits.



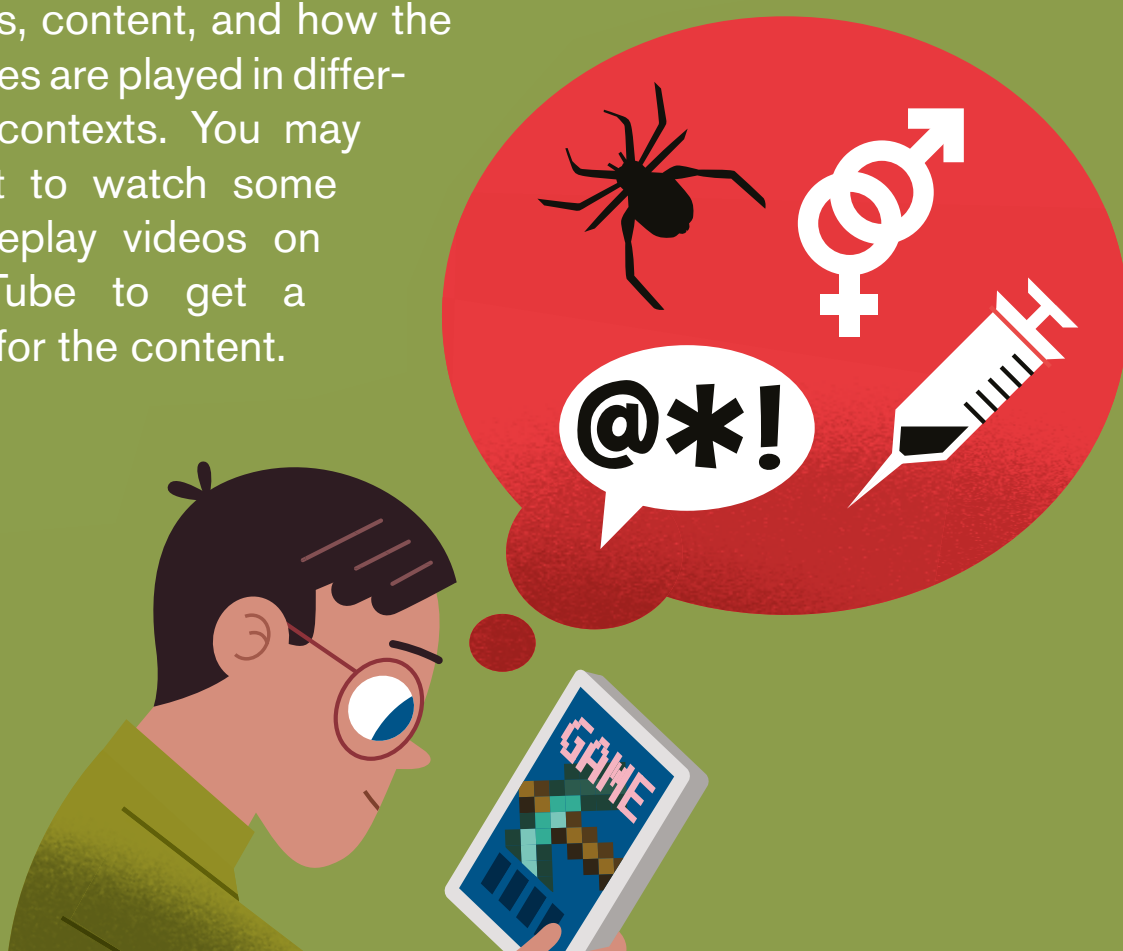
Parental controls for games are available on consoles such as Xbox, PlayStation and Nintendo Switch, as well as in online stores such as Steam, Epic Store, Google Play and App Store. They are also available in individual games, such as Fortnite and Minecraft.

AGE AND PEGI

Many digital games feature a PEGI age rating (3, 7, 12, 16 or 18 years) and a number of content descriptors that indicate whether the game features content like violence, profanity or gambling.

PEGI (Pan European Game Information) is a European rating system created by the gaming industry. The rating is primarily indicative of a game's image and audio content. Remember that children are different and have different degrees of maturity. A PEGI rating should therefore not be interpreted as an actual ban on whether certain games can be played by younger children. At the same time you may instead consider that your child should be even older than the age rating indicates.

Involve your child in this process, as children often know more than anyone else about game types, content, and how the games are played in different contexts. You may want to watch some gameplay videos on YouTube to get a feel for the content.



GLOSSARY



Battle pass

A “battle pass” is a pass that allows the player to access new content. These can be earned in-game for free, earned by playing for a specific number of hours or purchased using real-world money.

Discord

A chat program where users can talk and send messages to each other. Invitation-only private “channels” can also be set up on the server. Many players communicate on Discord as during a game, rather than in the game itself.

Loot box

A virtual “box” that contains things like weapons, skills, outfits or skins. These are free in some games, and in others, they cost virtual currency or real-world money.

Online stores

Games can be bought on phones, computers or consoles via various online stores. These include Steam, Nintendo eShop or App Store.

Skin

A cosmetic enhancement like a colour scheme or graphics for a virtual weapon, outfit or a character’s appearance. Some skins have real economic value.

Virtual currency

A video game’s in-game currency. In some games, you earn currency as you play through the game. In others, virtual currency can only be obtained by buying it with real money.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Danish Media Council for Children and Young People
medieraadet.dk

Center for Digital Youth Care
cfdp.dk

Save the Children Denmark
redbarnet.dk/foraeldre

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