1st December 2022

Re: Safeguarding information for parents and carers - Online Gaming

Dear parents and carers

We aim to provide regularly updated information to provide support for parents and carers to support their children to learn about how to keep safe online and to help their children to know what they can do if they feel unsafe or worried.

Online games can be a great way for children and young people to keep busy and stay in touch with friends and family, but it's important that they play safely. Things to consider if your child games online:

- age ratings of games they play
- messaging and contact functions on the games
- in-game purchases
- trolling, 'griefing' and scams
- how to report problems
- where they can get further support.

One online game we would like to raise parent's and carer's awareness of is **Poppy Playtime**. We are aware that some children in school have played this game and we have spoken to children, parents and carers about the contents of this game. Whilst this game does not appear to have any age ratings, *Commonsense media* reviews of this game rate it as **age 12+** because of the inappropriate horror and violence content.

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/game-reviews/poppy-playtime/user-reviews/adult

Poppy Playtime features frightening images and themes that are paired with child-friendly items. Videos, versions of the game, and associated material are becoming increasingly popular on YouTube, Roblox, and other platforms used by young children. Poppy Playtime is a horror game made by a small independent team (MOB Games). The player must solve puzzles whilst trying to survive the "vengeful toys" left behind. The factory's most popular toy "Huggy Wuggy" – a giant, horrifying blue creature with bulging eyes, wide red lips, and long limbs – actively follows you around as you try to complete the game. He appears in the dark unexpectedly to try and catch you. If you get caught, Huggy Wuggy bears his wide and sinister grin and eats you. Further information about the content and risks can be found using this link:

https://oursaferschools.co.uk/2021/12/03/poppy-playtime-online-safety-review/

The NSPCC website provides useful information for parents and carers about online gaming:

https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-games/

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There are four main things that you can consider to help you decide if a game's appropriate for your child to play:

Check the content of the game and any chat function
Content within games is regulated and rated into age groups based on elements within the game such as sex, violence, gambling, drugs, in-app purchases etc. There are lots of different age ratings around the world, such as PEGI used in the UK. Always check the age rating to help you decide to allow your child to download or play a game - this is normally visible next to the game title within gaming and app stores.

Consider who your child could have contact with whilst using the game:
Consider any communication channels and if there are settings to turn off or limit chat functions. There can be different types of communications, e.g. group chat or private chat. Communication in a game can increase the risk of bullying (sometimes referred to as being 'griefed' within gaming), being contacted by people they don't know and potentially groomed or exploited. Many games have a means of communication which includes private messaging and private chat. Look out for: words like 'whisper' or 'private' next to messages if your child is playing in multiplayer games (especially if they are playing with people they don't know offline) and any suggestion of taking the conversation to other messaging platforms.

Does the game affect your child's behaviour?
The behaviour of your child could be affected by some games, it can include bullying or 'griefing' others, trolling or other inappropriate behaviour. Very intensive games can result in short-term bad behaviour such as poor temper or 'ragequitting', which is getting so upset they stop playing immediately. Ensuring a game's suitability can help, as can limiting playing time.

Does the game have in-app purchasing?
In-app purchases normally enhance the game or gameplay, for example skins (design of the character or weapon) or loot boxes (treasure chests, but you don't always know what is in them). There can often be considerable pressure on children to be unique within their games (new skins) or to be better than others (purchasing power-ups). You should consider settings to turn off in-app purchases, or set a spending limit on the device or app.

Parents and carers can also use the links below to find out more about what children might be doing online and to seek practical advice on the steps you can as a parent to keep your children safe in their digital world:
> **NSPCC online safety information**
> **Internet matters**
> **Think u know parents information**
> **Government information on child safety online**
> **Young Minds - Parents guide to online gaming**

Please get in touch if you feel you need further advice or support with online safeguarding. Our designated safeguarding leads (Mrs Gallagher and Mrs Mupesa) and our Computing Lead (Mr Sahed) are able to offer individual advice to parents and carers.

Warmest wishes

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