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Resources About Online Gaming

1. SafeInternet.org has the results of a study on [teens playing the World of Warcraft game](#).
2. Since 2002, Nick Yee at Stanford University has been studying online gaming addiction. He has posted a lot of his research at his site "[Ariadne - Understanding MMORPG Addiction](#)".
3. Visit [WhatTheyPlay.com](#)

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Our research has repeatedly shown that the two most popular reasons children and teens turn to the Internet are games and socializing. Gaming also includes networked games played through Xbox live or Playstation 3, for example.



Today's online game play is dramatically different than it was even five years ago. Many games enable chatting amongst the players, some employ addictive behavioral modifiers also used in the gambling industry, and still others display horrific graphic scenes or scenes that sexualize young women.

Obviously, not all games contain offensive content. In fact, there are many wonderful games for children and teens. It is increasingly important for parents to carefully review the games their children are playing online today. Some are not always what they appear to be on the package.

Wikipedia has a very interesting article about the criticism and commentary on violence and hidden content in some popular games. Visit their page on the [Entertainment Software Rating Board](#) and scroll to the bottom half.

which is listed as the "parents' guide to video games". For example, you can look up information about popular online games such as:

- a) [Runescape](#)
- b) [World of Warcraft](#)

4. Understand the game rating system from the [Entertainment Software Rating Board](#). They also produce a handout for parents (in pdf format) titled [A Parents' Guide to Video Games, Parental Controls, and Online Safety](#). It contains helpful information on how to set up parental controls on most popular online gaming systems such as the Wii, XBox 360, Playstation 3 and others.

5. The Child Development Institute also [explains the ESRB rating system](#). They also offer an article on the [appropriateness of video game content](#).

You'll notice that several popular games, played by children as young as

As always, we welcome your comments. Our telephone number for Children Online is 413-214-1225.

Best wishes,
Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman

Please contact Marje or Doug at marjem@childrenonline.org or dougf@childrenonline.org for further information on our consulting services.

Online Games and Gaming

An increasing number of children and teens are playing games online. These games can be as simple as an Elmo puzzle on PBS.Kids or as complicated as World of Warcraft or Call of Duty for teens. Some games are free, others downloaded for a fee and others cost on a play-by play basis such as online poker. Most games today, even the most simple games such as Tic-Tac-Toe, have chat capability giving playing games an interactive and live format. Today's children and adolescents can sit alone in bedrooms, dens or schools playing games and still feel connected to others through their live game playing. Games today are adventurous, stimulating, mentally challenging, time absorbing and socially fun. While this can be great for kids, parents need to be aware of the addictive qualities of gaming and the risks of bullying and harassment found through the chat windows connected to the games.

Very popular MMORPG's (Massive Multi Player Online Role Playing Games) such as Call of Duty or World of Warcraft allow children and teens to spend hours in interactive play creating worlds, fantasies and communities through their play. Players can become absorbed in games and personas and play for hours, often missing family events, schoolwork or sleep. The interactive nature of the games offer the chance to "chat" with other users and gives kids the ability to become invested in a community of players. Renting a video for example might be entertaining, but renting or buying a game can be life transforming. Relationships are made, communities are created, and a feeling of connection and pride are cemented simply by playing the game in a community of online gamers.

9 and 10, are rated "M" for mature audiences (over the age of 17). These include:

- Call of Duty 4
- Halo
- Doom (all series)
- Gears of War
- Mortal Combat

6. The National Institute on Media and the Family have a [Fact Sheet on the effects of video game playing on children](#).

7. Parental Controls can be turned on within a number of gaming systems:

- [Nintendo's Wii](#)
 - [Windows Vista](#)
 - [XBox 360/Live](#)
 - [Playstation 3](#)
- and an article from [Families.com on setting Playstation 3 parental controls and other systems](#).

About Children Online

Children Online offers innovative and comprehensive workshops on Internet safety and online education to students, parents, faculty and administrators. Our approach, unique in the field of Internet safety, combines a

Go to a typical gaming site aimed at children or teens and it is only moments before users are exposed to harassing, mean or at times threatening language. Due to the large-scale public format of games, users may receive very inappropriate comments after their play. While some of the sites may be moderated (usually by software), kids know that substituting a character such a * or \$ passes the test. For example Sh!t may pass right by sensors.

An often overlooked, but very real problem for children and teens is the prevalence of marketing scams and tricks found on gaming sites. Directly targeting the vulnerability of children and teens, ads and marketing scams litter the sites asking kids to supply personal information in exchange for a free ipod or ringtones. These scams are very tricky and often hard to understand. An ad, for example, asking for a cell phone number in exchange for ringtones, might actually be charging \$9.99 with the input of the cell phone number. Unsuspecting kids and teens can become easily tricked and scammed on these sites.

Did You Know:

Â· Children aged 9-11 use gaming sites more frequently than teens. (According to our research)

Â· Some chat components on gaming sites can be turned off by parents and nearly all can be disabled using Parental Control Software.

Â· Boys tend to spend more time in gaming sites than girls. However, the numbers of girls in gaming sites has grown recently with sites such as Club Penguin, Barbie.com or Stardoll.com.

Â· There are currently no laws or regulations in place on gaming sites online, which makes children and teens even more vulnerable to scams.

Â· Parental control Software products can help parents limit and monitor their child's game playing online.

Our Recommendations:

Â· Children younger than 11 should not have access to live chatting options associated with gaming sites. For example,

thorough understanding of Internet technologies, child development and counseling, to focus on the impact of the internet on the social, emotional and language development of young people.

Doug Fodeman and Marje Monroe, experts in technology, counseling and education, work together to provide invaluable research and tools for parents and schools with practical real-life solutions to the issues faced by young people online. Since 1997, Marje and Doug have spoken to thousands of students, teachers and parents. They have several publications in the area of Internet safety and offer a free online newsletter. More detailed information can be found at ChildrenOnline.org.

do not allow chatting on Webkinz, Club Penguin, MMORPG's or other live games.

Children 10 and younger are not developmentally ready to handle the inappropriate language used in gaming sites, even very "safe" looking sites. In addition, these gaming sites often are filled with harassing or mean language.

Â· Do not allow children or teens to download games from the Internet without parental permission. Many "free" games contains spyware or adware such as GameVance.com.

Â· Be careful to screen games bought or played online. Many games are very violent and contain inappropriate material. We recommend parents view the games before children play them. Some parents who review games have found them to contain more violent graphic images than the games admit to having.

Â· Ensure privacy by advising your children to avoid marketing tricks and ads asking for personal information on gaming sites.

Â· Set rules for your home including time spent gaming, being kind and respectful in the sites, never giving out personal information, and asking for permission before downloading or purchasing anything online.

Â· Encourage your child to talk to you about meanness online or times when they feel scared or uncomfortable from something they experience online.

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