

## Gaming

Gaming is extremely popular with children and young people:

57% of UK children aged 3-15 play games online and 38% of those 16+ do (Ofcom, 2023).

It can feel hard to keep up to date with the latest games, know their mental health impact, be aware of the key safety concerns, and how to support children and young people to have a safer and happier gaming experience. This newsletter provides an introduction to online gaming and mental health.



## Mental health impacts of gaming

### Positive impacts:

- Way to unwind & relax
- Learn new skills
- Have fun
- Connect with friends and family

### Negative impacts:

- Displace other activities (sleep, exercise, studying or working)
- Isolation and loneliness
- Feeling a lack of control over gaming
- A form of escapism/avoidance of problems.



## Spot the signs

There are several signs that a child or young person might be experiencing issues with gaming:

- Persistent tiredness/signs of sleep deprivation
- Loss of interest in real-life relationships as a result of gaming
- Seeming withdrawn
- Anti-social behaviour towards family and friends
- No longer keeping up with other interests
- Obsessive nature toward a game, inability to reduce playing.

## Online Harms

There are a range of online harms to be aware of that can happen on gaming platforms, including:

### Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying, negative comments, and abuse are prevalent in online gaming. The anonymity of players and the use of avatars can encourage harassment and bullying.

[Visit CyberSmile for information and how to respond.](#)

### Online grooming

Most children's first interaction with someone they don't know is on an online gaming platform. In-game chat means that children and young people can talk to people they don't know, including adults.

[ThinkuKnow has more on grooming and how to respond](#)

### Addiction

Problems can arise when children and young people start to lose control over their gaming habits, including neglecting other areas of their lives.

[Young Minds information on having healthy boundaries with gaming.](#)

### In-app Purchases & Gambling

In-app purchases can help get additional features, items, and lives and are often linked to bank cards or accounts like PayPal. Concerns have been raised about Loot boxes and their links to gambling.

[Visit BBC Own It for tips on managing Lootboxes](#)

## Helpful Resources

- [Online Gaming Advice Hub](#) - A resource hub from Internet Matters sharing the latest advice on having safe and positive gaming experiences.
- Gaming Age Guides - Advice from Internet Matters on gaming for [under-5s](#), [older children](#), and [teens](#).
- [Games Reviews](#) - A collection of reviews of popular games from Common Sense Media to help find age-appropriate games and identify potential risks.
- [Gaming](#) - Information from Childnet on online gaming, its risks, top safety tips, and how to have conversations with children and young people about their gaming.

