

Gaming or Gambling: Top Tips

Get to know your child's favourite game

Which games are safe for your child to play and which expose them to gambling risks? It can be hard to work out.

There is currently no consistent way for parents or players to easily know which games have gambling-like features in them.

Parents can check the type of content that games contain by looking up the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) age-rating system. They can also see whether or not in-game purchasing is available - but gambling-like features are not explicitly highlighted.

This means it is especially important for you to take some time to read up on the games your child enjoys playing and find out what they're seeing.

Many games, like the popular battle-royale game Fortnite, or Candy Crush, appear harmless, with their goofy characters and cartoonish settings, but they may still offer players loot boxes — and many people are concerned that these are introducing children to gambling. By getting to know the games your child plays, you'll be more aware of the potential risks and what controls and support may be in place so that you can take steps to ensure that they stay safer.

Parent Zone has a range of [free Parent Guides](#) with advice on how to keep children safer while playing popular games which include gambling like Fortnite or Apex Legends.

Involve yourself in the buying process

Surrounded by offers for stylish skins and cool new weapons, there's always the chance children might give in to the temptation of cracking open a loot box — or simply click the wrong button and buy something by mistake!

Most platforms require you to have a credit card registered. If possible it can be helpful to not store credit card on the device/service. If it is required then look for additional features like notifications when purchases are made and restrictions on who can make purchases. This way your child knows they'll have to go through you if they want to buy something.

Bear in mind that sometimes the gaming console, PC or mobile phone save your card details after you've used it to make a purchase — in which case you'll have to manually disconnect it. Remember too, that if you haven't adjusted the parental controls, your child can spend in-game using prepaid cards or vouchers, so emphasising that they need to ask before buying anything is really important.

Get to know parental controls on your child's gaming console/PC

Most gaming platforms offer parents a range of different settings to help their child stay safer while playing. Bear in mind that these don't eliminate risk or guarantee that your child is protected from gambling harm. The settings vary depending on the console your child plays on but here's a quick breakdown of useful functions on the most popular consoles:

PlayStation 4: From the **Settings** tab on the main toolbar, click **Parental Controls** to access the different options. You can either restrict features for all users on the console or you can create a sub-user for your child so that the restrictions will only apply to their account. Then you will be able to, for example, create a **Monthly Spending Limit** or turn off in-game purchases all together.

Xbox One: To enable parental controls on the Xbox One you will have to create a user for yourself and one for your child. Then, go to the **Settings** menu under **Your Apps and Games**, click **Add to family** and you will be able to limit what content your child is allowed to buy or even turn off in-game purchases by allowing them to download only free content.

Nintendo Switch: From the **Home Screen**, click **System Settings** on the toolbar at the bottom, select your child's account and scroll down until you see the **Nintendo eShop Settings**. You can then set a password which must be entered if your child wants to download anything from the eShop.

PC: Unfortunately, setting up parental controls on PC is not as clear-cut as on consoles. You can enable parental controls on specific gaming services, like Steam or Origin, but this will have to be done individually for each service. Steam has what it calls [Family View](#) which limits what your child can access on the Steam Store. Similarly, Origin lets you set up a [child account](#) that will prevent them from spending any money in games.

Explain the risks of gambling

Although parental controls and safety settings can help reduce the chance of your child getting into trouble, it's a good idea to help children reflect on what they're doing so that they can build their resilience.

Encouraging [digital resilience](#) is a more effective way to help your child stay safer when they go online. The four key aspects of digital resilience include *understanding* when they may be at risk online, *knowing* what to do to seek help, *learning* from their experiences and *recovering* when things go wrong.

If you do decide to enable parental controls, it's a good idea to make it clear that you're doing this to help them stay safer and have more enjoyable online experiences.

Gambling-like features can appear in games that are thought of as harmless entertainment, and it could normalise the behaviour for children. This could potentially lead to harmful habits or even, because of the way the reward systems work in these games, addiction.

Talk to them about the similarities of these in-game features to other forms of gambling and the potential harmful effects.

Sometimes, the items children want can only be acquired through loot boxes which can lead to them feeling frustrated. This may drive them to want to make purchases. Remind your child that whilst it can be exciting to buy mystery boxes in games, there's no guarantee they'll get the items they want. They might end up disappointed if the items are worth less than what they paid.

When your child knows that you're taking an interest in what they get up to online, they're more likely to come to you if they're worried about something or if they come across any problems.

Be aware of the signs of gambling-like behaviour

Parents know their child better than anyone so you are in a good position to keep a close eye on any changes in their behaviour. Although these signs may not necessarily mean they have a problem with gambling-like behaviour - they can help you know when to seek further support for you and your child.

Of course, many of these signs are common to other problems. What's important is to be alert to them and recognise that gambling-like behaviour could be the issue. It is helpful to know what to look out for and when you may need to seek further support and guidance.

- Your child may seem more withdrawn than usual and seem irritable and anxious
- They may seem tired and have trouble sleeping
- They may seem anxious or annoyed if you ask them about any regular spending they have made on in-game purchases, that you weren't previously aware of
- You may notice regular transactions for in-game purchases

Want to speak to someone about gambling?

If you are looking for help, advice or support in relation to your or someone else's gambling, please go to [BeGambleAware.org](https://www.begambleaware.org) or contact the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133.

Find out more about Gaming or Gambling at parentzone.org.uk/gaming-or-gambling