

GAMING SAFETY GUIDE

Letter from a Parent



Be the Administrator

You're the admin so set up any system or game where you have the ability to see everything that is happening. Your child's account is linked to the device through the administrative function. Often online accounts require unique emails. For example, Microsoft uses an email for me and my kids, and I have access to all those accounts.

Monitor Online Activity

You can download apps for your phone to monitor your child's screen time (see parent resource guide here for a full list) and even limit it for each gaming device. If my daughter spends over two hours on the Nintendo, I get a notice. Monitor their activity regularly and check email accounts for notices (e.g., friends requests, suggestions, chats). Finally, be curious. Ask your child what's going on in the game, but do it when they're not busy playing.

Give Your Child Excuses

Let them use you as the bad guy. "My dad won't let me" or "My dad sees everything." In other words, my dad's protective. You get it, right? Now your child has an excuse. Also, it helps to have an open-door policy. I tell my kids, "You get to ask me anything you want and I can't get mad" or "You are learning so I can't get mad." If you're not ready to be the bad guy, you need to get out of the game.

Set Clear Ground Rules

If they are broken, there are clear consequences. In my house, my kids get a five-minute warning. If their device is still on, they lose it. If I say now, I mean now. You have to know what's going on outside of the game at all times. Also, because it's my house, my internet, my device, my energy, I have a right to see everything anytime I want to and you need to know I will check.

What gets lost a lot is to reward good behavior. Negativity is fleeting. Gaming is addictive because of the dopamine levels it produces in the brain. When that flow is interrupted, there is a brief moment of panic in the child. For all the reasons gaming can be positive, it can be hard on parents dealing with the outcry. Set the precedent that the outcry doesn't impact you, even though it might.

Stay Up To Date

All of these devices have parent resources. Check them once a month for every system you have in the house (including cell phones). Just Google, "Parent Resources for X" and read up.

ONLINE GAMING SAFETY TIPS



Research the gaming system before buying or playing.

- Nintendo is the safest console right now because safeguards are already in place.
- Always test a gaming system before allowing your child to play.



Learn how to set and update parental settings on the system.

- Microsoft Support (XBOX): support.xbox.com/help/family-online-safety/onlinesafety/manage-app-privacy-settings-xbox-one
- Sony Support (PS4): support.playstation.com/s/article/PS4-Parental-Controls?language=en_US&language=en_US
- Nintendo Support: play.nintendo.com/parents/crash-courses/parental-controls/

Create and test the parental controls for each game your child plays.

- Don't assume the game will already have controls in place. Parental controls can be set up per player for the entire console.
- Make sure safety settings filter what information other players can see about you and your child's contacts.
- Download a parental control app to notify you of any potential threats (see a complete list on page 5).

Create a username and password for the system so only you can access it.

- Restrict new user creation and guest login.
- Keep usernames separate from social media accounts.
- Do not use real names, addresses, or other personal information as usernames or gamertags.
- Create a unique password that isn't easily guessable. Change that password frequently.

Talk about the dangers of gaming and the internet.

- Encourage open communication between you and your child. Make them feel safe and able to come to you.
- Prepare and talk to your child about online gaming and the tactics of predators (e.g., catfishing).
- Traffickers can set up accounts as “professional gamers” and solicit information from your child, including personal information and nude photos of your child.

Be aware of where and what your child is doing online and while gaming.

- Establish a clear set of rules to help set boundaries and expectations for you and your child.
- Only allow your child to play in a community area of the house where you are present.
- If your child is younger, have them play with you. Younger children love to show others how to play the games they enjoy.

Restrict game content based on your child’s age.

- Follow the age ratings on games. To learn more, visit [esrb.org](https://www.esrb.org).
- Only download and play authorized editions of the game. Sometimes unauthorized versions are available online.
- Conduct random safety checks on your child’s computer to make sure they’re not playing something inappropriate. Several games can be downloaded for free.



Restrict the use of internet browsers.

- Do not allow your child to click on outside websites, such as loot boxes, social media, and unofficial gaming websites. Do not allow your
- Even with web filtering, your child can still access an unsecured website or be solicited online.

Turn off all communication with other players.

- The safest option is NO communication between players.
- Do not allow your child to accept player requests unless you and your child know them personally.
- Limit content created by other players, such as videos and images.
- Coach your child on what to do if they encounter inappropriate language or behavior.

Limit the amount of time your child games online.

- Make sure they're engaging with their friends and family outside of their game.

PARENTAL CONTROL APPS

- **Bark**: Windows, macOS, Android, iOS, Apple, Amazon Fire, Chrome Browser
- **Net Nanny**: Windows, macOS, Android, Apple, Kindle Fire
- **Family Time**: Android and iOS
- **Qustodio**: Windows, macOS, Android, IOS, Kindle
- **Kaspersky Safe Kids**: Windows, Mac, Android, Apple

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