*(INSERT SCHOOL LOGO)*

Dear Parents/ Carers,

Online safety is an important part of keeping children safe at *(INSERT NAME)* School. All pupils are taught how to stay safe and behave appropriately online, but this approach is only successful if we work together and reinforce safe behaviour at home too.

As the summer holidays approach, many children may be looking forward to spending more free time online gaming with their friends online, so we feel that this is an appropriate time to highlight some simple online safety tips to help parents/ carers engage with and support their children when they are gaming online. Whilst for many children and adults, gaming can be a healthy and enjoyable activity, it is essential that parents ensure that their children play age appropriate video games and discuss safe behaviour.

**Make gaming family friendly**

It may seem daunting, but one of the best things to do is to engage with your child’s gaming environment and begin to understand what makes it is so attractive to them as well as the types of activities that they enjoy!

* Talk with your child about the types of games that they are playing. If you’re not sure what they are or what is involved, ask them to show you how they play and why not a go have at them yourself; playing games together can often open opportunities to discuss safe behaviour online.
  + Why not use the conversation starter ideas and family agreements available from Childnet? [www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/have-a-conversation](http://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/have-a-conversation)
  + Childnet, NSPCC, Think U Know and Internet Matters have some useful top tips and advice specifically for parents about gaming:
    - [www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/gaming](http://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/gaming)
    - [www.internetmatters.org/advice/online-gaming](http://www.internetmatters.org/advice/online-gaming)
    - [www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-games-helping-children-play-safe](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-games-helping-children-play-safe)
    - [www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/gaming/](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/gaming/)
* Always check the age rating before allowing them to play; video games are often rated due to violence, sexual content and unsuitable themes so it’s important to make informed choices before allowing your children to play games. For more information on age ratings visit: [www.pegi.info](http://www.pegi.info)
* Make sure your children know that you are approachable; remind them that they can tell you if something happens in a game that makes them feel scared, worried or uncomfortable, without being told off or punished.

**Be ‘Share Aware’**

If your children love to game online, it can be difficult to monitor who they are talking to and what they are sharing. However there are some simple steps you can take to help minimise the risks.

* Many online games allow chat through by video, voice and text. Ask your child who they are playing with and find out if they are talking to other players – be aware this may include strangers as well as friends. If online chat is available, be aware that many online gamers are adults, so your child could be exposed to inappropriate language. Online gaming can also bring increased risks for children such as experiencing bullying, harassment and grooming.
* Remember that the same safety rules for going online should also apply to playing games online so establish clear ground rules for safe behaviour. Agree the expectations for playing online games and discuss safety considerations such as spending limits (many games allow online purchases), using appropriate screen names and not sharing passwords with friends.
* Make sure your child understands how their privacy settings work; show your child how to make their online accounts private and discuss how to block and report other people online. Make sure you and your children know how to report inappropriate contact from strangers.
  + If you or your child is worried about online sexual abuse or the way someone has been communicating with them, it can be reported to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Command of the National Crimes Agency: [www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/](http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/)
* Be aware that children play games on a variety of different types of technology such as laptops, games consoles, mobile phones, music players and tablets. Parental control tools should be available so make sure they are in place and use them to help protect your child.
* Internet Matters and the UK Safer Internet Centre have helpful guides relating to parental controls and privacy settings on a range of devices and platforms:
  + [www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers)
  + [www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/entertainment-search-engines/](http://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/entertainment-search-engines/)

**Manage screen time**

Some parents feel guilty about the amount of time their children spend looking at a screen, but you can help your child maintain a healthy balance between online and offline activities.

* Set boundaries for children online the same way you do in the ‘real world’. Don’t try to ban gaming; instead agree as a family how long they should play online for. Agree what the limits, expectations and consequences are before they start gaming.
* Share quality time together. Consider nominating ‘tech-free’ areas or times, such as your child’s bedroom or dinner time, where you can give each other undivided attention and share offline experiences, like reading a book together.
* Familiarise yourself with the parental controls on your home devices or from your broadband provider; if ‘rules’ aren’t enough for your children, you may find switching the ‘Wi-Fi’ off in the evenings or keeping charges downstairs may help ensure that they get a good night’s rest.
* Be a good role-model; remember that your children will follow your example, so think about your own use of technology and how often you pick up your devices.
* Childnet has useful advice for parents about screen time boundaries: [www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/screen-time-boundaries](http://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/screen-time-boundaries)

If you would like further support and advice regarding online safety, please contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead in school: *(INSERT NAME)*.

Gaming can be a wonderful, fun and exciting experience for children and adults, however it’s important that parents/carers manage the possible risks and take an active interest in their children’s online world as much as the offline one.

Kind regards

Headteacher