

## Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

### **What are age rating?**

Age ratings ensure that video games are clearly labelled for the minimum age group for which a game is suitable. Video game age-ratings offer a simple, clear means to let you know what audience a game is suitable for in terms of the themes of its content, as well as what those themes might be.

In the UK, game age-ratings are regulated by an organisation called PEGI – the Pan European Game Information group and administrated in the UK by the [Video Standards Council Rating Board](#).

PEGI ratings are double tiered. They state an age as well as content descriptors to provide additional information which make buying decisions easier. It's important to note that the PEGI age rating considers the age suitability of a game; not the level of difficulty or complexity. You might, for example, see a complicated simulation or a high strategy city-building game with a PEGI 3 rating.

More information on PEGI's age rating system can be found [here](#).

### **On what devices can my child play video games?**

Video games can now be played across a number devices including mobile phones, laptops, iPad and dedicated games consoles such as an Xbox, Nintendo or PlayStation.

### **How many hours a week should I let my child play video games?**

Anything can be done to excess, including playing video games. Everything, including playing video games, should be done in moderation. Players should also take regular breaks.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health suggests that it is "impossible" to recommend age appropriate time limits, instead urging parents to "approach screen time based on the child's development age [and] individual need." For more information see the full report [here](#).

### **What parental controls are available on my child's gaming device?**

Parental controls are software and tools which you can install on phones or tablets, games consoles or laptops – and even your home broadband. What parental controls are available depends on the gaming device. Parental controls can include: restricting settings to block explicit content and content ratings, block specific features such as multiplayer games, block in-game purchases and downloads, alter privacy restrictions, and plan what time of day your child can go online and how long for. Changing parental controls can typically be restricted with a pin to prevent your child changing the settings without you knowing.

The NSPCC has created a detailed and helpful [guide](#) to setting up parental controls on a range of devices, and in a variety of cases, covering games and more.

Information on parental controls for Apple devices can be found [here](#).

Information on parental controls for Google Play (Android) can be found [here](#).

### **Is it possible for my child to become addicted to games?**

Games are designed to be fun, entertaining and engaging. The vast majority of people play games safely and moderately. However, common sense and experience shows that anything can be done to excess, including playing video games. As with other hobbies, playing video games should be done in moderation.

On 18 June 2018, the World Health Organisation (WHO) published a classification of a new 'gaming disorder' in their International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). As defined by the WHO, a gaming disorder is:

'a pattern of gaming behaviour ("digital-gaming" or "video-gaming") characterized by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.'

For 'gaming disorder' to be diagnosed, the WHO stated:

'The behaviour pattern must be of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months.'

### **How common are gaming disorders?**

[Studies](#) estimate between 0.3-1 per cent of the general population might qualify for a potential acute diagnosis of Internet gaming disorder. Some [studies](#) suggest that gaming disorder is a symptom of underlying attention related mental health issues, rather than a unique phenomenon.

### **What should I do if I think someone has a gaming disorder?**

If you believe your child or a loved one's gaming is constantly getting in the way their study, sleep, work, eating, socialising or physical activity, there may well be a problem that needs addressing.

Please seek professional medical advice from the NHS.

## **Can playing violent video games cause my child to be violent in real life?**

A common criticism of video games is that their sometimes violent content can drive real-world aggression. However, recent [research](#) shows violent video game engagement is not associated with adolescents' aggressive behaviour. Another recent [study](#) also found that there is no evidence to support link between violent video games and behaviour.

Dr Tanya Byron's high profile government-commissioned report [Safer Children in a Digital World](#) – otherwise known as The Byron Review – also found no causal link between playing violent video games and violence in real life.

## **How can I find out if, and who, my child is talking to online whilst playing video games?**

You should always be aware that online games are usually played in virtual communities, requiring players to interact with other real people over the internet. Sometimes other players will be real-life friends, but in most cases they will be strangers. If you want to find out more about the games your child is playing try to look for a summary or review of the game content

If you are concerned you should play video games with your children, watch over them when they play, and talk with them about the games they play. You should always reassure your child that if there is anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, confused or upset, they can talk to you without you getting angry.

## **What benefits can my child get from playing video games?**

Today there is increasing evidence that playing video games can have health benefits to children and adults alike. For example, research has found that playing video games can:

- [Bring therapeutic advantages to youngsters, improve motor skills, better vision, provide pain relief, and even bolster happiness in the elderly](#)
- [Improve children's social skills and developing intelligence](#)
- [Reduces reaction time, improves hand-eye co-ordination and raises players' self-esteem](#)
- [Improve perception and memory](#)
- [Overcome dyslexia](#)
- [Help with weight loss and taking up sports](#)
- [Help treat depression](#)
- [Improve cognitive functioning](#)

## **Are VR headsets safe for children to use?**

Different manufacturers have different age recommendations for VR headsets, but general advice is that children should be monitored and take regular breaks. For example:

- [Samsung Gear VR](#): The Gear VR should not be used by children under the age of 13.
- [Google Cardboard](#): Google does not specify an age, but advise that Cardboard is not for use by children without adult supervision.
- [Sony PlayStation VR](#): The VR headset is not for use by children under the age of 12.
- [Google Daydream View](#): Daydream View should not be used by children under the age of 13.
- [Oculus Rift](#): The product should not be used by children under the age of 13.

VR involves immersive technology that engages your body, ears and eyes and because children are still growing and developing, you're advised to limit their time using VR.

A parent's guide to VR gaming can be found [here](#).

## **What are loot boxes/mystery boxes?**

Loot boxes are virtual boxes within games that contain random prizes. They can contain items from skins to power-ups that can significantly increase your chances of winning. The appearance of the loot box varies from game to game, often presented visually as packs of foil-wrapped cards or treasure boxes. Players usually 'open' those packs in-game to find rewards of varying values to be used in-game, introducing a degree of luck to their delivery.

Depending on the game, loot boxes can be acquired free of charge whilst playing the game or purchased by the player with real money. When purchased, this can be done either by purchasing the loot box with real money, or purchasing in-game currency which in-turn can be used to purchase a loot box.

## **Are loot boxes gambling?**

Under current law, loot boxes do not constitute gambling where the in-game items acquired are confined for use within the game and cannot be cashed out.

The ability to 'cash-out' items is sometimes enabled by third party websites, which does constitute gambling. The Gambling Commission has helped launch prosecutions against such websites. The first case of this kind was brought against the FutGalaxy website, which concluded in February 2017. More information about the FutGalaxy case can be found [here](#).

## **How can I find out which games contain loot boxes?**

Research the games your child is playing to find out if the game contains loot boxes. Try to look for a summary or review of the game content, or ideally play the game yourself first. Games are often playable in stores, at events, or via downloadable demos.

Loot boxes are often alternatively called mystery boxes, loot crates and prize crates.

Some loot boxes require an in-game purchase, either through purchasing the loot box directly or indirectly through purchasing in-game currency. In-game currency is then in turn used to purchase a loot box. Look out for the [PEGI in-game purchases descriptor](#) which is applied to all games that offer the option to purchase digital goods with real currency. It is important to note that not all loot boxes require spending real money and PEGI in-game descriptors do not currently explicitly identify the existence of loot boxes in games.

## **What should I do if I do not want my child spending money on video games and loot boxes?**

Steps can be taken to prevent your child from purchasing loot boxes or any item within video games. Ensure there is no credit or debit card associated with your child's account or console. Alternatively, you may be able to add a pin to restrict in-game spending; your child will then not be able to purchase items without knowing that pin.

Speak to your child and explain why you feel spending money on games is not appropriate. Many games can still be played and completed without using loot boxes.

## **What are Free-to-Play / F2P games and are they completely free?**

Free-to-play games, often shortened to 'F2P', are games based on a model which requires no upfront payment to start playing the game, with in-game extras typically provided at an additional cost.

The most common F2P games see players able to progress faster by spending some money. A game may ask for payment to acquire extra lives, buy digital skins, remove advertisements, purchase loot boxes, fast forward a timer preventing player progress, or to buy fictional 'in-game currency' that can then be used for certain in-game abilities. Look out for the [PEGI in-game purchases descriptor](#) which is applied to all games that offer the option to purchase digital goods with real currency.

It is possible to play games completely for free. The CMA has published a short guide providing advice to parents and carers about these games. This guide can be found [here](#).

F2P games are a common alternative to Premium Games, where there is a one-off upfront payment for game, and Subscription Games, where a game requires monthly or annual subscription to play or a service that gives customers access to premium games for a subscription.

**Can additional money be spent on Premium Games after the initial purchase?**

Although in-app purchases are most usually found in F2P games, they can sometimes be found in Premium Games. Look out for the [PEGI in-game purchases descriptor](#) when purchasing a Premium Game.