Spotlight on gaming

Online multiplayer games are video games that allow players to connect and interact with one another over the internet in real time from all over the world. They can range from cooperative games, where players work together to accomplish goals, to games where players compete against each other for victory. Online games typically require players to create accounts, join servers and sometimes form teams. Alongside gameplay, there are often additional features such as leader boards, achievements and paid-for upgrades.

Potential risks

Connecting with strangers

Many online games offer multiplayer modes, where players can connect with other users on the platform. These can bring risks such as encountering offensive language, bullying in the in-game chat functions or disruptive behaviour such as destroying things your child has made in the game.

Over-spending in games

Most games provide opportunities to make in-game purchases, where real money is used to buy items within the game. Often these items do not benefit gameplay but are a design feature to encourage users to spend more on the platform.

Access to inappropriate content

The content in games varies widely and the age ratings they are given reflect how suitable the content is. Most games do not require players to prove their age, so it is possible that younger players may be exposed to inappropriate content if playing games above their recommended age.

Practical advice

Talk about risks

Speak to your child about the risks of communicating with strangers and encourage them to tell you if they have experienced upsetting encounters when gaming.

Talk about money

Speak to your child about in-game purchases to make sure they understand that real money is used to make purchases within the game. You can also set the relevant in-app purchase settings on your device.

Check age ratings and suitability

Take time to become familiar with the games your child is playing, using the age rating and content descriptors for guidance. Parental controls can also be used to help manage content.