

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about ESPORTS

British Esports describes 'esports' as "competitive gaming, human-v-human, usually with a spectator element to it". In recent years, the esports industry has grown significantly – and is expected to reach an overall worth of \$1.2 billion, with around 30 million monthly viewers, by the end of 2022. This rapid evolution has presented even more opportunities ... but, of course, opportunities usually come with a risk. Here, we've highlighted some of the potential hazards within the esports arena and suggested ways to help young people stay safe so they can make the most of this exciting space.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

MICROTRANSACTIONS

Microtransactions are in-game purchases that unlock new features or give players special abilities, characters or content. These can cost anything from 99p to £99 (and sometimes more!). The topic of microtransactions in gaming is heavily scrutinised – with cosmetics, pay-to-win features and loot boxes all being a source of contention for gamers and governing bodies in recent years.

MENTAL HEALTH

Studies show that esports competitors face the same level of mental health issues as athletes from traditional sports, along with some specific additional demands. Like mainstream professional sport, esports is an incredibly tough industry – requiring countless hours of practice. Competing at the highest level can lead to pressures such as handling setbacks, stressful situations and facing criticism.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT & BEHAVIOUR

Only 22% of gamers globally are aged between 10 and 20 – meaning the majority are adults, who might not always act or talk in a way that's appropriate for children. Like traditional sport, esports has many athletes and 'personalities' to look up to. However, it's important that your child stays aware of how influenced they are by the people they follow, and whether the athlete is age appropriate.

TROLLS & TOXICITY

An internet troll is someone who tries to offend people and cause trouble by posting derogatory comments. Toxicity, as in the real world, refers to negative behaviours like harassment, verbal abuse and inappropriate conduct, which all impact on wellbeing. Trolls and toxicity are an issue within esports, perhaps due to its pressurised, extremely competitive and high-stakes nature.

POSSIBLE EXPLOITATION

The revenue in esports is potentially vast. Organisations often look to professionals and content creators to help grow their brand, in exchange for the organisation's backing, a salary, and marketing and sponsorship benefits. However, the industry is still in its infancy – and so is its regulation. In some countries, esports isn't regulated at all, so things can get sticky if players don't know what they're doing or who they're working with.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

The common perception of esports involves a sedentary lifestyle, an unhealthy diet and very little physical activity – which has obvious health implications. It's certainly true that players sit at their desk for hours, looking into bright screens and not getting regular exercise. Some professional esports players have nutritionists, personal trainers and dieticians specifically to protect their health.

Advice for Parents & Carers

ENCOURAGE BALANCE

Dedicating oneself intensely to any activity – including esports – can be harmful, both mentally and physically. Make sure your child's gaming routine is balanced with exercise, regular breaks, healthy food and plenty of water. If your child spends long hours gaming, using a chair with the proper supports and taking the time to practise good posture will help protect their lower back, neck and wrists.

UNDERSTAND GAMING

Chat to your child about the games they play; ask to watch or even take part to get an idea of how appropriate they are. This will give you an awareness of the phrases esports players and content creators use, helping you understand young gamers' slang. If you find some of the games unsuitable, talk to your child about why. You can also explore age-specific settings on apps like YouTube and Twitch.

GET EXPERT HELP

If your child *does* start on the road to becoming a professional, get in touch with an esports-specific agency who are experienced in industry terminology and loopholes. Do due diligence on any team or organisation offering your child a contract: a key point is how long your child would be contracted to them – the esports industry changes quickly, so there might be better and more secure offers out there.

BLOCK TOXIC USERS

Monitoring in-game chats, or disabling them altogether (either through the console or in the game itself), is a comprehensive way to avoid negative experiences and reduce the risk of toxic messaging. Your child also has options to block messages from particular players and only interact with their friends; this can also help to prevent them from encountering the blocked users in future games.

Meet Our Expert

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