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Fortnite Online Gaming Concerns

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Fortnite - online gaming concerns

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are aware that many of our pupils, from as young as P1, are taking part in the **12 rated** online game called **Fortnite**. While it is not automatically dangerous, it does carry some risks and as a school we are beginning to experience some of the side effects of a very exciting but potentially compulsive game. These include some children role playing and creating weapons to act out the game scenarios. This has led to more physical and aggressive play in and out of the classroom and children distracted and distracting others from class activities with talk about playing the game.

The multiplayer action survival game, Fortnite: Battle Royale, has received a lot of media coverage recently due to growing popularity amongst children – and also **emerging safety concerns**. We've pulled together some information about the game and how to keep your children safe while playing it.

What do you need to know?

The game has been classified as a **12 and is therefore deemed unsuitable for younger children** due to 'mild violence'. If a head set is added the classification rises to 13 due to the chat function that is enabled. When setting up and creating an account the child is not asked to provide their age, so younger children can still log on easily!

Players can currently play Fortnite: Battle Royale on a PC, Mac, Xbox, PlayStation, IOS and Android. Use of the game has grown rapidly amongst children and young people since the launch of the mobile game in March 2018. The game involves 100 players fighting each other in real time to be the final survivor.

What are the concerns?

You may have seen news reports or heard concerns raised about:

- **Communication between players**: a chat function allows players to talk to each other either over a headset and microphone, or using messaging. Children could use it to **speak to strangers which significantly increases the risk of online grooming,** or it could put them at risk of cyberbullying
- **In-app purchases**: players can build up large bills on their parents' accounts by buying cosmetic items like outfits for your character and better-looking weapons (otherwise known as 'skins')
- **Addictive nature of the game**: anecdotal stories tell of children staying up all night to play, or falling asleep in lessons after playing for too long. Some commentators attribute this to the communal feel of the game – you can play with your friends – and the game is different every time you play, keeping it fresh

What safety options are available to parents?

Use the parental controls on the gaming device.

Most devices allow you to **set time limits** on game play, **set age limits** for content, and **restrict in-app purchases.**

Visit the website 'ask about games' for links to detailed instructions on the device your child uses – the site covers Playstation 3, Playstation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, Apple and Android phones, and Nintendo Switch. www.askaboutgames.com/advice/parental-controls

The battles in Fortnite last around 20 minutes. When trying to limit your child's screen time, make the most of this natural stopping point. Set a limit in terms of matches rather than hours and minutes, or set time limits in 20 minute increments.

Turn off the voice chat feature

Speak to your child to make sure they know this feature exists, and encourage them to use the options below if they encounter someone who is offensive or inappropriate.

You can disable the voice chat function in the game if you:

- Open the settings menu (the 3 lines on the right-hand-side of the screen), then
- choose the 'cog' icon
- Select the 'audio' tab
- You should be able to turn off 'voice chat' by tapping the arrows next to it.

You can also 'mute' individual players in the game by:

- Pausing the game
- Hovering over the player you wish to mute
- Selecting the mute button (a loudspeaker icon)

Make sure your child knows how to report inappropriate behaviour.

You or your child can report players who make them uncomfortable using the in-game feedback tool (located in the main menu).

You can also use the 'support' section of the Epic Games website (the makers of Fortnite). You're asked to select the platform you play the game on, the game mode you're playing, and then you can select 'report player'. You can provide more detail such as the player's name, and attach a screenshot.

Support, Epic Games https://fortnitehelp.epicgames.com/customer/portal/emails/new?b_id=9729&q=email+us

What else can I do?

Further tips

- Download and play the game to help you understand it
- Talk to your child about what they're doing online, and make sure they know they can talk to you about anything that has upset them
- Check your bank statements and gaming system account balance regularly to look for in-app purchases you're not happy with, and to make sure your child isn't getting around any passwords you've set up

More sources of support

• Non-profit organisation Internet Matters has put together 5 top tips to manage children's screen time. https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/guidance/5-top-tips-to-manage-childrens-screentime/

 • The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has a range of resources for parents on internet safety. https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/

 • The NSPCC has also teamed up with O2 to offer advice to parents. You can call their free helpline on 0808 800 5002, or make an appointment with an O2 Guru in an O2 store. https://guru.secure.force.com/O2DeskStoreLocator

The link to the NSPCC Fortnite site is https://www.net-aware.org.uk/news/fortnite-all-you-need-know/?

Computer and online games clearly have their entertainment and education value, and I'm not suggesting that children don't play them at all; however, the adage 'Everything in moderation' comes to mind! My purpose with this letter and fact sheet is to support and help equip you with the information you need to set safe and balanced boundaries for your children as they have not fully developed the ability to regulate their own behaviour and time spent gaming. I want to minimise the negative effects that spending an excessive amount of time on some of these games can have on our children's learning. If you'd like to discuss this further, please get in touch with me at the school.

Yours sincerely

Mark Taylor
Head Teacher