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Beyond the screen: understanding and managing online gaming



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Online gaming has exploded in popularity, especially with youth. According to a [Statista survey](#) exploring how kids spend their time on the Internet, 50% of kids under 18 are gaming. [The Media Technology Monitor](#) backs up those findings with its own data. According to its research, 79% of Canadian kids aged two to 17 report playing an online game in the past month.

Online gaming worlds are interactive, social and anonymous. Gaming allows youth to connect with players who share their passions, and they get to be both strategic and creative. The anonymity can be a welcome relief from social pressures some kids feel at school. But there are risks involved. If your kids game (Roblox or Minecraft anyone?), it's important to be aware of the risks and how you can manage them together.

The risks

Kaspersky, a global cyber security provider, highlighted several risks kids may confront when online gaming. They include:

Cyberbullying: in gaming worlds, cyberbullying can start out as “griefing,” (intentional actions that make a game less enjoyable for a player) but escalate to hurtful direct messages or shaming on global chat channels.

Privacy: bad actors are skilled at interpreting usernames and then piecing together other bits of personal information available on the internet and social media. That's why it's important to counsel kids on creating usernames that don't include any reference to their names, location or age.

Malware: antivirus software, such as TELUS Online Security, provides automatic scans and updates to protect your devices and webcams from hackers.

Online predators: it's widely known that not everyone is who they say they are in gaming and virtual worlds. There have been instances where adults pose as kids and exploit shared experiences to try to trick kids into sending personal information, compromising photos or even meeting in person.

Unexpected costs: many games offer certain functionality for free but then charge for exclusive or comprehensive features that enhance the gaming experience (freemium model). All in-app or in-game purchases require a credit card. Try to avoid providing credit card information for freemium games and look for games that have a purchase password feature.

The Roblox riddle

Roblox is a free online gaming platform that allows players to play games designed by other players. They can also design their own games in the Roblox Studio and collect the in-game currency Robux to purchase additional features. Roblox is wildly popular amongst youth. According to Statista, at the end of 2024, there were more than 19.7 million daily active users of Roblox games in North America.

But is Roblox actually safe for kids? The answer is yes and no. When used as an imagination platform as it's marketed, Roblox is great. Kids can get creative and have positive shared social experiences with friends.

But like anything online, there are inherent risks. With the interactive chat boxes, there have been reported instances of sexually suggestive material in the games. There have also been several damning media reports about strip clubs and "condo games," which feature adult content including sexual acts, graphic images and inappropriate language.

But if you use the parental controls available to help manage communication preferences, friends list and spending, you can ensure that your kids have a productive, imaginative and safe experience playing Roblox games.

While Roblox illustrates both the opportunities and challenges of online gaming platforms, there are several practical steps you can take to ensure a safe gaming experience for your kids.

What you can do

As a parent or caregiver, you can help the kids in your life participate in online gaming in a safe way, so they can explore, create and have fun. Some strategies include:

Know the game: research the games your kids are playing. What do they do on them? What type of content is available? What is their rating? How do they interact with other players? Are in-app purchases available? Sit down with your kids and play with them. Let them be the teachers and learn what lights them up.

Use parental controls: you can manage how your kids communicate with other players, how much time they spend playing and whether they can make in-app purchases. As part of your gaming "contract," you can insist that kids game in shared spaces in the home and never behind closed doors in their rooms.

Emphasize critical thinking: just like any activity online, encourage kids to trust their guts. If something feels off, it likely is. Have regular conversations about the risks associated with online gaming without alarm or fear. Share age-appropriate articles or real-life stories they can relate to. And stress the basic rules frequently – only chat with people you know in real life, never accept messages from strangers, never share personal information, decline

invitations from anyone who requests to chat on a different messaging platform.

Find balance: there is such a thing as too much gaming. If gaming is the only topic of conversation or starts to get in the way of life – time with friends, hygiene, schoolwork – there could be an issue. Try to strike a balance between virtual gaming experiences and real-world activities.

Promote digital citizenship: it's important to avoid the risks of online gaming, but it's equally as important to behave with integrity. Help kids understand their responsibility to play with respect, kindness and safety and that their actions can have positive outcomes or negative consequences.

Online gaming is meant to be fun, exciting and creative. With awareness, education and ongoing dialogue, you can help the kids in your life understand the risks inherent in online gaming and how to stay safe. To learn more check out the TELUS Wise [Helping our kids safely navigate video games](#) guide.

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