



Gaming

The safe way

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO VIDEO GAMES



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Dear Families,

Digital media – and computer games – have become an integral part of our children’s daily lives. Kids and teens are particularly fascinated by video games. Games are fun, often challenging, and encourage players to interact with

one another. They can enhance creativity, logical thinking or teamwork, for example. Some games explain complex subjects in simple terms. The right games can really benefit children's learning and development.

But with all the opportunities games offer come potential risks, which need to be kept in mind. Not all video games are safe or suitable for every age group. And too much screen time can be unhealthy. Some games include in-game purchases, e.g., for objects or additional costume items, meaning it is necessary to monitor spending. Many games also have integrated chats through which players can interact with strangers. Parents should take a close look at these functions and use the relevant settings for their family so that gaming can be fun and children can safely explore the world of video games with the proper protections.

In everyday family life, there is often little time to actively engage with digital games. Nevertheless, many parents ask themselves:

**How long should my child be allowed to play video games?
What games are suitable and age-appropriate?
How can my child play video games safely?**

This parent's guide will help you find straightforward answers to all of these questions. We will give you practical tips on how to supervise your child, including information on USK age ratings, establishing clear rules, talking to your kids about gaming, and a complete overview of the gaming scene.

On that note, let's talk about Gaming – The safe way!

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01

General rules surrounding gaming

Kids love to play, at the playground, in school during recess, in their rooms, with cards and board games. No wonder the world of video games captures their attention and enthusiasm at such an early age. In computer and video games, children can slip into new roles, experience adventures, or build entire worlds. They can put their skills, speed, and strategic thinking to the test. And kids can play with others, not just on their own. The variety of games and platforms is sheer endless, which often makes selection difficult. Whether you as parents play computer games yourselves or not: The more you know about games, functions, options, and risks, the better you can make informed decisions with your child and establish clear rules.

Take video gaming seriously

Play is an important part of growing up, and the right to play and recreation is even anchored in the UN children's rights. It follows that children and adolescents also have a right to play video games. Play is important for their development and creativity. When it comes to video games, a lot of kids and teens are real pros, and they perceive themselves as such. For this reason, they are less willing to accept restrictions and rules from parents and other adults which they see as unfair or unjustified.



Gaming in the family

Take time once in a while to play video games together. For some games, 15 minutes is all it takes to get a first impression. Things like regular afternoon gaming sessions can also be a rewarding type of family time. Completing adventures together or solving tasks and puzzles is fun. You may even be surprised to see your child's reaction skills and dexterity. Don't be put off by that; just give a game a try and play along!

Try instead to understand why your child finds specific games so interesting. Show real interest and ask questions, just as you would about your child's other hobbies. Open discussion, and the trust that it builds, are important because they make children more willing to talk to you when problems with gaming come up.

Tip

Let your child show you a game and explain everything they know about it. Doing so not only promotes their verbal and communicative skills, it's also a simple opportunity to get talking and better understand your child's view of the game.

If you are gaming with several children of different ages, base your game choice on the younger kids. For the older ones, you can take time later on for other games suitable for their age.

Tip

It's important in a family for everyone to make sure that younger children are not playing inappropriate games. Older siblings can help by keeping an eye on what the younger ones are playing or watching.

Gaming at a friend's house

"But my friends are allowed to!" – You've probably heard your child say this before, but don't worry: It is totally normal. Children compare rules and sometimes try to find ways to get around restrictions. They often gravitate towards households that have fewer rules. There, they say, they can game longer or play games that are not really appropriate for their age.

It helps in this case to get in touch with the parents. Ask about the rules they have and whether they adhere to age ratings. This way, you can make sure your own rules don't get undermined, and your child will quickly realize that your rules apply even outside the home.



Tips

- Address the subject of computer games at parent/teacher night in school.
- Share experiences with other parents and collect valuable tips for handling this issue.

Games for young children

In the first few years of life, children learn primarily by touch and by interacting with other people. Digital media are not appropriate at this age because children first need to learn about the real world and find their way in it. Once they reach kindergarten age, children increasingly learn to understand and process media content. However, too many impressions and too much stimulation can overwhelm kids of this age. But sooner or later, they will inevitably come into contact with digital media. Children may, depending on their stage of development, even benefit from very limited and closely monitored exposure to digital devices. Taking a responsible approach is therefore crucial: Less is more and, as parents, you should supervise your child's media consumption, explain why, and pay attention to what your child needs and what is good for them.



Tips for video gaming in preschool age

- **Carefully select games:** Choose only games that are appropriate for your child's stage of development and maybe even promote child-led learning. Check the USK age rating.
- **Monitor media consumption:** Watch your child closely or play games together at first to understand what your child is experiencing, whether they seem nervous, and what may be overwhelming to them.
- **Talk about rules:** Explain to your child early on what rules and functions are important in a given game, and why some things are not allowed.
- **Limit screen time:** Set clear time limits for playing video games and be consistent about sticking to them.
- **Be a role model:** Be aware of your own digital device use. Stick to your own rules, such as "No smartphones at the dinner table." Children learn through imitation.
- **Balanced activities:** Make sure that digital media do not become a substitute for playing outdoors or other activities with other children.
- **Schedule breaks from media:** Ensure that your child takes breaks from digital media to enjoy other activities.



When children start playing digital games, supervision is important. Media education should always be tailored to your child's age.

02

Selecting appropriate games

Video games are diverse

If you've ever played computer games before, you probably know what action adventures and jump 'n' runs are. But are you familiar with the terms brawler, battle royale shooter, game creator platform or Steam? If not, don't be concerned for now. What's important to know is: There are many types of games and platforms offering a variety of gaming environments. To help your child select appropriate games, it is advisable to learn more about games, platforms, and relevant age ratings, because not every game or platform is suitable for every age or child.

Tips

- Find out if there are any community parent groups or family centers near you, which can help you try out popular games yourself and get tips from media education professionals.
- Visit the USK website for more information. It has a glossary that explains genres, gaming systems, gaming terms, and more.



[usk.de/lexikon](https://www.usk.de/lexikon)



Parental duty: The care and upbringing of children

Based on Article 6 of Germany's Basic Law, parents have the right to decide which media content they want their child to have access to. But this right applies only to their own child, not to visiting children. To fulfill your responsibility to care for and raise your child, you need to carefully consider what content is suitable. The USK age ratings give you a point of reference. They indicate which content is safe for a given age and help you select the right games for your child.

These questions can help you select suitable content:

- What is the game's age rating? Is it appropriate for my child's age group?
- What information do I have on this game?
- Does my child have the skills needed to use the game?
- Are there any alternatives that are better suited to my child's age and stage of development?

Tips

- Read the description or watch the trailer on the internet to get an impression of a game.
- Do not assume that your child has the same perception of a game as you do. A child perceives problematic content differently and has more – or even in some cases less – difficulty judging it.
- Don't let yourself be influenced by other families and their decisions. Make decisions that are right for your child and your family.

USK age ratings and rating information

When selecting a game for your child, the USK age rating is a good place to start. It indicates the minimum age at which a game is considered safe based on youth protection requirements. In other words, the game content is not harmful or detrimental to the well-being of children of this age or older.

Important to know: The USK age rating provides no information about how difficult a game is or whether it is beneficial to your child's development. The rating indicates whether a game is suitable for your child's age based on youth protection requirements, contains no content capable of impairing child development, and has no online functions that could expose your child to uncontrolled risks.

In addition to the USK age rating, additional information is provided:

→ Why was this game approved for this age group?

The age rating is accompanied by descriptors, such as "violence," a "dark atmosphere," or "increased incentives to buy," to indicate if content could be problematic for children. Features like online chats or in-game purchases are also critical depending on how they work and whether the game has parental controls.

→ What functions does the game have that you should be aware of?

Games often have added functions,, such as chatting, purchasing, and location sharing, that require a connection to the Internet. These functions can be associated with certain risks, especially when used without supervision.



Detailed explanations of the USK age ratings and the added rating information can be found on the USK website.



[usk.de/die-usk-alterskennzeichen](https://www.usk.de/die-usk-alterskennzeichen)

Families can find USK age ratings and added rating information on the back of the game packaging and in the USK's classification database at [usk.de](https://www.usk.de), or on many common online gaming platforms like Nintendo eShop, Google Playstore, Xbox Store, or Sony PlayStation Store. Important to know: Only if you see the USK age rating can you be sure that a game has been evaluated by the USK. Caution is advised if you do not find a USK rating. In this case, be sure to thoroughly test the game yourself.



Tips

- Check if the game has a USK age rating. If you don't find one, always be cautious.
- Read the rating information to identify any risks associated with the game.
- Consider whether your child is ready to use chats or in-game purchases, and if they are, agree on rules with them.
- Use the parental controls to secure all consoles, smart-phones, tablets, and other devices.. Information on how to do so can be found in this parent's guide and at [medien-kindersicher.de](https://www.medien-kindersicher.de)



Educational video games

If you are wondering whether a game is of educational value to your child or if you want general information on gaming, it is worth taking a look at some of the relevant specialist websites. They provide educational assessments, age recommendations, independent reviews, and awards for the most outstanding and recommended games. The various rating categories and symbols will help you to quickly find the most important facts.

A list of sites that provide educational assessments of video games can be found here:



[usk.de/hilfeseiten](https://www.usk.de/hilfeseiten)

Tips

- Read up on educational recommendations before you and your child select a game.
- Talk with your child about the aspects of a game that received positive ratings.
- Helpful information on media use in the family is also provided by the website [elternguide.online](https://www.elternguide.online)



Certain games can teach you a lot – even in school lessons. Choosing the right games plays a crucial role here too.

Learning with video games

Video gaming is fun – and you can learn a lot too. Games enhance many skills such as logical reasoning, problem-solving and eye-hand coordination – often with minimal to no involvement of teachers or parents – but they can teach children and adolescents so much more. Exciting stories help kids to view things from other perspectives, virtual excursions into the past bring history to life, and interactive systems can break down complex subject matter for them to better understand. For example, the purpose of supply chains can be explained more easily using a building and simulation game than a poster. Video games can offer a range of learning opportunities if parents or teachers know which games are suitable for which purposes and get creative about using them.



Tip

The Foundation for Digital Games Culture maintains a list of selected games that are particularly suited to learning through gaming. Let it inspire you!



[stiftung-
digitale-spielekultur.de/
paedagogische-spiele](https://stiftung-digitale-spielekultur.de/paedagogische-spiele)

03

Rules for safe gaming

As parents, you guide your child through their growing years, be it learning to walk, swim or ride a bike. Parents are there to provide a supportive, encouraging and safe environment. You also help your child learn good road safety practices by explaining traffic rules and making sure they can get around safely.

Kids get involved in any number of activities as they grow up and video games will more than likely be one of them. As in other areas of life, it is important to know and follow the rules of gaming too. By helping your child learn good gaming habits and establishing clear rules, you are helping them to be confident and sensible users of this medium.

Video game screen time and rules: Finding a balance

How much time should my child be spending on computer and video games? This is a valid question to which there is no standard answer. But there are a few rules of thumb. You know your child best, for example when they need a break to play or a break from play. Trust your instincts and establish appropriate rules. Keep the following in mind when agreeing on screen time limits with your child:

→ **Your child's age:** The younger the child, the shorter the screen time should be and the more breaks should be scheduled.



→ **Developmental stage:** Every child is different. Consider your child's ability to concentrate and monitor their own behavior, as well as their sense of responsibility.

→ **Media experience:** Does your child already have experience with video games? Do they know the important rules?

→ **Type of game:** Short dexterity games or long strategy and world-building games? Games differ in terms of the kind of concentration they require.

→ **Time required to play the game:** Some games can be paused easily, others require longer sessions in order to save progress.

Screen time for younger children:

Because younger children cannot concentrate for long periods, their screen time should be gradually increased with age. New games can be especially riveting, like an exciting book. Gaming for a little longer once in a while is not a problem, as long as it doesn't become a habit. During the week, it may be effective to limit screen time so that kids devote enough time to school and sleep. Time is an abstract concept that younger children don't yet understand. A visual aid like an hourglass can help kids to better adhere to agreed screen time limits. Another practical example for limiting screen time: Allow your child a block of time per week, such as five game rounds per week, and put five stones in a box representing the rounds. Every time your child plays the game, they remove one stone. Once all the stones

are gone, your child has used up their block of time for that week. Refill the box the following week. Using a method like this, your child learns to be aware of how they are using their screen time.

Screen time for older children and adolescents:

Flexible weekly screen time, such as a time budget, helps older children to take responsibility for their gaming habits and avoid stress. They also learn not to start lengthy game rounds right before meals or bedtime. Having a good sense of time helps them to divide up their screen time sensibly.

Many games can be paused or saved, but this often is not an option for games played online with other people. It's okay to be understanding if your child wants to finish a game round. After all, you wouldn't switch off a movie right in the middle of the most exciting scene. To avoid unnecessary conflicts, remind your child ahead of time about when they have to quit.

Gaming habits: Recognizing warning signs and taking action

Kids and teens often get into phases of intensive gaming because a game is especially exciting and fun. Some games are based on business models that deliberately entice players to play longer. Such games include, for

instance, push notifications, limited-time offers, or the threat of losing progress or playing figures if the game is paused for too long. These mechanisms are designed to hook children to play more or to return to the game time and again. It is important to be aware of these strategies so that you can better control video game consumption.

The USK adds the descriptor "pressure to play excessively" to the rating information of games associated with this kind of very high risk. Monitor your child closely for this reason. Extended screen time should be interrupted at regular intervals for breaks. In the long term, excessive gaming can have a harmful effect on your child's health. The following symptoms are signs that your child may be playing too much:

- Headaches
- Irritability
- Fatigue
- Nervousness
- Loss of interest

Some changes in your child's behavior are a normal part of puberty. But if you notice fundamental changes or health issues in your child due to gaming, then their screen time should be reduced or an alternative game found. Make sure your child gets exposure to a variety of free time activities, and talk openly with them about your observations and possible alternatives.

If your child temporarily displays some of the symptoms listed above, they are not automatically "sick." Seek professional help if you observe the following symptoms over an extended period:

- **Loss of control:** Your child cannot stop gaming no matter what the circumstances.
- **Preoccupation:** Your child does not pursue any other interests.
- **Isolation:** Your child neglects relationships and everyday responsibilities.
- **Denial:** Your child ignores the negative consequences of gaming on their daily life, the family and school.

Effective rules for total media time: A general limit instead of individual times

Kids and teens use many different kinds of media simultaneously for information, communication, or entertainment. The most effective solution is to establish rules for total free time media use instead of individual time limits for gaming only, for example by writing up a media use agreement. In addition to specific time limits for gaming, it can cover television, computer, tablet, and smartphone use. Time spent using media for school should not be included in the agreement.



Tips

- Find a balance of fixed and flexible rules so that gaming can be relaxing.
- Agree together on fair and workable family rules, e.g., for video game screen time.
- Provide for regular breaks and other free time activities.
- In particular, be aware of the descriptors provided on the USK labels, such as "pressure to play excessively."
- Monitor media use and use the available parental controls – because they give good insight into digital activity. See → *section 4* for more on this subject.

Recommended recreational screen time as a guide

Up to 3 years



on-screen media
not recommended

6–9 years



30 to 45 minutes on individual
days *with supervision*

12–16 years



max. 2 hours
per day

Up to 6 years



max. 30 minutes on individual
days *with supervision*

9–12 years



45 to 60 minutes
per day

16–18 years



2 hours per day
as a guide

Alternative for children ages 12 and up:

Agree on a daily or weekly time budget.

A rule of thumb:

10 minutes × your child's age per day,
or 1 hour × age per week.

In-game spending

Video games are accessible today through various channels and platforms, be it smartphone apps, game consoles, PCs, or internet browser games. Games purchased on a data carrier in a store often include online functions, such as multiplayer modes, updates, and additional content. In many cases, these functions generate added costs, e.g., for plug-ins or subscriptions to online services. Parents should familiarize themselves with potential purchase incentives and added costs (in-game purchases).

In-game purchase options are not only a feature of free games and apps, but also of full-price games with online functions. Many games offer extras for a fee, such as cosmetic items for game characters, special objects, or random objects (loot boxes). Some games use design techniques that encourage players to spend money or play longer. When kids and teens compete in a game, they can become very focused on specific achievements or exclusive content as status symbols. In particular, the urge to collect rare objects or special characters can induce them to spend money for these extras. The temptation grows when elements like these in a game are perceived as very valuable or prestigious.



The following aspects can help you and your child to handle in-game spending responsibly:

- **Start early:** Talk to your child before they start gaming about potential costs and in-game purchases. Explain how and why many games can involve the spending of real money.
- **Set limits:** Establish clear limits on how much money your child may spend on games or in-game purchases, and be consistent about sticking to those limits.
- **Take responsibility:** Be sure to retain control of all payment methods (e.g., credit cards, PayPal) and do not share the password for purchase confirmations with your child.

- **Be aware of the sense of urgency:** Explain how some games use design elements to encourage players to spend money.
- **Understand what you are purchasing:** Ask your child why they want to buy something in a game and clarify together if it is possible to enjoy the game without these extras.
- **Create learning opportunities:** Talk with your child about how to manage money responsibly. Game currency converters on the internet can help to show how much game currency is worth in euros.
- **Be understanding:** It's okay to allow in-game purchases once in a while, just like you treat your kids to candy – as long as it's in moderation.
- **Keep talking:** Talk to your child regularly and ask what they have purchased so that you know what's going on and can identify any potential problems early.

To avoid unexpected costs, parents should set up user accounts together with their child and either create a password for in-game purchases or block them entirely. Do not allow your child to use your own account for gaming if it allows purchases. Talk to your child about how to use payment methods safely. One option is to use prepaid cards that give your child a fixed budget to spend. It also is possible in many cases to block paid services on a smartphone or landline in order to prevent unwanted expenses.



Tips

- Check the USK age rating for descriptors like "increased incentives to buy," "in-game purchases," and "in-game purchases + random objects."
- Talk to your child about added costs and how to manage online purchases responsibly. Share experiences with other parents and collect valuable tips for handling this issue.
- Keep control of your cash and credit card details.
- Use the parental controls to limit spending.

Protecting personal information

To use online services, it often is necessary to create an account, which usually only requires an e-mail address. But sometimes users are also asked to enter personal information. Oftentimes, it isn't immediately apparent how this information will be used. For this reason, help your child to set up accounts, check which personal data is required, and if it is shared in any way. Children and adolescents should learn how to be careful with their personal data on the internet. When creating profiles, use pseudonyms instead of real names and avatars instead of real photos, especially if the platform supports interaction with strangers.

Why you and your child should be careful with personal data:

- **Protect against identity abuse:** Personal data can be used by others to create fake profiles or to impersonate you.
- **Avoid unwanted contact:** Strangers could use personal data to gain trust or specifically contact you or your child.

- **Preserve privacy:** Once shared, it is very difficult to delete personal information off the internet and it could have unexpected consequences in the future.
- **Risks of location data:** Information on where you live or your current location can be a risk, particularly if strangers have access to it.
- **Use of data for commercial purposes:** Many companies use personal data for advertising or they sell it. Check to ensure that this is not permitted when the user is a minor.

Actively support your child in the digital world and take time deciding how to safely manage personal information. Talk with your child regularly about the potential risks and why it's important to be cautious. Take advantage of the support services designed for parents and children which many platforms offer. These steps help you lay the groundwork for responsible and confident internet use.



Tips

- Check the USK age rating for descriptors like “interaction-related risks,” “increased communication risks,” and “location sharing.”
- Create an account together with your child and set up the relevant parental controls.
- For online services, use a neutral e-mail address that does not reveal your child’s name, address, age, or school.

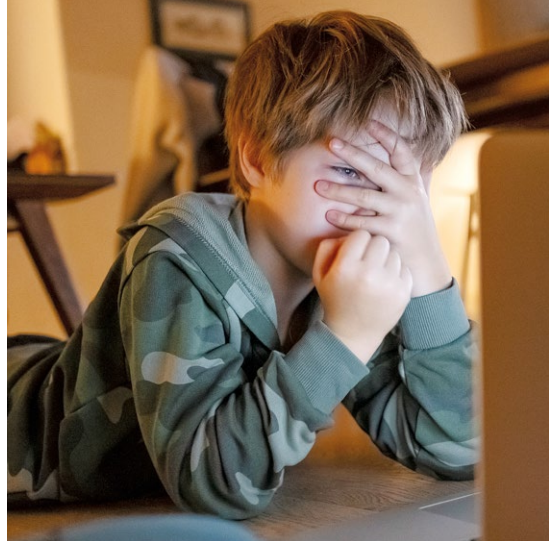
Interacting with others

Many online games include text, voice or video chats. Interacting with friends or the community is necessary in some games to discuss strategy. It fosters team spirit and helps kids to develop communication skills. Communication functions can be disabled in most cases, but this can considerably diminish the quality of the gaming experience, especially in team games.

Verbal attacks and insults can occur when communicating in online games and on platforms like Twitch, Discord, or YouTube. The anonymity of the internet lowers inhibitions, and insulting or abusive messages are common in gaming communities. Many young people are often unaware of the impact their words can have, because they don’t see their counterpart’s reaction. Deliberately toxic behavior also exists, especially towards new and female-perceived players, who are frequently the target of insults and disparaging comments. Like other places online, gaming communities can also be a gateway for disinformation and extremist content. Attempts are sometimes made to influence young people through hidden messages and symbols of extremist ideologies.

Important tips for being safe and respectful to others on the internet

- **Block unwanted contacts:** Encourage your child to block insulting or pushy people and to stop communicating with them entirely. Many platforms have simple functions for this or provide youth protection contact information.
- **Use moderated chats:** Have your child use gaming platforms with chat moderation if possible. In these games, trained people quickly delete any problematic content.
- **Identify disinformation:** Your child should be aware that not everything shared online is true. Critically questioning information is important. Talk with your child about how they can distinguish reliable information from fake information.
- **Be respectful towards others:** Whether or not you are online, the same thing applies: It's important to be polite and respectful. Your child should not be engaging in insults or harassment.
- **Speak up for what's right:** It's important to speak out for what you believe and against hate speech or disinformation, especially as it relates to attempts to spread ideological content.



Other players often use anonymous names or pseudonyms – which is standard practice in online communication and important for protecting your own privacy and safety. However, it also means that the true identity and intentions of others usually remain unclear. This leads to the risk of adults trying to approach children online and gain their trust through manipulation (“grooming”). Young children in particular are apt to quickly trust online contacts and often think that fake information about age, hobbies, or photos is true or real. But in serious cases, what appears to be harmless can lead to dangerous situations, including sexual assault and abuse.

Internet safety: Important topics of discussion for parents and children

- **Recognize grooming:** Explain to your child that there are adults online who pretend to be kids of the same age in order to gain trust and manipulate children.
- **Be wary of online friends:** Your child should be aware that not everyone online is the person they portray themselves to be. Photos, hobbies, and age are easy to fake.
- **Supervise your child's meetings with online friends:** Agree that your child may only meet online friends with your permission, and then only at public places and under supervision.

Talk to your child regularly about their experiences online and encourage them to always trust their gut reaction if something feels uncomfortable. Teach them that respectful behavior should be the standard even online, and that it is okay to set boundaries or get help. By discussing clear rules and safety strategies together, you can help your child to be safe and confident in the digital world.

Tips

- Check the USK age ratings for descriptors like "interaction-related risks," "increased communication risks," "chats," and "location sharing."
- Familiarize yourself with the parental controls that are available to protect your child.
- If necessary, limit communication in games involving team play to contacts you know.
- Your child should be aware: Not every online contact is harmless and if they feel unsure, they can always turn to you for help.

04

Parental controls in games

Many game platforms today offer practical safety functions. You can use these settings, for instance, to control what content your child is permitted see, limit in-game purchases, or specify how long they are allowed to play per day or week. Child safety filters and parental controls ensure that your child is in a safe digital environment. Parents can feel overwhelmed if they are not knowledgeable about video games. However, it is important that you take responsibility for your child's online activities. Children need support and clear rules – as much in the digital world as in the real world. In this section, we will show you what options exist and things to keep in mind.

Check the rating information on content and use

In 2023 the USK age rating was expanded to include information that makes it easier for parents to evaluate games. In addition to the age rating, you will now find information on why a game received a certain type of approval, for example due to "fantasy violence" or because players are under "pressure to act" in the game. Potential risks of games are also specified separately, e.g., chats, in-game purchases, and location sharing. This information helps you to make a better decision as to whether a game is really right for your child, and whether you need to enable some of the safety functions.


You can find the additional rating information:


- on the back of the package,
- on online platforms, and
- in the USK database at [usk.de](https://www.usk.de)


The USK website also has a list of the various added descriptors and explains what they mean.



[usk.de/die-usk-alterskennzeichen](https://www.usk.de/die-usk-alterskennzeichen)

 6 <small>ab 6 Jahren</small>	Handlungsdruck	usk.de
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 12 <small>ab 12 Jahren</small>	Erhöhte Kaufanreize Druck zum Vielspielen	usk.de
Enthält: In-Game-Käufe, Chats		

 16 <small>ab 16 Jahren</small>	Gewalt Erhöhte Kaufanreize Druck zum Vielspielen	usk.de
Enthält: In-Game-Käufe (+ zufällige Objekte) Chats		

 18 <small>ab 18 Jahren</small>	Gewalt Drogen	usk.de
Enthält: In-Game-Käufe, Chats		



Many games and devices offer the option to limit playing time, restrict content and secure purchases. This allows you to maintain an overview and establish appropriate rules together.



Use parental controls

Before you set up the safety functions, it's important to know: Which device is your child using? Depending on whether it's a smartphone, tablet, PC, or game console, different options exist for setting up parental controls. Consoles like Nintendo Switch, Xbox, and PlayStation have built-in parental controls that can be enabled during setup. Mobile devices have practical parental control apps, such as Google Family Link for Android devices. Many systems have integrated parental controls, such as content filters, screen time settings, and age restrictions. Familiarize yourself with these settings and adjust them to suit your family's needs. Remember to update them regularly.



Tip

Be sure to set up a separate account for your child. This is the best way to manage and adjust the settings.

Set up age restrictions

Digital devices usually have built-in parental controls or filter settings that allow you to set age restrictions and limit access to specific content. Ideally these should be activated during initial device setup and protected with a secure parental password. Smartphones, tablets, and PCs allow you to specify age limits for apps, games, and movies. Many operating systems allow you to restrict the use of apps and access to content based on the age rating of the relevant content. Game consoles from PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo also have options for adapting use of the console to your child's age by restricting access to specific games or functions. If necessary, you can also make exceptions for certain games.



Tip

Regularly check and update the parental controls on a game system so that your child has access to age-appropriate content only.

Set up screen time and screen time budgets

Many gaming platforms offer the option of limiting video game screen time. You can set how long your child is allowed to play per day or week. You child receives a warning shortly before the time is up, so that they can save their game.

Some consoles and games automatically remind kids and teens to take breaks, since they often lose track of time when gaming.

One very practical feature: A lot of online games allow you to restrict screen time not just on one device, but in your user account. This way, the restriction remains active even when your child plays video games at a friend's house. You can also specify when and on what days gaming is allowed – a very helpful feature especially for younger kids.

Tip

With a parental control app, you can flexibly manage device and app usage no matter where you are. You can also spontaneously allow extra screen time as necessary.

Set spending limits

To avoid unexpected charges, kids and teens should not play video games on their parents' devices or accounts, as these are often linked to payment methods (credit card data). It is better to create a separate children's account that allows you to disable or limit purchases. Gaming consoles, in particular, allow you to configure fixed spending limits or passwords for purchases, since they function as closed systems. Relevant settings should also be configured on PCs and mobile devices.

Tip

Use prepaid credit or parental controls on platforms to control in-game purchases and consciously allow them.



Parental control tools protect your child, even when they are playing on the go.

Limit communication options

You can specifically restrict interaction in games to avoid unwanted contact. Many consoles and platforms allow you to completely disable chats and voice messages or to restrict them to friends only. In the parental controls, you can also deactivate or monitor friend requests, enable automated word filters, and block inappropriate content.



Tip

Encourage your kids to block or report disruptive players.

Find a balance between control and trust

Even if everyday life is stressful, take time to update the parental controls for your child. Once they are set up, parental controls offer added safety for your child long-term. Minor updates can make a big difference.

But keep in mind that parental controls alone do not provide one-hundred percent protection. Although they function very reliably today on consoles and smartphones, they are no substitute for monitoring kids in a way that builds trust or for having candid discussions about safe video gaming.



Tip

As they get older, gradually give your child more responsibility for their own gaming habits. Keep the lines of communication open to foster conscious and reflective use of video games.

05

Gaming

and youth

culture

Children and adolescents today are involved in more than just playing video games. They are part of online communities, communicate with others about games, and are members of various video gaming subcultures. Gaming culture can be very diverse and not everyone is automatically interested in all aspects of it. This section explains some of the most important terms and formats you may encounter if your child is into gaming

Online communities and fandoms

As in other areas of pop culture, gamers form online communities focused on the specific trends, games, or personalities they like most. These communities, also known as “fandoms,” are very important to teens because it is through them that they make new friends and develop their identity. Popular “meeting places” for these groups include social platforms like Discord and Twitch, websites like Reddit, or forums set up by the various game creators.



Tip

Communities and fandoms are sustained by members communicating and staying engaged. For young people, actively participating in such communities is an important part of their personal development. To learn how you can make participation as safe as possible, see → *section 3*.

Gaming influencers

Influencers are people who use their popularity on social media, such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube, to earn a living. They reach a large number of people by creating and sharing entertaining or engaging content. Teens and young adults often view influencers as role models. Influencers can be as influential as music or movie stars.

Gaming influencers post social media content about video games that reaches a very large audience. For example, they create videos in which they introduce games, share tips and tricks, or live-stream their own video gaming sessions. They attract a large community of fans who are interested in new games and everything relating to games. Influencers earn money

through advertising built into their content or through funding from individual subscribers.



Tip

Ask your child why they follow certain influencers and what exactly makes the content and videos so engaging. This will give you better insight into your child's interests and role models.

Let's Plays and livestreaming

In a Let's Play video, viewers can watch someone while they play a game and comment on various aspects of it. Usually this involves enhancing the action of the game with humorous or exciting commentary. The videos are uploaded to platforms like YouTube. Another type of Let's Play is live-streamed, for example on the platform Twitch.

In a Let's Play, the viewer sometimes only hears the voice of the person playing, while only the game is visible in the video. Other times, a small video feed of the gamer is also shown. The main purpose is to experience the gamer's reactions. A lot of times, viewers consider Let's Plays more important than the game itself. Videos of this type are especially popular because gaming influencers can chat with their followers during a livestream Let's Play.

 **Tip**

Keep an eye not only on which games your child is playing, but also on the game content they might be viewing in online videos. USK age ratings are not given for video recordings of a game, but they can still serve as a guideline.

Cosplay

Cosplay (short for "costume play") refers to people who roleplay characters from computer games or other media. They wear costumes and imitate the characters' behavior.

Cosplay has its origins in the Japanese manga and anime fan culture. Costumes often include accessories like jewelry, fake weapons, and other objects. Special makeup and wigs are also used to recreate a character's appearance as accurately as possible. Cosplay is usually for fun or for competitions at conventions. Only a few cosplayers earn money by being hired to make professional appearances.

 **Tip**

Cosplay is more than just a hobby. Participants learn numerous manual skills through the crafting, designing, sewing, and tailoring that is involved. Encourage your child to get creative and learn new skills.



Through cosplay, gaming fans express their enthusiasm for games and make events such as gamescom an even more colourful experience.

Esports

Esports refers to athletic competition with video games. Any video game can be played as an esports if set rules defined by an esports organization are followed. In practice, specific multi-player games are primarily played in large-scale competitions.

As in other forms of sport, fast reaction speeds, team spirit, motivation, and fairness are what count in esports. Esports professionals are committed to physical and mental fitness as well as a healthy diet. Apart from professional esports, with sponsored teams and championships viewed by millions of fans, there is also a thriving hobby and amateur scene with organized clubs.



Tip

Through esports, young people can make new friends and experience team play. In other words, esports is not like “playing by yourself on a computer”; it can strengthen the social skills of adolescents.

Gaming as an opportunity for the future

Video and computer games are a free time activity, a break from the daily routine – and this is precisely what makes gaming so attractive. That does not mean, however, that gaming is a waste of time. In addition to being entertaining, games give children and adolescents an opportunity to get active or creative. Whether young people moderate an online forum or develop their own games in their free time: Parents should support these interests just like they would other social or creative activities such as learning an instrument, drawing, or writing.

People who develop their own computer games acquire design and technical skills that are important in many occupations. Programming, graphic and interface design, and the use of AI systems are just a few examples. Learning all you can about video games promotes an understanding of the medium’s impact and strengthens the media competence of young people. What is more, some computer games help with better understanding complex subjects like history, politics, and economics.



Tip

Does your child like to work on developing their own computer games? Have them show you the results and how they got there. You may discover that your child has new talents.

06

Important tips and links for parents at a glance

This section provides a summary of practical everyday tips for managing your child's video gaming activities:

- **Understand your child's interests and development:** Observe which games your child likes most and check whether the games are appropriate for your child's stage of development and age group.
- **Get information:** Familiarize yourself with the content, age ratings, and potential challenges of the games in order to make informed decisions.
- **Establish clear rules:** Agree on game content and screen time.

Ensure balanced media consumption and exposure to a multitude of free time activities.

- **Actively monitor your child and use parental controls:** Play along with your child from time to time, share your experiences with the game, and use the parental controls.
- **Be available and seek support:** Be open to discussion, take concerns seriously, and seek advice and support if necessary.

By taking these steps, you create a safe gaming environment in which your child can have a positive gaming experience.

Get fit for family gaming: Links for parents

Where can I find general information about video games?

- USK for families
usk.de/fuer-familien
- USK glossary
usk.de/lexikon

Where can I find information about the USK age ratings?

- USK age ratings
usk.de/die-usk-alterskennzeichen
- USK Classification Database
usk.de/pruefdatenbank

Where can I find recommendations for educational games?

- Spieleratgeber NRW
(NRW Guide to Games – available in German only)
spieleratgeber-nrw.de
- Digitale Spiele mit pädagogischem Potential
(NRW Guide to Games – available in German only)
stiftung-digitale-spielekultur.de/paedagogische-spiele
- Internet-ABC (Internet ABCs – available in German only)
internet-abc.de/kinder/spiel-spass/spieletipps

- TOMMI Children's Software Award
tommi.kids/en
- Pädagogischer Medienpreis (Education Media Award – available in German only)
paedagogischer-medienpreis.de
- Gaming ohne Grenzen (Gaming Without Borders – available in German only)
gaming-ohne-grenzen.de
- Games in der Familie der bpb (Video Games in the bpb Family – available in German only)
bpb.de/themen/kinder-jugend/games-in-der-familie

How do I set up a game console or gaming platform so that it is safe?

- Medien kindersicher (Child-Safe Media – available in German only)
[medien-kindersicher.de](https://www.medien-kindersicher.de)

How can I introduce my elementary school child to the world of video games?

- Wo ist Joy? – Ein Tauchgang in die Welt der Games (Where is Joy? Dive into the World of Games – available in German only)
[wo-ist-joy.de](https://www.wo-ist-joy.de)

How can I establish screen time rules together with my child?

- Mediennutzungsvertrag (Screen Time Agreement – available in German only)
[mediennutzungsvertrag.de](https://www.mediennutzungsvertrag.de)

Where can I find information about the USK's Digital Parent's Night?

- Digitaler Elternabend der USK (USK Digital Parent's Night – available in German only)
[usk.de/digitaler-elternabend](https://www.usk.de/digitaler-elternabend)

Where can I find information and tips on media education?

- [Elternguide.online](https://www.elternguide.online) (Parent's Guide Online)
[elternguide.online/en](https://www.elternguide.online/en)

Where can I find out more about the use of games in school and education?

- Foundation for Digital Games Culture
[stiftung-digitale-spielekultur.de/en](https://www.stiftung-digitale-spielekultur.de/en)

Where can I get help with problems?

- fragZEBRA (askZEBRA – available in German only)
[fragzebra.de](https://www.fragzebra.de)
- JUUUPORT (available in English)
[juuuport.de](https://www.juuuport.de)
- Mediensuchthilfe (Help for Media Addiction – available in German only)
[mediensuchthilfe.info](https://www.mediensuchthilfe.info)
- Verbraucherzentrale (Consumer Protection Office – available in German only)
[verbraucherzentrale.de](https://www.verbraucherzentrale.de)



Parent's quick guides to video games

Explanatory videos for parents
about managing video gaming



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About this publication

Publishers

Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle Unterhaltungssoftware GmbH (USK)
und Stiftung Digitale Spielekultur gGmbH

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Design

minkadu Kommunikationsdesign | minkadu.de

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July 2025

