

Online gaming safety tips

Guidance for parents and carers of neurodivergent young people

Video games offer young people a range of benefits that are often amplified for neurodiverse communities. But that means potential risks and harms are also amplified.

This guide offers parents and carers advice on those specific risks and benefits to help you support your neurodivergent child as they play video games.



What the research says

Benefits



58%

of neurodivergent teens say gaming makes them happy



31%

of neurodivergent teens say gaming helps them feel part of a community



42%

of neurodivergent teens say gaming helps them relax

Challenges



23%

of neurodivergent teens struggle with accessibility of video games



1 in 4

of neurodivergent teens struggle with sensory aspects of gaming



22%

of neurodivergent teens say communicating with others in games is a challenge

Video games that support neurodiverse needs

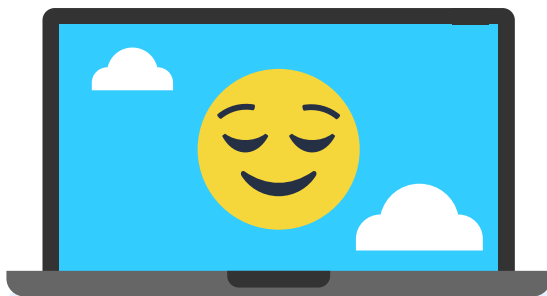
If your child struggles with any of the challenges on the previous page, the following games might help.



Accessibility options

These video games let players customise their experiences, making them more accessible for a range of needs:

- [Mario Kart 8](#) (action/racing)
- [Townscaper](#) (creative/simulation)
- [Dorfromantik](#) (puzzle/strategy)



Sensory over-stimulation

These games provide low pressure environments to support neurodiverse children who might feel overstimulated:

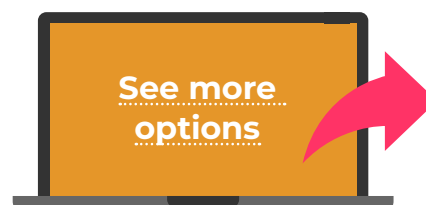
- [Animal Crossing: New Horizons](#) (roleplay/simulation)
- [A Short Hike](#) (adventure/narrative)
- [Stardew Valley](#) (roleplay/adventure)



Communication support

These games offer ways to play with others without voice or text chat (or with pre-set options):

- [Journey](#) (adventure/narrative)
- [The Endless Forest](#) (simulation/adventure)
- [Hearthstone: Battlegrounds](#) (battle/strategy)



The challenges of online gaming and actions you can take

Contact from strangers

Video games give neurodivergent children the chance to socialise and build community with others. But not all strangers are trustworthy.

Harmful strangers prey on the trust, kindness and vulnerability of others, including neurodivergent children.

Harmful strangers might ask your child to meet on a separate platform in private or meet offline. They might try to groom or influence your child in some way. Additional harms could include hate speech or the sharing of inappropriate content.



What you can do

- Make use of in-game parental controls. These can limit who can contact your child, including sending them play requests.

It's also important to show children how to use features like report, block and mute.

[Explore these step-by-step guides to help.](#)

- Have regular conversations about their online lives. Who are their friends? What kinds of things do they talk about? Are they online-only friends or from somewhere like school?

These conversations don't need to be in response to an issue. Instead, ask them

specific questions about their online 'day' just like you might with their school day. Repetition is really important for neurodivergent children.

- It's important to also have clear and regular conversations about what healthy behaviour looks like online.

Then, set clear rules about what your child should do if they notice unhealthy behaviours online.

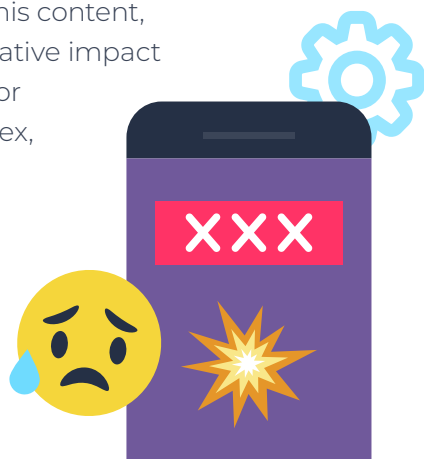
You might want to post these rules somewhere easily noticeable so your child has a visual reminder.



Seeing inappropriate content

Some video games might have sexual, violent or graphic content that is inappropriate for your child's age or development.

If your child plays this content, it could have a negative impact on their wellbeing or understanding of sex, violence and other real-world issues.



What you can do

Many games have an age rating or guide to support appropriate gameplay. Both ESRB and PEGI ratings, for example, tell you for what age a game is appropriate. These ratings also tell you what kind of content has led to that rating.

Review game ratings and guidance to make sure your child is only seeing content appropriate for their age and development.

[You can also set in-game settings to limit the content your child can see and access.](#)





Physical impacts

Many games require users to sit in one place to play (with some exceptions).

If a child plays for extended periods of time, they might experience physical health issues such as body pain, difficulty sleeping, eye strain, migraines and more.



What you can do

Neurodivergent children might struggle to take breaks or transition into other activities.

To help them regulate their time, agree on boundaries like when and how long they can play.

Then, use tools like timers or in-game screen time settings to help them remember to take breaks.

Some children might need you to give them a different activity to focus on, so plan something fun they can do instead.

Financial impacts

A lot of games are now free to play but might have expansion packs to add more features or in-game items users can buy to enhance the game.

Some children might struggle to keep track of their spending or might make purchases without realising how much they spend.

Scams are also a risk. A harmful stranger might seek to scam your child through phishing links or false promises. These scams could lead to a child losing in-game currency or items.

Additional financial risks might come from other scams, games that promote gambling behaviour or other users targeting your child and their vulnerability.



What you can do

- With your child, set boundaries around spending. This might include setting monthly limits or routines for buying something new (like asking you first).
- Make use of in-game or console parental controls that require a PIN to make purchases. You might also want to remove your payment card from the account.
- Another way to manage spending is to give a monthly allowance on a gift voucher or setting up a monthly subscription, so it's not possible to overspend.
- Remind children to check with you first if someone asks them to click a link or send them something. You can help them decide if something is trustworthy or not.



The benefits of playing online games



Neurodivergent children often experience more of the following benefits than neurotypical children.

Creativity: Many video games give children the space to create their own worlds or storylines. This might also translate into creating art based on the games or learning how to create their own video games.

Skill-building: With platforms like Roblox, users can also create virtual items and experiences, which helps to develop skills in design, development and programming. Different video games can also teach skills like critical thinking, problem-solving and coordination.

Regulating emotions: Video games can help some neurodivergent children find calm or regulate their emotions. Some games also offer settings to reduce sensory input if a child is feeling overstimulated. Video games with a 'sandbox' mode can also offer calmer alternatives to regular gameplay.

Socialising: For children who struggle to socialise offline, video games give them space to practise these skills. Video games can also help them connect with their offline peers who might also play these games.

"I feel accepted. I feel very comfortable talking to people online.... I can be myself and there's no one who could really tell you what to do on playing games." - 15-17-year-old



More resources



[Online video games advice hub](#)



[Roblox parent's guide](#)



[Report Harmful Content](#)



[Step-by-step parental controls](#)



[Staying safe while gaming guide](#)



[Games Designed for Autistic Diversity](#)