



Helping Parents Protect Kids

A Family Guide to Video Games



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Overview

As leaders in our respective fields, Microsoft®, Best Buy™ and Boys & Girls Clubs of America are committed to helping provide a safe, secure environment where consumers can enjoy the full benefits of interactive entertainment. We are striving to provide parents with accurate, complete information to help make appropriate decisions in raising their children.

As a continuation of our commitment to partnering with parents and caregivers, we are providing this quick, easy-to-read brochure to provide more information about the world of computer and video games, Microsoft's parental controls for the Xbox 360™ called Family Settings, and additional resources to help parents and caregivers make the choices that are right for their families.

It's our hope that parents and caregivers will use this information and pass it along to others who may be interested and can benefit from it.

How Computer and Video Games are Rated

Before all else, it is helpful to know that computer and video games are rated by an independent, self-regulatory body called the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). This organization assigns ratings, enforces advertising guidelines, and helps ensure responsible online privacy practice for the video game industry. To get a game certified with an ESRB rating, prior to a game being released to the public, game publishers submit responses to a detailed written ESRB questionnaire (often supplementing such responses with lyric sheets, scripts, etc.), specifying exactly what pertinent content will be in the game. Along with the written submission materials, publishers must provide a videotape capturing all pertinent content, including the most extreme instances, across all relevant categories including but not limited to violence, language, sex, controlled substances and gambling. Pertinent content that is not playable, but will exist in the game code on the final game disc, must also be disclosed.

Once the submission is checked by ESRB for completeness, which may also involve ESRB staff members playing a beta or alpha version of the game, the video footage is independently reviewed by at least three (and oftentimes more) specially trained game raters who are recruited from one of the most culturally diverse populations in the world – the New York metropolitan area. These raters are all adults and typically have experience with children, whether through their profession, education or by being parents or caregivers themselves.

Upon reviewing the video, the raters use their own judgment to recommend appropriate rating categories and content descriptors for the specific scenes and depictions reviewed and the game overall. ESRB staff checks the raters' recommendations for consensus, conducts a parity examination where appropriate to maintain consistency in rating assignments, and issues a certificate with the official rating assignment to the game publisher. The publisher may either accept the rating as final or revise the game's content and resubmit the game to the ESRB, at which time the process starts anew. Publishers also have the ability to appeal an ESRB rating assignment to an Appeals Board, which is made up of publishers, retailers and other professionals.

When the game is ready for release to the public, publishers send copies of the final product to the ESRB. The game packaging is reviewed to make sure the rating information is displayed accurately and in accordance with ESRB requirements. Additionally, ESRB's in-house game experts play the final version of both randomly selected and hand-picked games to verify that all the materials provided by the game's publisher during the rating process were accurate and complete.

Digital IQ Quiz

How much do you know about the games your kids are playing? Many parents and caregivers who are new to digital entertainment are often intimidated by the technology or are unaware of what they need to know to ensure their children are enjoying games responsibly and safely.

Take this fun quiz and learn about the interactive entertainment world that is such a big part of children's world.

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

What is a console?

- A. Something you do when someone you love gets owned in a Halo® match.
- B. The computer system that video games are played on. We may be biased, but the best console systems are the Xbox® and Xbox 360.
- C. A flat fish that has both eyes on one side of its head and likes to scam people.

What is the difference between computer games and video games?

- A. The main difference is that computer games are only playable on a PC. Video games are only playable on consoles. Really, don't put a PC game in your Xbox. It'll just spin and won't do anything.
- B. Computer games are video games you play on a computer, rather than on a console or at the mall.
- C. Both of the above.

What is a sandbox game?

- A. A game that's so bad, your cat tries to bury it in the sandbox.
- B. A game where you're free to explore anywhere you want, and you're not tied down by the plot or specific missions.
- C. A video game designed exclusively for small children.

What is a browser game?

- A. A thrilling role-playing game where you play a bookstore customer looking for something to read.
- B. A game played on a webpage.
- C. Short, playable versions of computer and video games that users play before purchasing them.

What is Xbox Live®?

- A. A subscription-based online service for the Xbox and Xbox 360 that lets users play video games with or against other Xbox players wherever they are. But, just because your children are playing an Xbox game, doesn't automatically mean they are playing online.
- B. A spectacular new Broadway musical, featuring scenes from some of the most popular favorite games.
- C. A new cable channel where you can watch other people play Xbox.
- D. An experimental new Xbox made of living organic components, cobbled together from vegetable matter and parts of old game systems.

RATINGS

Is there a ratings system for computer and video games?

- A. Yes. An independent board rates games based on age-appropriateness, with brief descriptors detailing why games were given a specific rating.
- B. No. An old Massachusetts law dating back to 1763 states that “the rating of vydeo games be a form of wychcraft.”
- C. No. Seven year olds are mature enough to make their own decisions.

Where can more information about video game ratings be found?

- A. www.esrb.org
- B. www.xbox.com/isyourfamilyset
- C. www.bgca.org
- D. All of the above

Where are the ratings on computer and video games?

- A. In the entertainment section of your local paper.
- B. The rating symbol can be found on the front of the game's package. It suggests the appropriate age range based on the game's content. Content descriptors are found on the back of the box, indicating what may have triggered a rating and/or may be of interest or concern.
- C. You have to ask the store clerk.

Which game rating is appropriate for all ages?

- A. E
- B. E10+
- C. T
- D. M

FAMILY SETTINGS

What are Xbox 360 Family Settings?

- A. Xbox 360 Family Settings are the best way for parents and caregivers to help protect their children by limiting their online interaction to pre-approved individuals.
- B. Password-protected parental controls that help parents and caregivers control which video games are played in their home.
- C. A visible demonstration to Microsoft's commitment to helping parents and caregivers protect their children in the digital world.
- D. All of the above.

Can you play video games with strangers on a console?

- A. Sure, online with an Xbox Live account. However, because many of the other players are strangers, use common sense precautions. Make sure your children know never to give out personal information, and to tell you if someone makes them uncomfortable.
- B. No, not if a parent or caregiver enables Family Settings and limits online interactions to pre-approved individuals.
- C. Both A and B.

What is online game playing?

- A. A common symptom of a troubled online dating relationship.
- B. Online games are computer games most commonly played over the Internet. They can range from simple text games to those incorporating complex graphics, virtual worlds, and thousands of game players at the same time.
- C. Business school jargon for walking on a tightrope.

What is an MMORPG?

- A. A popular treat with mountain hikers. MMORPG is the French acronym for Good Ol' Raisins and Peanuts.
- B. MMORPG stands for Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. It is a computer game played over the Internet in which large numbers of players interact with each other in a virtual world.
- C. The MMORPG is a much sought-after item in Quake 4, the Massive Multi-Ordnance Reactor Plasma Gun, capable of administering a serious beatdown to armies of evil cyborgs.

What is an avatar?

- A. The character who represents you in an online or MMORPG. You can generally determine your avatar's look, so if you're a 6'5" Detroit Lions linebacker, you can play as a 3' dwarf priest. Or vice versa.
- B. In Greek mythology, a terrifying beast that's half-bull, half-pilot.
- C. The main character in the legendary Ultima series of computer RPGs.

So, how did you do? Need to learn more about the world of computer and video games? Visit www.xbox.com/isyourfamilyset.

Correct Answers: B | A | B | B | A | A | D | B | A | D | C | B | B | A

Get Set: A Quick Guide to Using Family Settings

Family Settings are built into every Xbox 360 Microsoft makes. Family Settings are a powerful tool that can help parents and caregivers choose the gaming and entertainment experience that is right for their families. On a basic level, they help limit the types of games and DVDs that can be played or viewed by automatically reading what the game or movie's rating is, as well as online access to Xbox Live.

The Xbox 360 Family Setting also empower parents and caregivers to manage and, if they chose so to block entirely the Xbox Live audio and video communication settings, including content through the Xbox Live Vision camera.

Following are simple instructions on how to set up your Family Settings. For more in-depth directions or for more information on how to control online interactions on Xbox Live, please visit: www.xbox.com/isyourfamilyset.



To control what type of video game ratings can be played on the Xbox 360:

When your Xbox 360 starts, you will be at the initial screen, which is called the Xbox Dashboard or—if you're using the Xbox 360 system for the first time—from the Initial Setup Complete screen.

- 1 Select "Family Settings, Console Controls."
- 2 Select "Game Ratings." The default setting is "Allow All Games."
- 3 Select the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating level you deem appropriate.
- 4 To set a pass code that prevents unauthorized changes to the settings, select "Set Pass Code" from the "Console Controls" screen and follow the on-screen instructions.
- 5 After you've set your code, select "Done" from the Console Controls screen. When prompted, select "Yes" to save changes and put your new settings into effect.

To control what type of movies can be played on the Xbox 360:

- 1 Again, you'll start from main screen, which is called the Xbox Dashboard or—if you're using the Xbox 360 system for the first time—from the Initial Setup Complete screen.
- 2 Select "Family Settings, Console Controls."
- 3 Select DVD Movie Ratings. The default setting is "Allow All DVD Movies."
- 4 Select the rating level you deem appropriate:
- 5 And, again, to set a pass code that prevents unauthorized changes to your settings, select "Set Pass Code" from the Console Controls screen and follow the on-screen instructions.
- 6 After you've set your code, select "Done" from the Console Controls screen. When prompted, select "Yes" to save changes and put your new settings into effect.

Tip:

If these settings need only apply to certain children in your home, provide all other members of your family with the pass code to permit their unrestricted use of the console.

Allowed or Blocked - Xbox Live Controls:

On Xbox Live, Microsoft provides child safety measures to block inappropriate contact and content and limit the ways in which a child's identity and personal information is shared – even when playing online away from home.

Some parents may not want their children to access online games and interaction. Following are simple instructions on how to block access to Xbox Live. However, if your child has access to Xbox Live and you would like more information on how to control who can interact with your child, privacy measures, and how to control accessing online material please visit: www.xbox.com/isyourfamilyset.

To allow or block access to Xbox Live on your Xbox 360 console:

- 1 Start from the System area of the Xbox Dashboard or—if you're using the Xbox 360 system for the first time—from the Initial Setup Complete screen. Select "Family Settings, Console Controls."
- 2 Select "Access to Xbox Live." The default setting is "Allowed."
- 3 Select either "Allowed" or "Blocked." If access is blocked, users will not be able to connect to Xbox Live to play, communicate, or download content.
- 4 To set a pass code that prevents unauthorized changes to your settings, select "Set Pass Code" from the Console Controls screen and follow the on-screen instructions.
- 5 After you've set your code, select "Done" from the Console Controls screen. When prompted, select "Yes" to save changes and put your new settings into effect.

ESRB and MPAA Rating Systems

Understanding of the game and movie rating systems is an important part to using Family Settings effectively. Note that the ESRB ratings have two equal parts: rating symbols (front of box) suggest age appropriateness for the game and content descriptors (back of box) indicate elements in a game that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern. There are over 25 content descriptors (e.g. Comic Mischief, Edutainment, Simulated Gambling). To get a complete understanding of the content in a game, it's important to look at both sides of the box. For more information on the ESRB ratings and content descriptors, please visit <http://www.esrb.org>. Most of you are familiar with the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings, but for more information, please visit <http://www.mpa.org/index.asp>.

ESRB RATINGS



Early Childhood - Titles rated EC (Early Childhood) have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.



Everyone - Titles rated E (Everyone) have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



Everyone 10+ - Titles rated EC (Early Childhood) have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.



Teen - Titles rated T (Teen) have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.



Mature - Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.



Adults Only - Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.



Rating Pending - Titles listed as RP (Rating Pending) have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.)

The ESRB rating icons are registered trademarks of the Entertainment Software Association.

MPAA FILM RATINGS



General Audiences - This is a film which contains nothing in theme, language, nudity and sex, violence, etc. that would, in the view of the Rating Board, be offensive to parents whose younger children view the film.



Parental Guidance Suggested - This is a film which clearly needs to be examined by parents before they let their children attend. The label PG plainly states parents may consider some material unsuitable for their children, but leaves the parent to make the decision.



Parents Strongly Cautioned - A PG-13 film is one which, in the view of the Rating Board, leaps beyond the boundaries of the PG rating, but does not quite fit within the restricted R category.



Restricted - This film definitely contains some adult material. Parents are strongly urged to find out more about this film before they allow their children to accompany them.

The Language of Video Games

If you want to help protect your kids while they play video games, you need to know what they're talking about. Like any other language, the language of computer and video games is constantly evolving.

This brief list will give you an idea of some of the terms used not only by video game developers, but also your kids.

For more information and helpful tools, visit www.xbox.com/isyourfamilyset.

What Types of Games There Are

FPS: First Person Shooter - *This is a computer and video game genre where the player sees the action through the eyes of the main character, virtual reality-style.*

Free-For-All - *A form of multiplayer gameplay where there are no teams, and several players compete against each other to score the most points in a given amount of time, or be the first to reach a predetermined scoring limit. Synonym: FFA.*

Genre - *Categories that games fall into. For example, role-playing games, strategy games, and driving games.*

MMORPG: Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game - *This online game allows hundreds and thousands of users to play a game together.*

RPG: Role Playing Game - *A type of game where the player controls a character, or party of characters, on a lengthy quest. During the course of the game, the character earns experience points for completing tasks or beating opponents in battle, and becomes increasingly powerful.*

RTS: Real-Time Strategy - *a type of game where the player controls an army, and manages natural resources, finances, and troops in order to defeat other armies. Also known as RTS games.*

Simulation Games - *While arguably most games are a simulation of something, simulation games, or "sims" take it a step further, recreating a particular situation in more exacting detail. Flight sims, for example, give the player full control of the plane, down to every switch and gauge. Other types of sims replicate driving a race car, coaching a sports team, running a city, or even dating.*

Zone - *This is for players to describe their way of playing to others, so they can interact with people with similar experience and attitudes. Parents will see a "Zone" listed next to their child's username (not real name) when they are playing (and others will see it when online). The Zones are:*

Recreation - *For gamers who aren't about winning or losing, but that everyone enjoys the game. Kick back, relax, be considerate and have fun.*

Pro - *For those who aren't going to settle for anything less than first place, but still respect the game and competitors.*

Family - *A zone for both parents and kids to enjoy. No mature language, no intimidation, no super-competitive egos. In short, fun for the whole family.*

Underground - *For those not easily intimidated, the Underground is for them. This is for the hardcore gamer that has a high-level of experience.*

What's Found in Many Video Games

AI: Artificial Intelligence - Allows the computer-controlled characters in a game to think, move, and act in a way similar to humans. Many games allow the player to adjust the difficulty level, so the game's AI could range virtually from "caveman" to "Gary Kasparov-beating" levels.

Cheat Code - These are codes that can be used on a video game to change the way the game is played, giving the player unearned advantages. By definition, this is cheating in a game. You might beat the game more easily, but it's less satisfying.

Easter Egg - A hidden item in a game that the developer puts in, often as an inside joke, or to reward the thorough explorer.

Hack - A piece of programming that allows a player to get past anti-cheating or security measures. A hacker is a person who creates or uses a hack.

Lag - What every online gamer hates, lag is when a player's connection to a game server suffers, causing a delay between the player's actions and those actions taking place in the game. Lag can be caused by anything from a lack of bandwidth, to too many connections to the server, to high internet traffic.

Mod - Most computer games can be altered through the use of downloadable modifications, or "mods" for short, which are broadly available on the Internet and can change the content of the game. It is important for parents to be aware that some mods can alter a game in ways that may not be appropriate for younger players and may be inconsistent with the original rating.

Packet Loss - Brief interruptions in gameplay caused by a poor connection to a server. This appears as a slight delay in the action, or if the connection is very unstable, a stuttering effect. Synonym: lag.

Patch - Patches are most common in MMORPGs and online games. Patches allow developers to change gameplay, scenery, add new challenges, and fix compatibility issues after the product is shipped and purchased. Also known as a point release.

Power-Up - This is an item found in a game that gives the player's character added powers, such as greater strength, speed, or the ability to turn into a flying antelope. Powerups usually wear off after a short time, since they give the player an advantage over opponents.

Respawn - In many multiplayer games, if your character dies, it will reappear in a random location, or "respawn." Also, items you collect during the game will often respawn after a set amount of time. Knowing when items will respawn is key to the strategy of most FPS games.

Server - A computer or device on a network that manages network resources. For example, when you want to join a game on Xbox Live, you choose from a list of servers running the game.

Strategy Guide - A book or web document that tells you all you need to know about a game. Strategy guides cover everything from characters, to storyline, to walking you completely through every step of the game. They're useful when you're stuck, though some people avoid strategy guides, preferring to unlock the game's secrets on their own. Synonym: walkthrough.

XP: Experience Points - Experience points. In roleplaying games, the player gains these by defeating enemies or accomplishing key goals. After a certain number of points, the player gains new abilities and grows stronger, a process known as "leveling up."

How Some Gamers Play

Button Mashing - When the (usually novice) game player randomly presses all the buttons on a controller during game play. A method commonly employed when learning martial arts-based fighting games. Button mashing decreases as the player learns actual moves.

Camping - In an online game, camping is when a player stays in one place, usually to limit other players' access to an important item or location. Excessive campers will often invoke the wrath of other players on a server.

Chat-Frag - In most first-person shooters, players have the ability to chat with each other by typing. You can usually tell when someone's chatting by the small symbol next to their character's head. It's considered unsportsmanlike to attack a player when they're chatting.

Frag - In a first-person shooter, to defeat an opponent. Also refers to a point gained from fragging said opponent.

Kick - To remove a player from a server. This can be done by either an administrator, or through a vote by the other players. A player can be kicked for a number of reasons, such as annoying other players, cheating, or otherwise disrupting the game.

Owned - Defeated soundly, or otherwise embarrassed. Synonym: pwned, schooled, housed.

Types of Gamers

Clan - A team of players who play together online, usually in an FPS. A clan may consist of players from the same town, or all over the world, and may play together casually, or in tournaments for often sizable cash prizes. Clan players can usually be identified by a symbol, or "tag," next to their nickname in the game.

Guild - Like a clan, but for an MMORPG rather than an FPS. Guild members help players work together, increase each others' chances of survival, or just socialize.

Griefers - Players in online games that taunt other players, especially beginners; thwart fellow teammates in the games; use inappropriate language; cheat; form itinerant gangs with other griefers; block entryways; lure monsters toward unwary players; or otherwise use the game merely to annoy a convenient target or harass other players. Synonym: troll, lamer, llama.

Newbie - A novice player, especially in an established online game with a large community of experienced players. Synonym: newb, noob.

Nick - The nickname a player uses in-game.

Other Resources

If you would like to learn more about computer and video games, or for more resources and information on how to help protect your children from inappropriate video games, movies, and online interactions, please visit:

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) - BGCA aims to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. To learn more, please visit: www.bgca.org.

Common Sense Media - This is a national organization led by concerned parents and individuals with experience in child advocacy, public policy, education, media and entertainment. Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the media and entertainment lives of kids and families. For more information, visit: www.commonsensemedia.org.

Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) - The ESRB rating system is an unbiased, self-regulatory body established in 1994 by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA). The ESRB independently applies and enforces ratings, advertising guidelines, and online privacy principles adopted by the industry. For information on game ratings or privacy protections enacted by the computer and video game industry, please visit: www.esrb.org.

StaySafe.org - This is an educational site intended to help consumers understand both the positive aspects of the Internet as well as how to manage a variety of safety and security issues that exist online. The guidance given on this site is focused on helping consumers understand those issues and how to take steps to prevent or repair their effects. That guidance may include both behavioral and product and technical solutions. For more details, visit: www.staysafe.org.

Helpful Tips

Have a conversation with your children about which types of video games you find appropriate and how you came to that decision.

Look at what computer and video games are in your home—make sure they meet your approval and are appropriate for your child and family.

Set limits on how often and when video games can be played.

Make sure you and your children take breaks from playing video games. Stepping away at regular intervals is important.

Get to know the video games your kids play and who they interact with online. Let your children teach you. Ask them to show you the video games they're playing and who they're interacting with online.

Teach your children that they should immediately tell you if anyone online makes them feel uncomfortable and can do so without fear of getting into trouble or losing video game playing privileges.

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