

Crockerton C of E Primary School

Safeguarding Newsletter 4: Gaming

March '24

Crockerton C of E Primary School is committed to providing a caring, friendly, safe and Christian environment for all our pupils so that they can learn in an atmosphere of mutual respect and co-operation.

Crockerton School prioritises safeguarding and the promotion of the welfare of children and young people. We ensure that all our recruitment and employment practices reflect this commitment. The safety and wellbeing of every child in the care of Crockerton School is our absolute priority. We expect all of our staff, pupils, parents, governors, visitors, contractors and third-party professionals to share this view. The safeguarding and protection of children is everyone's responsibility.

3 ways to make gaming safer for your child

- 1. Talk with your child about gaming.** Talk with your child to learn the games they like and the content and features of these. This will help you to understand more about how your child plays games and how appropriate different games are. You can use [NSPCC's online safety hub](#) to find out more information on safer gaming.
- 2. Learn together.** Use our resources to teach your child about safer gaming at all ages. For primary age children you can use our [Jessie & Friends](#) (ages 4-7) and [Play, Like, Share](#) (ages 8-10) resources.
- 3. Set boundaries and safety settings.** [Internet Matters](#) provides step-by-step [guides](#) for putting safety settings in place for each console or device. Spend time setting these up with your child and make sure they know how to block and report on the games they are playing. You should also talk with your child to create an agreement for gaming; think about how much time they can spend, which games they can access, if you will allow in-app purchases and what spaces they can play in. For primary aged children it is advisable to have them play in shared spaces or in the same room as you.

How risky is in-game chat?

Gaming is often a social activity for children and talking with friends is part of their enjoyment. However, in-game chat can pose risks such as:

- **chatting with people they don't know.** This can include adults that are seeking to make contact with children with the intention of [sexual grooming](#).
- **inappropriate or unmoderated chat.** Whilst a lot of chat is moderated, chat is live and there is a risk of exposure to sexual language, swearing or bullying.
- **requests to make chat private.** Once chat is moved off a monitored platform, no one is moderating it. This can be used to pressurise children into sharing personal information, photos, video or chat that they don't want to.
- **offering gifts or trades.** This may be used by offenders to build trust and a relationship with a child, as part of grooming.

Learn more about in-game chat and what you can do to make it safer by reading our [parents and carers guide to in-game chat](#).

How do I know what games are age appropriate for my child?

The article on [what's appropriate for your child](#) will help you to understand more about the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) age rating system, which helps parents and carers to make informed decisions around games, giving age ratings and content descriptors.

Meet the Designated Safeguarding Team:

The Safeguarding Team oversee and coordinate all aspects of the school's work to ensure that children are kept safe. They regularly attend training to ensure their skills and knowledge are up-to-date.

Designated Safeguarding Lead:

Mrs Nic Ilic

Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead:

Mrs Kate Woodley

School Safeguarding Governor:

Mr Nick Martin

Mental Health Lead:

Miss Charlotte Sides

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Gov:

Mr Tony South

All can be contacted via the office
01985 212168

If you have significant safeguarding concerns about someone who is working or volunteering with children and young people, call 0300 456 0108 and ask to speak to the Designated Officer for Allegations (DOFA) for advice, or email dofaservice@wiltshire.gov.uk Or 0300 456 0100 - Out of hours service

<https://crockertonprimary.eschools.co.uk/web/safeguarding-information/631650>

Our Web of Support



[On-Line Safety Policy](#)

<https://www.familygamingdatabase.com/>

<https://nationalcollege.com/categories/online-safety> At the bottom of this page there is a parents and carers section.



Minecraft is played by millions of children around the world, who use their imaginations to build three-dimensional worlds with virtual building blocks in a digital, pixelated landscape. It is classed as a 'sandbox game,' which means players have the freedom to build their own creations with 'blocks' they collect and also have the opportunity to explore other people's creations with their characters. Players can choose from thousands of different 'servers' to join, which are created by other players, making every experience of Minecraft unique.

Minecraft has approximately **74m** users each month



What parents need to know about **MINECRAFT**

GROOMING

As the majority of users who play Minecraft are children, this makes it an 'appealing' gateway for groomers. It has been reported that some users have created worlds in Minecraft to lure young people into a conversation to ask for explicit photos. There have even been more serious cases in which children have been persuaded to meet these people in real life.

CYBERBULLYING & GRIEFING

In multiplayer mode there is a live chat feature which allows players to talk to other players through text. This chat functionality includes basic filtering to block out external links and offensive language being shared, but varies between each server. Griefing is when someone purposely upsets another player during the game. This can be done by ruining somebody's creation or generally doing something to spoil gameplay for another. Essentially, 'Griefing' is a form of cyberbullying and can be extremely frustrating for players.

COMMUNICATING WITH STRANGERS

Minecraft incorporates thousands of servers to choose from which are a single world or place created by the public and allow users to play the game online or via a local area network with others. No two servers are the same and each has its own individual plug-ins which are controlled by the creator. This means that some servers will allow communication with strangers.

VIRUSES & MALWARE FROM MODS

There are several websites that offer downloadable 'mods' which modify gameplay in a number of ways. Most of the mods will be safe to use, but as they have been created by the public, they will often contain viruses that can infect your child's device and potentially try and find personal information about you or your child.

AGE RESTRICTION & 'FANTASY VIOLENCE'

According to the 'Entertaining Software Rating Board' (ESRB), Minecraft is suitable for users aged 10+. Due to its 'Fantasy Violence,' the ESRB states that this rating has been given as 'players can engage in violent acts such as setting animals on fire and harming them with weapons. Mild explosions are occasionally heard as players use dynamite to fend off creatures and mine the environment.'

CHILDREN MAY BECOME ADDICTED

As with other games, Minecraft is a game where players can keep returning with constant challenges and personal goals to achieve. Children may find it difficult to know when to stop playing, becoming absorbed in the game and losing track of time.



National Online Safety

Top Tips for Parents

DISABLE OR MODERATE CHAT

To avoid potentially inappropriate comments in a live chat, you can follow these steps to turn live chat off: 1. Select 'Options' 2. Toggle the Chat button to 'Hidden' or 'Commands Only'. Bear in mind that the chat feature is also where your child can enter commands during the game, so this may restrict their game play.

MONITOR YOUTUBE TUTORIALS

Many Minecraft users turn to 'YouTube' for video tips on improving their game play and discovering new techniques. Although many videos are age-appropriate, some include sexual references and bad language. We suggest watching Minecraft tutorial videos together with your child. If your child is under the age of 13, we suggest installing 'YouTube Kids' which provides a safer platform for children to safely find the content they want.



SCAN 'MODS' FOR MALWARE

Minecraft 'mods' add content to games to give extra options to interact and change the way the game looks and feels. However, although 'mods' can bring fun for a child, it's important to consider that downloading and installing 'mods' could potentially infect their device with a virus or malware. In 2017, security company Symantec stated that between 600,000 and 2.5 million Minecraft players had installed dodgy apps, which hijacked player's devices and used them to power an advertising botnet. Install a malware scanner on every device that your child plays Minecraft on and make sure it's regularly kept up-to-date.

PLAY IN 'CREATIVE' OR 'PEACEFUL' MODE

Even though the age limit is 10+, Minecraft can be quite overwhelming at times, especially for younger players or SEND children. We suggest restricting your child to play in 'creative mode' or 'peaceful mode' which takes away the survival element and removes the 'scarier' monster/zombie characters.

SET TIME LIMITS

With 'Gaming Disorder' becoming an official health condition, we suggest setting a reasonable time limit when playing Minecraft. Parents can use parental controls on devices to limit the time a child plays games. It is worth having a conversation with your child to understand which 'mode' they are playing the game. This may help you decide on the amount of time you would like them to play. For example, a mini game will have an 'end,' but this will depend on how long the game creator has made the game last. In 'survival mode,' the game has no end as there is no goal to be achieved other than the child's own e.g. after they have built something.

CHOOSE SERVERS CAREFULLY

To protect your child from engaging in conversation with strangers, advise them to only enter servers with people they know and trust. Your child can also create their own multiplayer server and share this with their friends, which is safer and more controlled than joining a stranger's server.

Sources:

<https://minecraft.net/en-us/help/faq/multiplayer-server-safety>
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THIS IS AN INDEPENDENT ONLINE SAFETY GUIDE AND IS NOT AN OFFICIAL MINECRAFT PRODUCT. THIS GUIDE HAS NOT BEEN APPROVED BY NOR IS IT ASSOCIATED WITH MOJANG

<https://www.familygamingdatabase.com/>

<https://nationalcollege.com/categories/online-safety> At the bottom of this page there is a parents and carers section.

At National Online Safety we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one platform of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.



There's a very good chance you've heard of Fortnite, but what exactly is it? And why is it so popular amongst young people? Fortnite is an online multiplayer "battle royale" game developed by Epic Games, and is playable on Playstation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, PC and mobiles. It gained popularity in late 2017 and has since become the biggest game in the world, thanks to its rapid and engaging gameplay. As with most games, Fortnite itself is a highly enjoyable and safe experience, but it pays to be vigilant, as the safety is not water tight.



BATTLE ROYALE

Battle Royale games have become very popular over the last couple of years, and most tend to follow a very similar setup. Taking Fortnite as an example, 100 players drop into a map, loot buildings for weapons and armour and attempt to beat all the other players to be crowned victor at the end. If you've ever seen the Hunger Games movies, you'll have an idea of what this entails. Each game can take up to 20 minutes (assuming you last to the end) and can be restarted relatively quickly once 100 free players have been found.

IS FORTNITE ADDICTIVE?

Fortnite is at the forefront of gaming addiction discussions because it is so popular with young people. But whether it actually contributes to gaming addiction is up for debate. WHO (World Health Organisation) have classified gaming as a legitimate addiction, but this is not solely a concern with Fortnite. Signs of addiction can include irritability when not playing, lying about the amount of time played and a preoccupation with thoughts of the next gaming session. Realistically, it must be down to parents and carers to recognise these symptoms and act accordingly if they think they are developing.

FREE TO PLAY... OR IS IT?

While Fortnite is technically free to play (in that you can download and play it without paying) it does come with the caveat that spending money on things like skins and emotes in-game is heavily pushed to players. The currency used in-game is called 'V-Bucks' and can be bought with real money through the game's online store. It's worth remembering that these purchases are absolutely not necessary, are cosmetic only and that V-Bucks can be earned in-game with enough play time.

SEASONAL UPDATES

Every 10 weeks or so Fortnite is updated with a new season. This essentially adds new things like skins and emotes to the game, while also sometimes changing up the game map in interesting ways. These seasons are free to everybody and don't require additional money to play, though battle passes for each season can be bought with V-Bucks. A battle pass will typically allow a player to earn experience faster and gain fun in-game items by completing a host of daily challenges.

CROSSPLAY IS AVAILABLE

One of the wonderful things about Fortnite is that it can be played cross-platform. This means that no matter what platform a person plays on (PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One etc) they can play with friends who own the game on a different platform. To do this, an Epic Games account must first be created online (which is free) and then linked with your platform account. Doing this removes the age-old boundary of not being able to play together because you don't have the same console and opens up a whole new world of playing online with friends.

IS FORTNITE VIOLENT?

Fortnite has been rated by the ESRB (Entertainment Software Ratings Board) as teen, as it contains cartoon violence and the weapons and acts depicted in the game are some way removed from their real life inspirations. Characters don't draw blood when shot and instead of dying, they are simply bounced up off the map. Naturally, players younger than the recommended age limit will want to play the game and that should be at the discretion of parents and carers.



Top Tips for Parents

BUYING V-BUCKS

As mentioned, Fortnite does contain in-game purchases and microtransactions in the form of V-Bucks which can be bought with real money. If you do decide to let your young one spend money in the game, be sure to delete your card information afterwards as it can be very easy to purchase more items at the press of a few buttons. It's important to set a limit on any purchases (as mentioned they are absolutely not necessary to play the game) and a suggestion would be capping the spending at around £50 - this is the normal retail price of a game.

GAMING WITH STRANGERS

Fortnite Battle Royale is an online game, and as such, there is a chance that young children could come into contact with strangers who are randomly placed into their groups in a game. It's difficult to predict what another person might say or do in a game, so it's a good idea for friends playing together, to be grouped together. The only real countermeasure to interacting with strangers offered by Fortnite is to turn off all mic communications, which can be done in the game's settings. Using outside chat apps, like Skype or Discord while playing, is a great way to make sure you know who you're talking to and that nobody else is listening in.

LIMIT TIME, BUT BE FLEXIBLE

A game of Fortnite can last up to 20 minutes, so be flexible when it's time to put it away. The approach of 'one more game' as opposed to '10 more minutes' will stop any complaints that a match is still ongoing. Better still, play with your child and take it in turns; that way you're helping control the time played and can keep an eye on what they're experiencing.

TALK TO OTHER PARENTS / CARERS

If you're concerned about play time or spending money in the game, talk to other parents and carers of your child's friends. If you approach as a collective, it will be easier to know when their friends are online and you don't have to worry about who they're playing with. It can also help curb expectations on spending money on battle passes and skins if you stick together.

CAN DEVELOP SOME IMPORTANT SKILLS

It's often overlooked just how good gaming can be for young people. Fortnite encourages team play, quick and complex problem solving and communication; that's not to mention the lightning fast reflexes gamers can develop. While taking breaks to do other activities is of course important, there are benefits to screen time which might not be immediately obvious.

PLAY THE GAME YOURSELF

There's no substitute for sitting down and playing the game yourself to learn all about it. Fortnite is available for free on almost anything you can imagine, even your smartphone, so there's never been a better time to get involved and see what all the fuss is about. You never know, you might even be able to impress your children when you show them your impressive Victory Royale tally!

Meet our expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGBible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.

#1 VICTORY ROYALE

<https://www.theguardian.com/games/2017/09/07/fortnite-battle-royale-parents-guide-to-the-game-and-battle-royale-shooter>, <https://www.psychguides.com/behavioral-disorders/idea-games-addiction/>, <https://www.polygon.com/2018/3/23/17468440/cross-platform-crossplay-ps4-xbox-pc-switch-for-mobile-enable-friends-compatible-real-time-log770E76>, <https://www.esrb.org/ratings/349467/article/>