

E-Safety Newsletter for Durham Schools

May 2015 Video Games

It can be really challenging for schools when young pupils graphically describe or enact a violent or inappropriate scene from a video game or film seen at home. On some occasions this can become even more complicated as other children react to hearing about the game.

Surprisingly the research evidence is very mixed as to the effects of games on the young mind, however when there is clear impact in the classroom from these activities at home it would be prudent to provide advice for parents.

On the following page is some text that may be included in a school newsletter to provide advice to parents on safer gaming.

Following that is a sample letter (from London Grid for Learning) which may be sent to parents when the school becomes aware that a child is playing games which are totally age inappropriate.

Further advice and support for schools is available by contacting paul.hodgkinson@durham.gov.uk

The following may be included in a school newsletter:-

Video Games – advice for parents

Children love to play video games, but there are some risks involved. The two main areas of concern are

- Children experiencing violent or sexual content beyond their age.
- Children playing online with strangers and either experiencing inappropriate language, or being groomed.

The PEGI ratings should help you decide what is appropriate for your child

PEGI 18

The adult classification is applied when the level of violence reaches a stage where it becomes a depiction of gross violence and/or includes elements of specific types of violence. Gross violence is the most difficult to define since it can be very subjective in many cases, but in general terms it can be classed as the depictions of violence that would make the viewer feel a sense of revulsion



PEGI 16

This rating is applied once the depiction of violence (or sexual activity) reaches a stage that looks the same as would be expected in real life. More extreme bad language, the concept of the use of tobacco and drugs and the depiction of criminal activities can be content of games that are rated 16.



PEGI 12

Videogames that show violence of a slightly more graphic nature towards fantasy character and/or non graphic violence towards human-looking characters or recognisable animals, as well as videogames that show nudity of a slightly more graphic nature would fall in this age category. Any bad language in this category must be mild and fall short of sexual expletives.



Further advice is available from www.askaboutgames.com which will also provide advice on setting parental controls on games consoles to help ensure that play is safe for children.

It is also important to ask your children who they are playing with. One recent, extreme example was of a 19 year old grooming a 14 year old boy, Breck Bednar before murdering him. Most parents would want to know who their children are playing with in the real world, the same should also apply to the virtual world..

Dear Parent/Carer,

**Video Games and keeping your child safe:
E-safety - key information for parents/carers**

Child's name: _____

Class: _____

It has been brought to our attention that your child has been playing console games such as **GAME NAME**, even though the certification for this game is **18** based on International PEGI ratings

SCHOOL NAME is committed to keeping our children safe and to promoting the safe, responsible use of the technologies. As such, we feel it is our responsibility to raise this particular issue as a concern.

1) Ratings denote the content and appropriateness of games

Since 2003 games have been age rated under the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) system which operates in the UK and over 30 other countries of Europe, in addition, where a game showed realistic scenes of gross violence or sexual activity the game had to be legally classified and received one or other of the BBFC classification certificates given for videos/DVDs



The PEGI system has been effectively incorporated into UK law and video games will be age rated at one or other of the following age levels; which you will find on video game sleeves. Ratings do not denote the

difficulty or the enjoyment level of a game, but that that it contains content suitable for a certain age group and above

The PEGI age ratings will enable parents and carers to make an informed choice when buying a game for their children.



It is important to note that the age ratings 12, 16 and 18 age ratings are mandatory and that it is **illegal** for a retailer to supply any game with any of these ratings to anyone below the specified age. The age ratings 3 and 7 are advisory only. **An 18 Rated game** is applied when the level of violence reaches a stage where it becomes gross violence and/or includes elements of specific types of violence.

In general terms it is where the level of violence is so visually strong that it would make the reasonable viewer react with a sense of revulsion.

This rating is also applied where the level of sexual activity is explicit which may mean that genitals are visible. Any game that glamorises the use of real life drugs will also probably fall into this category.

2) Content Indicators



In addition to age ratings, video games will include indicators of the type of content and activities that the game includes in it.

The descriptors are fairly self-explanatory but should be read in conjunction with the age rating given for a video game.

A violence descriptor with an 18 rated game will indicate a more extreme level of violence than a violence descriptor with a 12 rated game. Similarly a sex/nudity descriptor with a 12 rated game will probably indicate sexual innuendo but a sex/nudity descriptor with an 18 rated game will indicate sexual content of a more explicit nature.

3) Parental responsibility

We feel it is important to point out to parents the risks of underage use of such video games, so **you** can make an *informed* decision as to whether to allow your child to be subjected to such images and content.

- The PEGI ratings system helps you make informed decisions about which video games to choose for your family
- A PEGI rating gives the suggested minimum age that you must be to play a game due to the suitability of the content
- As parents you can take direct control of what games your children play at home, how they play them and for how long through parental controls on video game systems such as the Xbox or Playstation
- Choosing and playing video games as a family is the best way to understand and enjoy them together
- The stories, worlds and characters in video games offer playful ways to engage with a wide range of subjects and fuels creativity, interests and imagination
- The recently re-launched askaboutgames.com website provides further information about video games ratings and offers real family stories and suggestions on how video games can be a creative and collaborative experience for all the family
- We also recommend that all parents visit the CEOP Think U Know website for more information on keeping your child safe online www.thinkuknow.co.uk

4) School support and action

School Name has XXXX as well as addressing e-safety issues as part of learning.

We have also invited you to attend an E-Safety workshop for parents on DATE and recommend that you attend.

If you feel that you, or your child, needs further support in keeping your child safe on the internet, please make an appointment to see NAME (Role)

Because of our duty to all the children in our school, we will take action (which may involve the police) if a problem comes to our attention that involves the safety or wellbeing of any of our pupils.

With thanks for your continued support,

Headteacher