

6<sup>th</sup> February 2024



## Online Safety Newsletter – Safer Internet Day

Dear Parents & Carers,

Today we have celebrated Safer Internet Day across the school. The theme this year is '**Inspiring change? Making a difference, managing influence and navigating change online**'. We are spending some time completing a range of different activities across the school.

In EYFS, children have been exploring how technology has changed through time and designing technology of the future. In Key Stage 1, children have been discussing how changes online can make them feel and that if something doesn't feel right that they should ask a trusted adult for help. In Key Stage 2, children have been thinking about how technology's design, and influencers, can influence people's choices and they have been investigating ways to manage that influence. They also thought creatively about how using positive words and actions can make the internet a safer place for everyone.

The UK Safer Internet Centre have published some guidance and tips for parents and carers. Please take a few moments to look at the information they have published:

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/safer-internet-day-2024/parents-and-carers>

### **Online Safety Workshops**

As a reminder, on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March, we are being joined by Simon Aston (Online Safety and Wellbeing Officer) who will be running some online safety workshops with all children in Year 5 and Year 6. He will also be running a **parent workshop after school**. I have personally attended Simon's workshops in the past and they are very informative and offer practical advice on how you can help to keep your child safe online. We will be providing a childcare service (for current pupils) for the duration of this workshop.

### **Fortnite**

Over the past few weeks, we have had an increasing number of reports from our young people about accessing Fortnite at home. The age certification of this is for children 12+ and the Battle Royale is 13+. Fortnite is posing an increasing concern. Please read the information below that has been written about young children accessing Fortnite. I have also shared National Online Safety's parents guide.



More and more children are talking about playing the game 'Fortnite'. Whilst we understand the game is very popular, it is also highly addictive and unsafe if played without strict monitoring.

Before your child plays Fortnite for the first time or goes back online, we urge you to take the time to learn more about it and the risks by reading the brief articles below.

For starters, the game is rated for aged 13 which means it is not recommended for any child at primary school. However, children as young as 5 are saying that they are playing everyday. There is absolutely no good reason a child this young should be playing the game. Apart from the mild violence, the game is designed for online chat with other players and is highly addictive. Addictive games often lead to tiredness, extreme behaviour and a lack of interest in other things. Young children simply should not be playing this game.

As a parent it can be difficult to make unpopular decisions for your children. Particularly when people in the media are promoting the game. That said, it is really important that your children are kept safe and their well-being is protected. Perhaps this is easier if you agree boundaries as a group of parents so all your child's friends are doing the same thing. Gaming is good fun but needs to be appropriate and carefully monitored

<https://childmind.org/article/parents-guide-dealing-fortnite/>

<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/fornite-battle-royale-parents-guide/>

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/parents-guide-fornite-battle-royale>

As always, if you have any concerns or questions, you can find lots of help on the online safety section on our website, or you can contact myself via the school office. We'll always help if we can.

With regards

*Miss Walker*

Miss Walker

Computing Lead

# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# FORTNITE

CHAPTER

4

AGE RESTRICTION  
PEGI  
12

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Fortnite may be something of a veteran in gaming terms (having launched back in 2017), but it remains massively popular – with more than 250 million people playing online every month. That's partially due to the competitive nature of its player-vs-player combat, its pop culture crossovers and its constantly shifting map. Significant updates are rolled out with each new version of the game – known as 'chapters' – and within these sit shorter 'seasons', which bring more subtle changes. The latest iteration, Chapter 4 Season 2, adds a cyberpunk-themed city and anime-style areas, for example, along with new weapons and characters.

## ALWAYS ONLINE

There's no single-player offline mode in Fortnite: it can only be played online. Internet access can sometimes be an issue when you're out and about (both in terms of connectivity and using up data), so you may find that dedicated young Fortnite players are often less enthusiastic about trips away of a certain length – such as days out and holidays – than you might have expected.

## IN-GAME COSTS

Fortnite is free to download and play, but it does offer various additional purchases – cosmetic skins, rare weapons and so on – which don't really impact on gameplay, but can cost quite a significant amount. These items are bought with game's currency, V-Bucks – which can be earned through playing, but are also often purchased from the game's store for real-world money.

## POP CULTURE REFERENCES

Part of Fortnite's appeal is its ongoing crossovers with other popular franchises, ranging from movies and TV shows like *The Walking Dead* to comic book characters including Batman to other games such as *Street Fighter*. This means you could find your child asking questions about the creature from *Alien* or who Gertalt from *The Witcher* is a little sooner than you'd possibly anticipated.

## CROSSPLAY AND PARTY CHAT

Fortnite is popular with vast numbers of gamers ... of various ages. Crossplay lets friends play with and against each other, regardless of whether they're on an Xbox, PlayStation or PC – while party chat allows them to communicate during the game. This chat feature can also, therefore, put youngsters at risk of hearing inappropriate language from older players in the heat of virtual combat.

## VIRTUAL VIOLENCE

At its core, there's no avoiding that Fortnite is about shooting other players to eliminate them. That said, there's no blood or gore: the violence is generally rendered in a cartoonish style, and there are frequent comical touches to lighten the mood (fishing mini-games, for example). The machine guns, shotguns and other weapons often look and behave realistically, however, so discretion is advised.

## FREQUENT UPDATES

The game's developers release content in 'seasons' that usually run for around ten weeks. Each fresh update sees items added to the in-game store, changes to the environment's map and a different over-arching theme (such as 'medieval', 'pirates' or 'party'). These regular renewals help to hold players' interest – but also give young gamers plenty of reasons to keep returning to their screens.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### MATCH GAMING TIMES

Younger players tend to want to play Fortnite alongside their friends. With this in mind, it could be worth speaking to the parents and carers of your child's social group and trying to coordinate their gaming around certain hours of the day. Safety in numbers is obviously a factor here, but it will also help your child feel that they're getting adequate opportunity to socialise with their friends online.

### SET SPENDING LIMITS

Fortnite's rotating store is a not-so-subtle mechanism for coaxing players into splashing out on those sought-after items before they disappear again for weeks. This could potentially lead to surprise outlays on your card if your child is tempted into an impulse purchase. You could consider setting up a prepaid card for them to use – or ensuring that any online purchases require adult authorisation.

### USE UPDATES AS REWARDS

Fortnite's seasonal updates are free – but each also brings the option of a 'battle pass', unlocking exclusive rewards for playing the game and completing set challenges. The passes cost around £8 (and are available as part of larger bundles) and can be an effective reward to young Fortnite fans for good behaviour or academic performance, or as an incentive for chores like tidying their room.

### BE WARY OF SCAMS

The immense popularity of Fortnite with more trusting younger audiences means that there's no shortage of scammers looking to fraudulently obtain passwords and other personal data through techniques like phishing. As the developers point out on many of Fortnite's loading screens, they never ask for a player's account password outside of the game: make sure your child knows this.

### ENJOY FORTNITE TOGETHER

Fortnite also offers split-screen gameplay, meaning that two people can play simultaneously via the same TV or computer. That's ideal for siblings or when your child's friends visit – but it also offers you an opportunity to spend time doing something fun with your child, while also being able to make sure they're playing the game safely. Who knows, you might even teach them a thing or two!

## Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is Editor in Chief of gaming and esports site *G2Esports* and has worked in the gaming media for around four years. A long-time gamer, he is also a parent and therefore a keen advocate of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his articles have been published on influential sites including *IGN* and *Technradar*.



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