

Next level: Empowering your teen to game safely



As the parent of a teenager, you may feel like your child inhabits two distinct worlds: the offline realm where you spend time with them, and the online gaming universe that they immerse themselves in.

However, it's crucial to understand that these worlds are not separate, and establishing expectations for online behaviour is just as vital as offline guidance.

The reality of teenage gaming

Recent research conducted by the [eSafety Commission](#) reveals that 81% of Australian children aged 8-17 have played online games, with half of them interacting with individuals they haven't met in real life.

There are various types of games your teen might be interacting with, including role-playing games like *The Legend of Zelda* and battle royale games like *Fortnite*. Additionally, educational games like *Education Perfect* and *Prodigy* are increasingly being used in schools and as part of homework assignments to make learning more engaging.

Determining suitability

Before granting permission for your teenager to play a game, it's essential to conduct research using resources like the [eSafety Guide](#) to understand its purpose and the [Australian Classifications Guide](#) to check its rating.

Encourage your teenager to also engage in their

own research on these classifications, fostering discussions about why certain games are more appropriate than others.

Older, wiser, and more responsible

As your teenager grows older, it's natural for them to seek more autonomy and responsibility. Collaborate with them to establish rules and expectations regarding gaming within your family. For example, negotiate the types of games they can play at different times, considering factors such as bedtime and the potential impact on sleep quality and energy levels the next day.

Prioritising online safety

Privacy is a critical aspect to consider when participating in multiplayer games. Emphasise the importance of choosing usernames that do not reveal personal information and encourage your teenager to remain vigilant regarding any attempts to solicit personal details.

The gaming environment is only as safe and friendly as the people in it. Teach your teen how to report inappropriate content within the gaming platform and how to block users if necessary.

Staying safe while playing games online is often a priority for teens because they know they can have more fun when they're safe. Our [Gamers Guide](#) has advice from teens about how and why to do this and is a great resource to help you build an understanding of the gaming landscape.

Play the game

In this digital age, where gaming has become a significant part of teen culture, finding common ground can be the key to fostering a deeper connection. While teenagers may initially resist the idea of gaming with their parents, approaching it with the right attitude can make it a rewarding experience for both parties.

Initiating conversations with your teenager about their gaming world requires a delicate balance of respect and genuine interest. Instead of imposing your presence, express curiosity about the games they enjoy. Ask questions like, "I've heard a lot about this game you're playing. Can you show me what it's all about?" or "How did you finally make it past that last hard level?" Acknowledging their expertise and allowing them to be the guide can be a powerful way to break down resistance.

Consider proposing joint gaming sessions as a fun and laid-back bonding activity. Suggest playing co-op games where teamwork is essential, turning it into a shared challenge that strengthens your connection. Be open to learning from your teenager, acknowledging their skills, and perhaps even letting them teach you a thing or two. This not only empowers them but also sets the stage for a more collaborative and understanding relationship.

Why is this worth the effort? Shared gaming experiences provide a unique avenue for communication and shared enjoyment. It allows you to peek into their world, understand their interests, and participate in an activity that brings them joy. Moreover, it's an opportunity to model healthy digital habits and, in the process, foster a stronger parent-teen bond. By bridging the generation gap through gaming, you're not just sharing a hobby – you're creating lasting memories and reinforcing the idea that, no matter the age difference, connection and understanding can be found in the most unexpected places.

Be a kind human

The behaviour that your teen shows online is going to say a lot about what they value. In the heat of the moment, like in a particularly intense part of game play, emotions can run high – but that doesn't have to be a reason to react negatively if something doesn't go to plan.

Encourage your teen to call out negative behaviour and celebrate with them when they play a part in contributing to positive interactions. They might act like it's a bit daggy, but positive reinforcement is always going to feel good.

Key takeaways:

1. **Research and discuss:** Before allowing your teenager to play a game, research its purpose and rating together. Encourage them to be involved in the decision-making process and have conversations about game preferences and suitability.
2. **Foster responsibility:** As your teenager grows older, involve them in establishing rules and expectations for gaming within your family. Negotiate the types of games to play at different times, considering factors such as bedtime and their ability to switch off appropriately.
3. **Prioritise online safety:** Teach your teenager about privacy settings, the importance of using non-identifying usernames, and the need to remain vigilant against potential attempts to solicit personal information. Empower them to report inappropriate content and block users if necessary.
4. **Promote positive interactions:** Encourage your teenager to contribute positively to the gaming community while also calling out negative behaviour. Emphasise the significance of creating a safe and friendly environment for everyone through their actions and words.
5. **Integration of online and offline guidance:** Recognise that the online gaming world is

Telstra tech talk

Scammers target gamers of all ages and across all platforms in a bid to steal valuable virtual items like in-game currency and character accessories. They also attempt to take over accounts and may target popular players who stream their gaming online.

Thankfully, these essential defences are free and easy:

- *OPSEC is not just for spies.* Operational security is a big word for a simple concept; outsmart your adversary by cleaning up clues. This applies everywhere online and has additional gravity in gaming; teens may trash talk in-game and stream their gaming on services like Twitch. Both can make them a target of reprisals or random acts of cyber attack. Ask your teen to avoid linking their real identity to their gaming profile or be very mindful of being kind if they choose to be known publicly. Gaming can be more spiteful above other areas of online interaction, especially given the open anarchy of game chat, so it is crucial your teen thinks about the consequences of their actions. Identities that are common on multiple profiles can be traced so a unique gamer name is key to maintaining good OPSEC.
- *Password managers help.* These set, store, and recall passwords so you don't have to. Free managers are built into most phones including iPhone, Samsung, and Pixel, along with web browsers, and are widely-trusted by security experts. Paid options allow for family password management.
- *Every account needs a new password.* Reusing passwords is very dangerous, so ensure your kids use their managers to set new combinations whenever they register gaming accounts or set up new consoles. If they would rather write them down, use a passphrase which is a combination of three or four words in a unique sentence. There's no need for random letters and numbers – just type a regular sentence with spaces and capitals in the usual spots.
- *Multi-factor authentication is a deadbolt for accounts.* It's a complex name for a simple process that will send almost all hackers packing. It validates by way of a code or phone notification that your child is the person trying to log in, and not a hacker with their stolen password. Set it up for gaming and all other important accounts. Some gaming companies even reward players for doing this with free stuff!

