

To: all parents and carers of primary age children

17 June 2019

Dear Parent or Carer

18-rated video and online games

I am writing to draw your attention to a further increase in reports of primary school age children playing games rated as 18+.

All video, computer and downloadable games are given an age rating under the PEGI system. The age ratings are 3, 7, 12, 16 and 18.



These ratings do not indicate enjoyment or intellectual level – they mean that the content is unsuitable for anyone below that age. It is a criminal offence for a retailer to supply a 12, 16 or 18-rated game to anyone below those ages.

As well as age ratings, games will usually include a list of the types of content included. For example:



I believe that it is unacceptable knowingly to allow primary age children to play games with an 18 rating, whether supervised by an adult or not.

For a game to attract an 18 rating, it will mean that the content is such as “to cause a reasonable viewer to react with a sense of revulsion”. To take one example, the popular game “Grand Theft Auto” in its various versions includes all of the following: violent activity including torture; bad language; stealing cars; nudity; dealing in class A drugs; random unprovoked acts of murder; managing (pimping) prostitutes and controlling them with physical violence; and deliberately provoking a gang war between different ethnic groups. While it is possible to configure the game to minimise the inclusion of such material, it is (literally) child’s play to go back in and reverse any changes.

There is almost no evidence of a causal link between *violence* in video games and violent behaviour in real life. However, research by the NSPCC has established that young children playing 18-rated games are more vulnerable to abuse through being exposed to early sexualised behaviour and extreme brutality, as well as contact risks through conversing with older teens and adults they do not know.

Children who have access to these kinds of games often discuss the content with their peers at school and during clubs. This leaves other children scared and vulnerable, especially as they do not understand the game and its graphic content, and it is hard for these children to discuss their fears with their parents and teachers.

Advice from the police to primary schools is that if they become aware of a child who is permitted to play an 18+ game by a parent or carer and their initial advice goes unheeded, they consider making a referral to Children’s Social Care on the grounds of neglect.

As parents you can avoid your children accessing such unsuitable content without your knowledge by enabling the parental controls. Virtually every internet-connected device has parental controls built in, but they are usually switched off by default.

The QR codes below can be read by most mobile phones and will take you to detailed instructions on how to set products for maximum safety. Left to right, they are for iPod Touch/iPhone/iPad; Android phones and tablets; Kindle Fire; Microsoft Xbox; Nintendo products and Sony PlayStation. If you don’t know how to use QR codes, ask a young person in your family to show you.



Ensure you set a strong password on the parental settings that is not known to the child.

I recommend that you set the device so the child cannot download *any* apps or games themselves without seeking your permission. To help you to decide if a game or app is appropriate, the [Ask About Games](#) and [NSPCC Net Aware](#) websites give information about setting parental controls, video game and app ratings and offers suggestions on how games can be an enjoyable experience for all the family.

I would also recommend that all parents visit the CEOP [Think U Know](#) website for more general information on keeping your child safer while online.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Cowley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

Peter Cowley
ICT and Online Safety Adviser
Achieving for Children