Part of our Online Mental Health & Wellbeing Series

NOS
Online Mental
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What you need to know about...
AGE RATINGS

18+

What are they?
'Age Ratings'

A game's age rating can be used by adults to make an informed choice as to whether or not a game is suitable for their child. The PEGI (Pan European Game Information) system rates games and, instead of indicating the level of ability required to physically play a game, it indicates the suitability of content for that age group. 3, 7, 12, 16 and 18 are the labels that can be awarded to games and a variety of content descriptors such as violence, bad language and fear are used to further clarify why the label was assigned.

16 & UP ONLY

12- 15

Know the Risks

18+ Inappropriate content

The biggest and most obvious risk of not following the age rating system is that children may view or hear age-inappropriate content. Many games now include scenes of a violent or graphic nature which could be upsetting or considered too intense for younger players.

Peer pressure

Peer pressure has a large role to play in age ratings being overlooked. Children don't want to be the ones left behind and can put their parents under pressure to allow them to play a game beyond the recommended suitability, especially when all of their friends are playing it already.

Level of 'Kudos'

Playing a game with a label that is higher than their age can be viewed by some children as a challenge and to gain a good reputation amongst friends. Kudos is attributed to the child playing the age inappropriate game resulting in more children wanting to follow suit.

Free Platforms

In order for a game to be released on popular platforms, such as PlayStation and Xbox, game developers must pay for a PEGI rating. However, smaller development teams are sometimes reluctant to pay these fees and games are often released on other platforms, such as Steam, without any age restrictions.

Spot the Signs

Being vague

Be aware of children being vague around the content of what they want to play. If they are unwilling to supply you with information about what the game is about, this can be an indicator that you wouldn't allow them to purchase it if you knew.

Unofficial sites

There are plenty of indie games that can be bought using online stores that don't necessarily have age restrictions. If you notice your child using sites such as GOG or itch.io rather than official channels such as the Google Play Store, they might be accessing games that aren't officially rated but still aren't age appropriate.

Unfamiliar terminology

Your child might start using phrases or terminology that is new to them or mimicking actions that they have learnt from a game without realising their inappropriateness.

Wanting to be secluded

Be aware if suddenly your child wants the move the device that they play their games on into a more secluded area of the house away from adults. It is a good idea for your child to play online games in shared area where you can see the screen.

Be aware of spending

Setting up accounts with online stores require bank account details. Keeping an eye on your bank balance means that you will be able to tell if there has been a new purchase and can provide you with an opportunity to ask about what new game they've purchased.

Safety Tips

Do your research

If you've noticed a new game that your child has downloaded then use quality resources to make sure that your knowledge is up to date. Online websites, such as National Online Safety, can provide you with the information you need.

Review parental controls

Review your parental controls on the stores where you buy games from. Most sites allow parents to set passwords to block games with certain age restrictions from being downloaded.

Encourage open dialogue

Encourage open dialogue with your child. You don't want to be in position where they won't talk to you if something has made them feel uncomfortable in a game because they are worried they will get in trouble for playing the game in the first place.

Discuss ratings

Talk to your child about why the game has been awarded a certain label. Debate the positives and negatives of playing a game and decide on some ground rules together.

Our Expert
Heather Cardwell

Heather Cardwell is a practising Online Safety Lead and senior school leader who is passionate about safeguarding online and educating children around online risks. She has over 10+ years as a Computing Lead and has successfully developed and implemented a whole school approach to online safety in schools, delivering online safety training to both school staff and parents and helping to roll-out a bespoke online safety policy across her local network of education settings.