ScreenSafe
Social Media & Online Safety for Parents, Children and Schools

Co-op Academy
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# Online Safety News

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## Who Is Your Child Really Gaming With?

New Ofcom research published on 13 October found that more than half of children who game online play with people they have never met in person.

While gaming can be a great way to have fun and connect with friends, parents aren't always aware of who their children are talking to.
Ofcom also found that 64% of parents of children who game online were concerned about contact with strangers.

### Three Things to Check

**CHECK:** Is your child's correct age registered on their gaming accounts? This can prevent chat functions being available or add in extra protections on some games.

**CHAT:** Ask who they play with and whether they know those people in real life.

**CHANGE:** Review chat settings, friend requests and who can contact them.

### Try This Conversation

"Show me who you play with online. Are they all people you actually know, or have you made friends through the game?"

You don't need to understand every game just the ones your child is playing. Understanding who your child is interacting with and what chat functions are available is a good place to start.

This is then a great place to have conversations around protecting privacy and why we shouldn't talk to people we don't know in real life, online.

## A Five-Minute Family Gaming Challenge

Ofcom has launched a free Power Up Your Play family challenge to help parents and children explore online gaming safety together.

The activities are designed to take around five minutes each and cover topics such as online friendships, privacy, age ratings and gaming habits.

### Why Not Try It This Weekend?

Ask your child to show you their favourite game.
Can other players send them private messages?
How do they block or report another player?
Can they make purchases without permission?
Are there any settings you'd like to change?

### A Simple Way to Connect

Let your child be the expert and show you around.

It's a simple way to understand more about their gaming world without turning it into another conversation about screen time.

**Sources:** [Ofcom — Free Power Up Your Play family challenge]

**Sources:** [Ofcom — New online gaming research, 13 October 2026] | [Ofcom — Parents Power Up: Check, Chat, Change]

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# Anti-Bullying Week: Break the Silence




**16–20 November 2026 is Anti-Bullying Week,** this year's theme is 'Break the Silence'.
For primary-aged children, unkind behaviour can happen in gaming chats, messaging groups and online friendships as well as in the playground. Children may stay quiet because they feel embarrassed, scared or worry they will lose access to their games or devices.

It's important that we make it clear that asking for help is always the right thing to do — even if they have made an unkind choice themselves.

### Try this conversation

"If somebody was being left out of a group or everyone was laughing at them online, what could you do?"

Encourage them not to forward hurtful messages, to support the person affected and to tell a trusted adult. If bullying happens, listen calmly and involve school where appropriate.

**Source: Anti-Bullying Alliance — Anti-Bullying Week 2026**

# Games, Virtual Coins and the Pressure to Spend



New guidance highlighted by Parent Zone and the PSHE Association explores how easily children can face financial pressures online.

For younger children, that might begin with buying game currency, upgrades or digital items, sometimes without understanding how real money is being spent.

The issue is not just accidental purchases. Limited-time offers and pressure from friends can also make children feel they need to buy something to keep up.

### Check this together

Review in-app purchases, remove saved payment details where appropriate and require adult approval before spending. Show your child how virtual coins translate into pounds and agree what is and is not allowed.

Try asking: "If a game says you need something today or you'll miss out, how could you decide whether it is really worth buying?"

# Is It Real? Helping Children Spot AI and Fake Content

From talking animals to impossible stunts, children are increasingly coming across videos and images online that look real but have actually been created or altered using artificial intelligence (AI).

As AI-generated content becomes more convincing, it can be difficult for children (and adults!) to tell what's genuine.

Children may believe something they see, share misleading information or become frightened by content that isn't real.

### Help Your Child Become a Digital Detective



Encourage them to:

- **STOP:** Don't immediately believe or share something just because it looks convincing.
- **QUESTION:** Who created it or sent it to them? Could it have been edited or generated using AI?
- **CHECK:** Look for the same information from another trusted source, or ask an adult for help.

### Try This Together

Find an unusual picture or video online and ask:

"Do you think that's real? How could we find out?"

The aim isn't to make children distrust everything they see online, but to help them develop the confidence to question, check and think for themselves.

Remember, even adults can struggle to recognise AI-generated content.

Why not put your family's detective skills to the test with these free interactive quizzes?

**Internet Matters – Find the Fake: Test your family's ability to recognise misinformation. Find the Fake quizzes**

**Common Sense Media – Two Truths & AI: Three images, but which one is AI-generated? Two Truths & AI | Common Sense Education**

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