

The **Entertainment Software Rating Board** assigns the age and content ratings displayed on all computer and video games. Visit [www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org) to get a rating upon your child's game.

### Know the symbols and know the game:



Titles rated EC (Early Childhood) have content suitable for ages three and older. Games featuring this symbol contain no material that parents would find inappropriate.



Titles rated E (Everyone) have content suitable for ages six and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



Titles rated E10+ have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles may contain cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.



Titles rated T (Teen) have content suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles may contain violence, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.



Titles rated M (Mature) have content suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.



Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.



Where to find more information:

Parents & Guardians Guide  
<http://www.netSMARTZ.org>

<http://www.parents-guide-to-gaming.com/Xbox%20Live.html>

Parents guide to video games and video game ratings:  
<http://www.whattheyplay.com>

Additional parent resources on general teen internet use:  
<http://www.microsoft.com/security/family-safety/gaming-about.aspx>  
and  
<http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/parent-guide>



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# ONLINE GAMING: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



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# Online Gaming: What you need to know

Advanced game consoles coupled with high-speed internet allows your children to play games online with people all over the world.

While online gaming is usually little more than a harmless distraction, parents should closely monitor their child's participation in the online community.

## What is online gaming?

Online gaming allows multiple players to interact and play games over the Internet or through a computer network. (Visit <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-online-gaming.htm> for more information.)

Once considered an exclusive adult pastime, online gaming is now a mainstream hobby among younger generations. New and advanced gaming systems such as the Xbox and PS3, as well as new hand-held gaming systems like the Sony Vita (A new version of the PSP handheld gaming system) and many tablets can connect users to the Internet through a Wi-Fi system.

Online gaming can be an enjoyable experience, but players should use caution since online gaming presents many of the same dangers associated with Internet use.

## Online Predators:

To play online with other gamers, your child must set up an online account. Players are not required to identify their age or real name to other gamers.

While this may aid in protecting your child's identity, it may also protect child predators who fish the Internet for underage gamers by posing as a teen or child. Most online games allow real-time conversation via microphone headsets during online play. Predators can use this communication to arrange in-person meetings with your child, who may not know that the "other kid" they've been playing with is really an adult.

Likewise, your child's personal information is only as personal as your child chooses it to be. A stranger may try to earn your child's trust and coax him or her into divulging dangerous information, such as the location of your home and whether or not you, the parent or guardian, are in the house. Additionally, predators may also try to gain your child's trust by giving "pointers" on how to win a game or other gifts.

## Scams:

Your child may purchase "virtual" goods, such as in-game power-ups or game add-ons that enhance their gaming experience. Some parents connect their bank accounts or credit card accounts directly to their child's online gaming account to pay for virtual goods. However, scam artists may pose as software suppliers in order to get your account number and parents should beware of downloading from less than reputable sites. (visit: <http://www.microsoft.com/security/family-safety/gaming-about.aspx> for more information)

## Pornography:

A gaming console system is basically a computer system without a keyboard and mouse. Most systems contain a working hard drive capable of storing data, just like a computer. Your child can download inappropriate photos and footage if it is in the correct format. "Xvid" is one video format required by both the Xbox and Playstation 3 consoles to play the videos, and numerous pornographic sites offer videos in this format.

Also, predators can send inappropriate content to your child.

## Cyberbullies:

Computer gaming can be an intense hobby, and passions run high when the virtual action is underway. Cyberbullies may harass fellow gamers with name-calling and "trash talk" that can at times be racist, homophobic or downright inappropriate. Such harsh language often comes from adult gamers

who may not realize they are playing with a juvenile and can leave your child with mental injuries and broken self-esteem; as well as premature exposure to adult topics and conversation.

## Adult game material:

Computer games have a rating system for a reason. Many adult-themed games feature images of drugs and prostitution, and contain adult language and images that may be unfit for children.

Also, many games feature graphic displays of blood, gore and violence that rival movies in terms of realism.

## What to do:

- **Educate:** Explain to your child the possibility of his or her online buddies being somebody other than what they are. Many predators pose as youths, and can use devices to disguise their voice to sound younger. Also, restrict your child from handing out personal information, even to his or her friends.
- **Be Cautious:** Never connect your child's online gaming account to a bank account or credit card account. Most reputable game hosting communities allow parents to purchase for their child a set number of "game credits" with which the child may purchase add-ons and additional game content.
- **Be Nosy:** Make your child give you a tour of online gaming and see for yourself if you are happy with the online company he or she associates with. Also, closely monitor video footage stored on the game system. Open any and all files and search for questionable content, and make sure your child knows you'll be doing weekly searches of the hard drive in order to discourage misuse. Set time limits for game play and enforce family guidelines regarding privacy rules.