

A guide for kids who love video games!





Video games can be exciting places full of adventures, creativity, and new worlds to explore. Many children enjoy playing games to have fun, solve challenges, and connect with friends.

This quick guide invites you to think about your gaming habits in a curious and thoughtful way. Instead of telling you what you should or should not do, it helps you explore different sides of gaming.

What do you enjoy about it?

How does it make you feel?

How does it fit into your everyday life?

There is no “right way” to play. Everyone experiences games differently. This guide simply gives you ideas to reflect, discover new perspectives, and talk about games together with your family and friends.

So, are you ready to start the adventure?

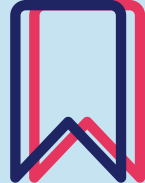
This quick guide was designed to support young children who play video games. It is written by the Media Governance Lab research team of GAMEHEARTS, a funded project by the European Union that focuses on video games and the video game industry.



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Self-Check Questions

Some things to consider before you start:

1. Do you play games?
2. How often do you play video games? Do you play every day?
3. How many hours do you play per week?
4. Do either you or your parents control your screen time?





My favourite video game:

.....



Amount of hours I play per week:

.....



**The days I usually
play in the week:**

.....

Better Gaming Habits

01

There are things we can do to be in charge of our gaming, instead of the games controlling our lives and mood! Making a plan and setting OUR OWN limits is very helpful. Can you try it? See how easy or difficult it is to stick to it! What do you think about it?

02



Breaks are also important. Taking regular breaks can help us stay focused and feel better physically.

03

It is easy to lose track of time when we do an activity that we like. Having support from parents or older siblings can make it easier for us to notice when it's time to stop. Limits can help everyone feel clear about screen time. It may not always feel pleasant, but it is best for your health.

04

Try to choose games that let you pause whenever you need to. Games that don't allow pausing can make it difficult to take breaks or stop on time, which can lead to unhealthy gaming habits.



05

Try checking the game's age rating (like PEGI) or asking a parent or older sibling to help you find games that are right for your age.

06



Snacks and drinks keep your body going. The same way you look after the characters in the games you play, take care of yourself as well.

07

Never share your personal information. Do not share your real name, school, address, or phone number online and do not upload photos of yourself or your family to the internet. It's always safer to keep your details private and talk to an adult about it.

08



Chatting with others while gaming is something you should restrict to good friends. If anyone you don't know personally asks you to move your conversation elsewhere, do not accept. Tell a trusted adult (this could be a parent, a teacher, or another adult you trust).

**HOW-TO deal
with others online**

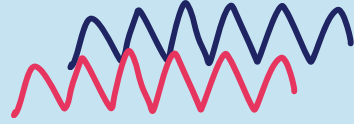
Feeling unsafe about
another person in-game?

→ mute them

Still happening?

→ block and report them
and tell a trusted adult





09

Where you play can also make a difference. Try not to isolate yourself whilst playing so adults can make sure you are safe when you are playing.

10



Sleep matters for mood, focus, and energy. Noticing how late gaming affects your sleep can help you decide what time feels right to go offline.

11

Playing with your friends or classmates online can be fun. Sometimes you may choose to play the same videogames, but you should also make sure that you make time to meet them in person outside school. Meeting in person cannot be replaced with online contact.

12

Gaming often means sitting for quite a while. You could take a short walk or even stand up and stretch a bit in the house during the breaks. What kind of movement would feel good to try?



Online friends vs. Real friends

Someone online may seem friendly because you play together often. But remember:

⚠️ Even if you have played with someone for hundreds of hours, they are still a stranger if you have never met them in real life.

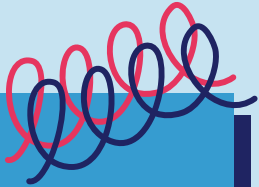
 Online Friend	 Real-Life Friend
You only know their username	You know who they really are
They can pretend to be someone else	Trusted adults know them too
You only talk online	You meet in real life



Warning signs online

Tell a trusted adult immediately if someone:

- ✗ asks you to move to another app (Discord, WhatsApp, etc.)
- ✗ asks for photos or personal information
- ✗ tells you to keep secrets from parents or guardians
- ✗ makes you feel uncomfortable or scared



Age Rating

Do you know that games have specific age ratings and some of them are appropriate for some ages but they are not for other ages?

PEGI (Pan European Game Information) classification is a system for rating video games based on how suitable it is for kids. Your parents can find out what these labels mean and judge whether a game is appropriate for you.

It is important that you do not play games that are not suitable for your age!

Top Tips to Avoid Risks

Games are exciting and social, and like any online space, there can also some risks involved. Knowing about them gives you more control.



Beware of online bullying.

In games, you have the opportunity to collaborate with others and this can be great. Some interactions and words insult and hurt people. Not everyone has good intentions. If someone becomes insulting to you or to others, you can always logout, mute, or leave the game, you do not have to participate in insulting conversation.

Also, think of the potential effect your words or actions may have on others. It is important to be kind and respectful to other members of the community and expect the same behaviour. It is not OK for others to treat you disrespectfully. If you observe behaviour like this in the games you play, please talk to a trusted adult from your environment (e.g. your parent or a teacher).

Never reveal your personal information online.

Communication about the games may be great, but it is advised that you do not reveal personal information when you play videogames. Think twice before sharing something about you in the community online. If in doubt, ask the help of an adult in the house.



Never pay money!

During the games, someone may ask you to pay some money to buy something on the game (e.g. an extra life or some equipment for your favourite hero). These offers are often designed to feel urgent and exciting. Before making any payment, having a conversation with a parent or a caregiver helps you stay in control.

Be careful of loot boxes!

Have you ever seen anything like these when you play games?



Games sometimes have these boxes in order to gain extra money. They don't show you what it is inside but try to make you curious about it! They ask you to give something in order to open them – usually it's your parents' money! You might spend a lot of money and still not get what you want. It is like a slot machine.

You may have to try many times to get a prize that you like. To try again, you have to pay again! And you may still end up with no good reward! Don't open these boxes on your own. If you are in doubt, talk to an adult you can trust.

WHEN UNSURE. ASK FOR HELP.

If you have questions or are unsure about something, if something doesn't make you comfortable, that's usually a good moment to talk to your parent, teacher or another trusted adult for guidance and support.

Issues and Recommendations

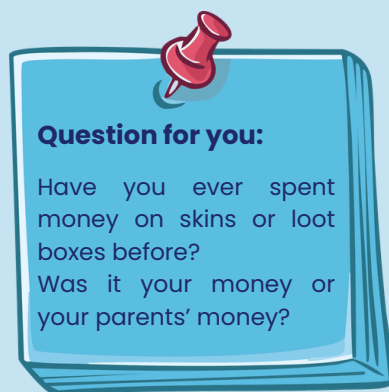
There are also some issues with the video game industry.

Games push you to spend money

Some games try to make you buy things like loot boxes, skins, or extra lives. They might show “special offers” or timers to make you feel rushed.

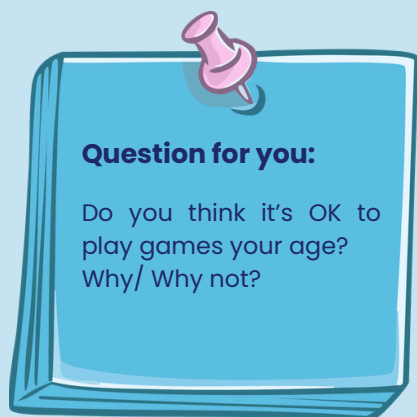
What can you do?

- Ask an adult first before buying anything.
- Take your time – don’t let countdown timers stress you.
- Remember: you might not get the prize you want, even if you pay.



Games that aren't made for your age

Some games look cool but may have scary or violent content that doesn't feel good. Age ratings can be confusing or easy to ignore.



What you can do:

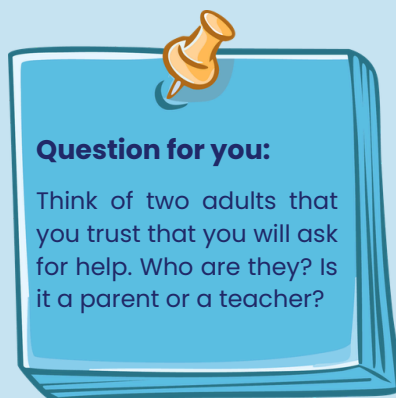
- Check the PEGI age rating before you start a new game.
- Choose games that feel comfortable and safe – it's okay to stop if a game makes you uneasy.
- Ask an adult if you're unsure whether a game is right for you.

Online chats can be unfriendly or hurtful

Sometimes players say mean things, pressure you to keep playing, or try to get personal information.

Think:

- We want others to be kind to us. How should we treat others?
- Do you know how to block or mute anyone who is rude to you or makes you feel uncomfortable?
- For your safety, never share personal information like your real name, school, or address. What other sensitive information can you think of?



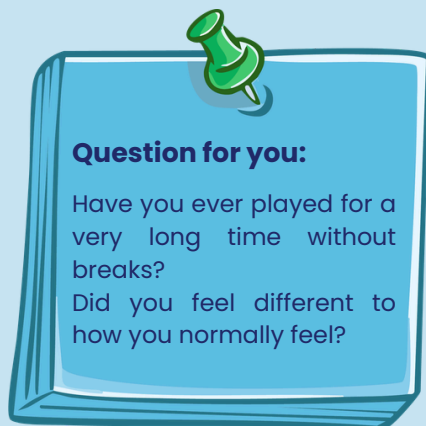
Playing too long and forgetting real-life needs

Games are exciting, and it's easy to lose track of time.

This can lead to you being tired, skipping homework, or not moving enough.

What can you do?

- You could take regular breaks: Stretch, go outside, or chat with friends offline every hour or so.
- You could try to make time for homework, sports, and other hobbies
- If a game starts feeling stressful or addictive, take a break or talk to someone about it.



Working in the Video Game Industry

Do you like games? Do you consider getting a job in the video games industry?

What role would you like to take in the game industry?

People who work in the industry talk about their roles, what they like about them and the challenges they face.

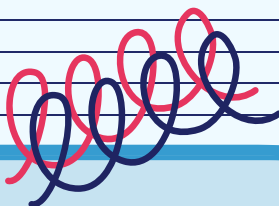
Watch them on our website:

<https://gamehearts.eu/>

Your role:

What could you be doing?

Why do you like this role?



Making the industry better for all!

Some recommendations

The video game world is exciting, creative, and full of possibilities, but it can also be improved so that everyone feels safe, included, and able to enjoy games. Based on what we learned from many children, young people, families, and experts across Europe, here are some ideas for how the gaming world can become even better!

1. Require clear odds to be displayed before opening a loot box

- Games should clearly show when something costs real money.
- Reward systems should be fair and easy to understand.
- Spending limits or reminders can help players stay in control.

2. Make age ratings easier to understand and follow

- Age ratings should be the same and followed everywhere in Europe.
- Games should do better age checks before letting kids play or chat.
- Parents should get simple guides to help them choose safe games for their children.

3. Create kinder and more welcoming communities

- Need for tools for users to block, mute, or report harmful behaviour.
- Clear rules about respect and kindness should be enforced.
- Players from all backgrounds should feel welcome — no matter their gender, culture, or abilities.

4. Support creativity, learning, and future careers

- More chances for young people to learn coding, design, or storytelling.
- Support fair and healthy working conditions for future game makers.
- Make sure girls, women, and underrepresented groups have equal opportunities in gaming and game-related careers.

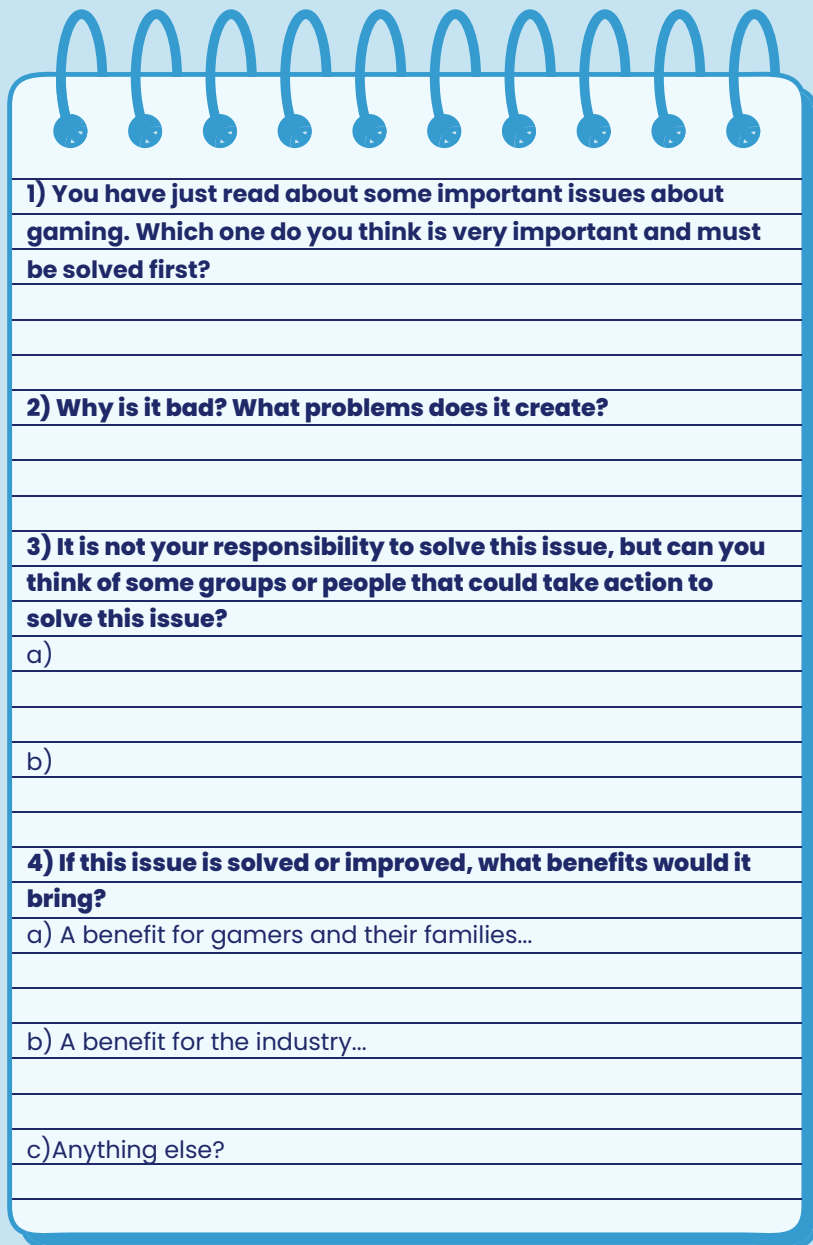
5. Make sure everyone can participate

- Games should show diverse characters, stories, cultures, and abilities.
- More women, girls, and people from different backgrounds should be supported to join the industry.
- Studios should listen to players about what makes them feel included.

6. Work together to keep players safe

No single group can fix everything alone. The best gaming future happens when game companies, parents and schools, policymakers, youth and player communities all work together to make games fair, safe, and fun.

Questions for you:



1) You have just read about some important issues about gaming. Which one do you think is very important and must be solved first?

2) Why is it bad? What problems does it create?

3) It is not your responsibility to solve this issue, but can you think of some groups or people that could take action to solve this issue?

a)

b)

4) If this issue is solved or improved, what benefits would it bring?

a) A benefit for gamers and their families...

b) A benefit for the industry...

c) Anything else?

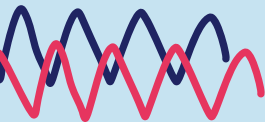
More Help

- Saferinternet (Austrian awareness centre for children, carers and teachers)
Email: office@saferinternet.at; <http://saferinternet.at>
- Rat auf Draht (Austrian helpline) Tel.: 147
- fit4internet (Austrian initiative to strengthen digital competencies) Email: office@fit4internet.at
- Blinde Kuh (German search engine for children) <http://blinde-kuh.de>
- Kiddle (English search engine for children) <http://kiddle.co>
- The School of Social Networks Project (A free program teaching children safe social media use) <http://schoolofsocialnetworks.org/kids-corner/>
- Better internet for kids (EU wide platform with resources for kids, parents, teachers) <http://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en>



Notes:

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The GAMEHEARTS project is all about making video games even more awesome and valuable for everyone in Europe! We believe that video games can help our communities grow, create new jobs, keep us healthy, and bring people together. We want to make sure that video games are a big part of the creative and cultural world.

Our team, which includes universities and partners from the UK, Finland, Austria, Netherlands, and Poland, works together to come up with smart ideas. Some of our amazing partners are Ubisoft, the Imperial War Museum, and the London Symphony Orchestra. We look at how video games can make other cultural activities like art, history, and sports more exciting and accessible.

We explore possibilities of more inclusive, engaging, and empowering cultural experiences through studying gaming. Our work includes seven different project packages where universities and industry partners work together to explore current and future trends in the videogame world.

Find us here: www.gamehearts.eu
Or contact us: info@gamehearts.eu

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