



Practical Parenting Tips

ONLINE VIDEO GAMES

INTRODUCTION

While video games once consisted of self-contained content—content that was factored into ratings and parental reviews—now many games contain online elements.



Games on mobile devices and consoles often include the option for online social interaction.

Some of the dangers parents might associate with social media are now shared by popular games like *Fortnite: Battle Royale*, *Roblox*, and *Minecraft*. These games bring people together on online servers and some allow players to add friends and play together as teams.



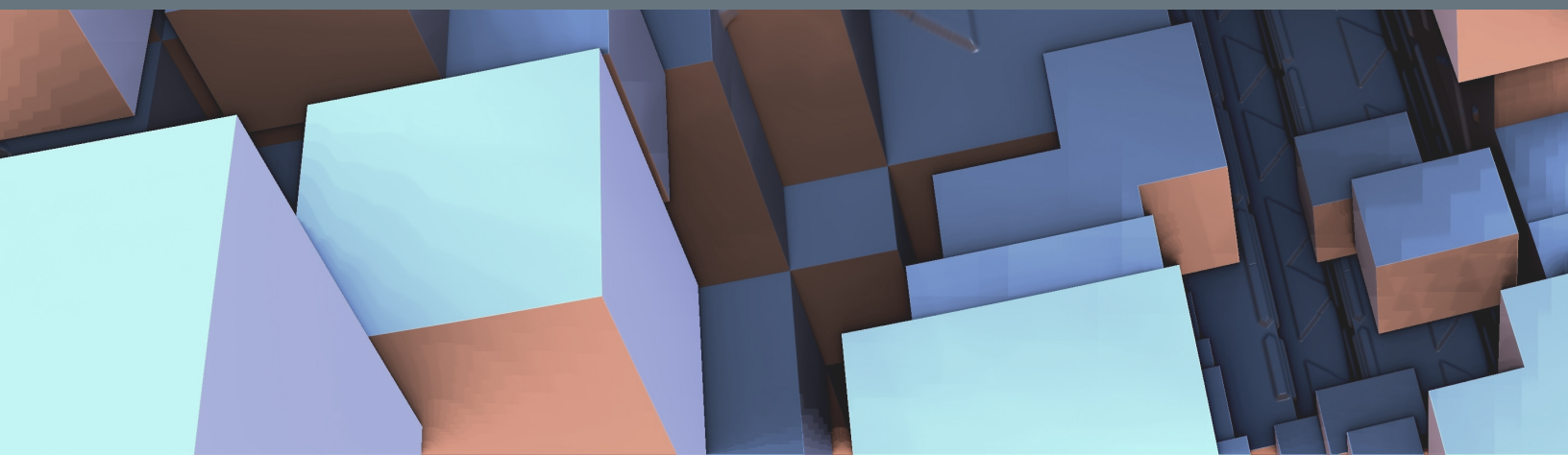
Many games with online components prompt kids to buy, with real money, in-game equipment, expansions, and/or merchandise.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

So why is this a problem for parents? Well, while a game may have parental controls, strict privacy settings, methods of reporting abuse, and/or the censorship of certain words or phrases, these things cannot always control how players act in-game or what they say in chat.



You may have heard stories about parents who were surprised to find players using sexual language or mimicking sexual acts on the typically kid-friendly application *Roblox*. While this behavior is often against the user policies of games and websites like this one, sometimes inappropriate content and behavior falls through the cracks. Whether these players are attempting to exploit and gain the trust of children or trying to see what they can get away with on a kids game, our kids can be exposed to predators and/or all kinds of inappropriate content if they are in the wrong place at the wrong time with no supervision.



PRACTICAL APPLICATION

So what does it take to keep kids safe from predators or explicit content? No internet? No video games? Well, there may not be one clear answer to this question. What is clear is the need for parents to be responsible, wise, and discerning with how they allow their children to interact with video games. Let's consider 8 ways parents can be responsible for their kids as they play video games:



- Consider the Internet a public place. If you don't leave your 8-year-old at the mall by himself, why do it online?



- Set an example for your kids by how you use social media and through other online interactions.



- Be available to hear your kids' concerns and create an open dialogue around the use of video games. Create an environment in which your kids will feel open to come to you first If they notice something weird in a game they are playing.



- Maintain access to your kids' video game accounts, and better yet, create the account for them so you can access the game, set it up, and familiarize yourself with the content and settings.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION



- Remind your kids not to share personal information with strangers on the internet: real name, age, location, etc.



- Set time limits for playing video games. Remember, kids often try to mirror their parents' behavior. Pass along a healthy attitude toward screen time through your example.



- Supervise your kids while they are online and be aware what games they are playing; some games may have online elements that you aren't aware of.



- Consider how your kids behave and treat other players in online games.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

As parents take on the responsibility of keeping kids safe online, they must be wise and discerning. Let's look at 10 wise and discerning practices for parents:



- Research the child safety features of a video game before allowing your kids to play it. Make sure you understand how these features function and their potential limits.



- Seek out the right thing to do in the situation you are in; things may work out differently from situation to situation, game to game, and child to child.



- Have resources ready so you will be prepared when these issues come up.



- Stay informed, check facts, and do research.



- Talk to people you trust and people who have already succeeded in similar parenting situations.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION



- Seek accountability and advice from others to give you direction and keep you consistent.



- Try asking for advice from mature young adults. They may be more familiar with these issues than you are and could have advice based on what their parents did or did not do to regulate their online experiences.



- Seek discernment through prayer.



- Don't make assumptions; instead, research, discuss, and observe.



- Learn from the teachings, stories, and experiences documented in the Bible.

TALK TO YOUR KIDS

Parents can protect their kids by equipping them with important information and advice. Here are a few examples of things kids need to know and understand about gaming online:

- Always get permission from your parents before playing a video game.
- If someone starts asking you personal questions, using words that you don't understand, or asking you to do strange things online, stop talking to that person and tell/show your parents.
- Tell your parents if you have seen or heard anything weird, confusing, or bad in a game you are playing.
- Log off and tell your parents if you are frustrated by other players and if they are acting weird or making you angry.
- Supervision and rules for playing video games might seem inconvenient, but they are for your safety. It's like wearing a helmet on a bike!



SPIRITUAL APPLICATION 1

READ: Luke 11:11-13

“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

CONSIDER:

1. What kind of gifts does our Heavenly Father want to give us?
2. How could parents unwittingly give their kids poison instead of sustenance?
3. How can some of the concepts in this verse relate to video games?
4. How can parents be sure to give their children good gifts instead of gifts that are deceptive and full of poison?

SPIRITUAL APPLICATION 2

READ: Mark 9:42-43

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.”

CONSIDER:

1. How can these few verses from the New Testament, written thousands of years before the internet was invented, apply to parenting today?
2. Could parents lead their children to sin by giving them unfettered access to the internet?
3. Could neglect in this area fit the definition of causing a little one to sin or at least exposing one to sin?
4. How does the passage indicate we should treat things that cause us or our children to sin?

SPIRITUAL APPLICATION 3

READ: 1 Peter 5:8

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

CONSIDER:

1. What does this passage teach about the nature of evil?
2. How does this passage suggest we should do to avoid the attacks of the evil one?
3. What does this passage tell parents about unexpected instances of evil in the lives of their children?
4. How can this passage be encouraging to parents?

RESOURCES

Here are a few resources parents can use to help keep their kids safe as they play video games online. As you seek the advice of other trusted parents, perhaps you can add to this list of potential resources.



- Common Sense Media: This website shares reviews of video games, movies, television shows, and more from the perspective of kids and parents. This is a great place to hear about the various aspects of a game and its benefits and risks. Go to: www.commonsensemedia.org



- Plugged-in: This website from Focus on the Family shares reviews and insight into popular video games and other entertainment options. Go to: www.pluggedin.com



- License to Parent with Trace Embry: Parents can hear the parenting advice of Trace Embry, Co-founder and Director of Shepherd's Hill Academy, through his weekly podcast and short radio broadcasts. Go to: licensetoparent.org

CLOSING PRAYER

Philippians 1:9-10

“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”

