

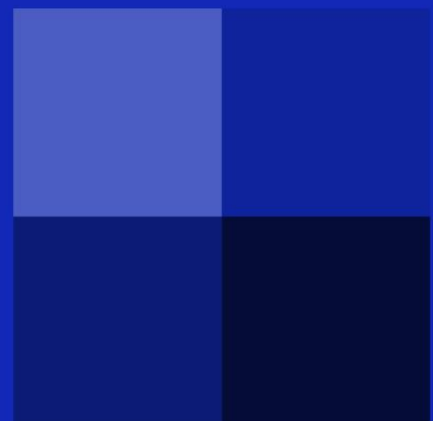


What do I risk if I ignore age restrictions?

A guide for parents and carers

E-Sussex, E-Safe

Safeguarding all children in East Sussex all the time



The purpose of this Guide.

The purpose of this guide is to help parents and carers to understand why certain products have age restrictions, and to explain some of the risks of ignoring them.

Whether we like it or not, age restrictions do exist, and they are important. Some take the view that they are over-cautious. However, it is important to understand that while this may appear to be so, there may well be legal requirements that have resulted in that particular age restriction, or, perhaps more importantly, that the movie, game or website may contain material that is not suitable for people younger than the age restriction states.

In some cases, it may actually be illegal to expose children to certain material.

Legalities aside, it should be remembered that the minds of young children are still in the process of forming. They do not have an adults wealth of life experience to refer to, and they may not be able to emotionally process what they see.

This guide will explain the various ratings, and will explore some of the abuses and risks associated with them.

PEGI ratings.

PEGI ratings are applicable to online games. It stands for Pan European Game Information, and is intended to inform parents and carers on the likely content of the game.



PEGI 3

The content of games given this rating is considered suitable for all age groups. Some violence in a comical context (typically Bugs Bunny or Tom & Jerry cartoon-like forms of violence) is acceptable. The child should not be able to associate the character on the screen with real life characters, they should be totally fantasy. The game should not contain any sounds or pictures that are likely to scare or frighten young children. No bad language should be heard.



PEGI 7

Any game that would normally be rated at 3 but contains some possibly frightening scenes or sounds may be considered suitable in this category.



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.



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 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

In addition, there may be symbols that add further descriptions to the game content.



Bad Language

Game contains bad language



Discrimination

Game contains depictions of, or material which may encourage, discrimination



Drugs

Game refers to or depicts the use of drugs



Fear

Game may be frightening or scary for young children



Gambling

Games that encourage or teach gambling



Sex

Game depicts nudity and/or sexual behaviour or sexual references



Violence

Game contains depictions of violence



Online gameplay

Game can be played online

Remember that many games these days contain “in-game purchases”. Great care is needed when setting up a game or games station to ensure that you retain control of any additional offers, and that they are not bought accidentally.

What about film and video?



“U” rated films are generally acceptable for all age groups.

“12” indicates that no-one under the age of 12 should view the material

“12A” indicates that this will have slightly stronger material in it than a “12”

“PG” indicates that a film can be viewed by minors only if a parent has agreed.

“15” indicates no one under the age of 15 should see it

“18” indicates 18 year olds and over

“R18” is very likely to have adult content including sex, violence and swearing. There may also be an element of fear.

And Social Media?

All social media products have a minimum age limit. Some, however are, in effect, meaningless. For example, One platform aimed at children said “A social networking site for 7 – 11 year olds and upwards.

Facebook has a minimum age of 13, yet it is known that there are a large number of users under this age. If Facebook are informed of an under-age account they will close it, but there is little evidence that they pro-actively look for such accounts.

And the abuses?

Abuses and abusers have always been present on the internet and in the gaming world. It does not take much imagination to realise that if an abuser wished to target children of a particular age, participating in those games themselves is a good way to start.

Many abusers will create highly detailed false online profiles and will prey upon children that they find. The problem is that children do not always recognise when someone is grooming them until it is too late. (Another really good reason to restrict access not necessarily according to your child’s chronological age, but also their level of common sense and maturity.

The forming mind.

A child takes in many things from their surroundings. They will form their own moral code, and this may or may not be yours. If they are exposed to violent, they will learn violence. If they are exposed to bad language, do not be surprised if they use it, especially when they have lost their temper themselves. Sexual imagery can have a profound effect on a developing mind and these days, we need to guide our children’s emergence as adults in the online world every bit as much as in the physical world. It won’t go away, and we ignore it at our peril.

It is now time to understand a little more about offenders and how they target children.

Paedophiles. This group of men and women, (yes, women can be paedophiles too) are, by definition sexually attracted to children. Some actually want to meet with young people to commit offences, while others only want to offend online. They often target children they find who play age-inappropriate games, or who use websites that are age inappropriate. They find a 13 year old on an

18+ website, and in the mind of the offender, somehow they assume that the child knows what they are doing.

Whatever excuses a paedophile offers, a child under the age of 16 cannot, in Law, give consent to participating in any sexual act. It is also unlawful to incite a minor to commit a sexual act, and there is no difference whatsoever in law whether the offence takes place online or in the physical world.

Young people are often encouraged to take naked or semi-naked images of themselves, and once they do this, the offender will often attempt to blackmail them into taking more explicit images, or even meeting with them.

Identity thieves.

There is a lot of money in information. Identity thieves will target young people, sometimes over a very long period of time, and the internet games industry has, unfortunately, provided a platform for this. A typical scenario here is where an identity thief befriends a young person within a game. They will show that young person the tricks to getting high scores, or getting into the next level. Over that period of time they will attempt to learn the young person's real name, location in the UK, date and place of birth, and any additional personal information they can get.

This is then stored until the young person attains the age of 18 in the physical world, at which point a request can be made for duplicate birth certificates and passports. It is very easy for young people, who do not have a lot of worldly experience to be taken in in this way.

This can be a very long-term game, and in many cases, the young person has no idea their identity has been copied.

Scammers.

Scammers are active both on the internet, social media and gaming world. They tend to be hit-and-run offenders, often attempting to frighten a young person into revealing personal information or worse, a parent/carer's credit card or bank details.

Cyber-bullies.

A cyber-bully is someone who uses connected technology to target someone else. Their motivation is usually power, and the enjoyment they get by making someone else's life a misery, although some cyber-bullies also attempt to extract money or sex from their targets. The problem with cyber-bullying is that it is never possible to get away from it. It is there 24/7/365.

How bad can it get? Children have become reclusive, have self-harmed, and even, sadly, taken their lives as a result of sustained cyber-bullying.

To sum up.

The duty of care of a parent/carer is not transferable. With regard to online and connected technology, it starts by taking a firm responsible view on what you allow your children to see and do online.

They will want to see and do it all of course, and will not like the idea of restrictions, which is why it is best to start this as early as possible.

Here are some ideas:-

- Limit when your child can engage with connected technology. (They aren't allowed unlimited access at school, college, university or the workplace, so why should they have it at home?) Time limits are easy to set up, and there is no cost involved.
- Make sure your child has a username and password for your home computer(s). It's really easy to set this up, and again, has no cost involved. You can use this to stipulate when their logon will work. How will you know they aren't surfing the night away? Simple! Computer says no!
- Enable and use parental controls on your child's mobile phone and any computer they have access to at home so that there are reasonable restrictions about what they can do. This should include restrictions on the internet (age/maturity related), and whether or not they can download and install applications. (Again, this is free of charge.)
- Consider very carefully if you are going to allow them to have any technology in their bedrooms. Remember, behind closed doors, they are in control, not you. If you decide to let them have a TV (or a Sky subscription), are you sure that they cannot access channels that are unsuitable for them, and are you sure that they are not watching TV until the early hours with headphones on?
- Games and games stations. **Take your time setting up your games station.** They are very complex these days and will offer you a range of additional services. Some may ask for a credit card, but there is usually a way of refusing this option, or adding a password that is required before any in-game purchases can be made. **Remember, your child is highly likely to work out, see, or otherwise guess your passwords. Change them around frequently. Finally, the games themselves.** Be under no illusion – some of the games available today are highly graphic, have scenes of extreme violence and some have highly questionable sex scenes in them. Some games even have rape scenarios. It is difficult to understand how rape can be part of a "game", but it is. Exposing children to sexual material is in itself an offence.

- Don't forget their phones. **Parental controls are now available for mobile phones – please use them, and shop around until you find the best provider in this regard.** Whatever limitations exist in your home, their mobile phones offer unlimited access to the internet, unless you prevent that by setting up parental controls. It is really important that you do not miss this step out.

Children will always want more, and your standards may not be shared by everyone they know. Sooner or later, your child will see material which you would rather they didn't. It's not a matter of "if", more like "when". You can't control what others do, but you do have control in your own home.

If we teach our children how to keep themselves safe online, we are giving them an essential life skill. Certain questions should never be answered. These include:-

- **What's your real name?** (Anyone who has a right to know already knows!)
- **Where do you live?** (Again, anyone who has a right to know already knows)
- **Where are you going on holiday?** (Maybe ok to say this, but never.....)
- **WHEN are you going on holiday?** (Why tell the world your house will be empty?)
- **Do you have a webcam?** (Far too many paedophiles ask children this question)
- **Do you have a pic?** (Same as the above. Anyone who has a right to know what your child looks like already does.)
- **What are you wearing?** (Often the paedophiles opening gambit)
- **Do you have an older sister/brother?** (Some paedophiles often target people they are interested in through siblings or friends.)

No list of "No-No" questions can ever be exhaustive, so talk about what questions they mustn't answer online. You may find your own list is different, and much longer.

Remember, the more age-inappropriate the website/game is, the more risk your child is in from predatory behaviour, and the more likely it is they will pick up language and behaviours you do not want to see.