



## **Switched on Parents**

Many parents and carers have children who go online for gaming, social media, chat platforms, streaming and downloading – whether on a tablet, mobile phone, computer or games console.

In most cases, online gaming and chatting is fun, social and harm-free but we need to be realistic. Parents and carers are becoming increasingly concerned about the safety of their children within a digital world they may not be familiar with themselves. Risks can range from downloading a harmful computer virus to online bullying or being targeted by a predator with sinister motives.

Although the internet is a fantastic tool and a key resource for modern learning, communicating and entertainment; it is largely unregulated and a magnet for people with malicious intentions.

As parents and carers it is impossible to know what children are doing all of the time, particularly when it comes to online activity. In the same way you educate children about the physical risks of riding a bike or crossing a road, it is just as important to raise their awareness of online security dangers from an early age.

Children are full of curiosity and although they can navigate their way around devices better than most adults, they may possess an innocent and trusting approach to online activity, often unaware of the dangers and threats.

Parents and carers should be 'switched on' to digital trends and to have open and honest conversations with their children about the threats and safe online practices.

There are currently minimal restrictions when it comes to online gaming, so anyone with access to a gaming account from anywhere in the world can make contact with other players of a game, no matter what age they happen to be. Unfortunately, some players are not who they say they are, so young people should be on their guard against random 'friend' requests and be wary of sharing any private information which could put them at risk.

It can be a challenge to enforce such advice and encourage safe online behaviour amongst children and young people. Fortunately, there are tools that can help. Parental control software can help establish and enforce the framework for what is acceptable online and which websites can be accessed. It can even be set to control how much time children spend gaming online, allowing parents and carers to create different profiles to suit individual children at varying levels of maturity and age groups.

## **Key Messages**

**Children**                      Be aware – Only accept friend requests from people you know, (that is someone you speak to in person).  
Don't share personal information

**Parents/Carers**      Ensure anti-virus software is up to date  
                                 Use parental control software

### **Top Tips**

Working with police forces countrywide, Get Safe Online ([www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org)) has prepared these tips and simple checklists to help keep children and young people safe online according to their age group.

#### **Tips for safe online gaming**

Have an open and honest talk with your kids about online gaming and the risks involved.

Tell them never to reveal private information like their real name, e-mail address, home address, family member's names, information about home, including location or financial details.

Explain that not everyone is who they seem (or claim) to be, and their motives may be suspicious.

Tell them not to respond to bullying or other abuse and to tell you straight away if it happens.

Join in with their gaming occasionally to get an idea of their games and who they're connecting with. Do this from an early age so they don't suddenly feel 'spied' upon.

Set and monitor limits for the amount of daily or weekly time your kids spend online gaming

Check age ratings of games, chat rooms etc to ensure your kids aren't accessing inappropriate content.

If your child is using a stand-alone computer, sit the computer where the screen can be seen by all the family in a communal area.

Never give your child your payment card details as extras can be very costly.