

GROWING UP GAMING!

Children's gaming habits research summary

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Growing up Gaming

Millions of children in the UK play video games online on consoles, tablets, phones and computers. From sports to strategy, action to adventure – video games can be a great way for kids to play, learn and be creative. Increasingly, it's also an important way to spend time with friends, family and wider online communities.

Video games are a part of modern childhood, and many children say that gaming is their favourite activity – both on and offline.

While video games are popular across all groups, there are differences in how children play. Boys game more frequently than girls. Children with limiting or impacting conditions and looked after children are also more likely to game.

For many children in the UK, gaming is as much about socialising as it is about playing. Most children game online with friends and family, and many also interact with people they've only ever met online.

But alongside the benefits of gaming, there are challenges. More than half of children who game report playing with people they have never met in person. Parents in the UK express concerns about contact with strangers, exposure to inappropriate content, bullying, and pressure to make in-game purchases.

Some children also report encountering nasty or hurtful behaviour while gaming. Notably, children with a limiting or impacting condition are more likely to experience such behaviour than those without.

Growing Up Gaming brings together findings from Ofcom's Children's Media Lives, Children and Parents Media Tracker and the Children's Passive Online Measurement research, all published earlier this year, plus our Persuasive Design Features and Potential Child Financial Harms research from 2025. It highlights children's gaming habits, the devices they use and the games they play, and how this can vary significantly across different groups.

This research has also informed Ofcom's *Parents Power Up* campaign, which encourages parents to take simple steps to help keep their children safer while gaming online, including checking age settings, talking about who their child games with and reviewing parental controls. More information on this can be found at Ofcom.org.uk/powerup.

How children in the UK game

The children who game

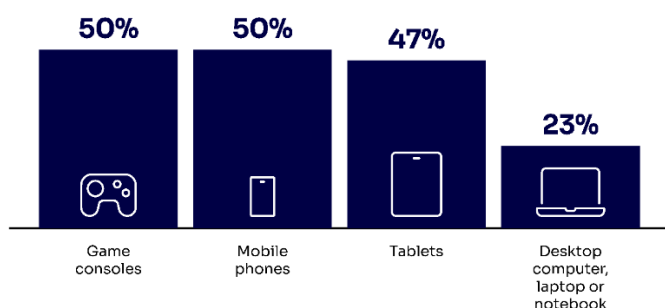
When asked about their top three favourite activities to do in their free time – on and offline –, gaming was the most popular activity nominated from a list provided to children aged 8-17, with over four in ten (43%) selecting it.¹

Almost nine in ten (88%) of all children aged 3-17 play games on some kind of device. Gaming peaks at around 10-12 years-old (96%) and boys are more likely than girls to game (91% vs 86%). Children with a limiting or impacting condition² are more likely to game than those with no conditions (95% vs 88%). Nearly all the looked after children³ we spoke to as part of this research say they game (99%).⁴

The devices children use for gaming

The most common devices for children aged 3-17 to play games on are games consoles (50%), mobile phones (50%) and tablets (47%), while 23% use a desktop computer, laptop or notebook. Games consoles are more likely to be used by boys than girls (62% vs 38%), but the use of other devices is more evenly split.⁵

Figure 1: Devices used by children aged 3-17 for gaming



Source: [Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2026](#). QP23: Does your child play games at home or elsewhere in any of these ways? Base: All parents of 3-17s (n=4,600)

¹ Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). J1. From the list below, what are your three favourite things to do in your free time? Base: All children aged 8-17 (n=3,426)

² A child is typically classified as having a limiting or impacting condition if they have a physical or mental health condition, illness, or impairment that has a substantial effect on their day-to-day activities. This includes conditions that affect areas such as mobility, dexterity, vision, hearing, speech, learning, mental health, social/behavioural functioning, or stamina.

³ Looked after children means those who are currently in a care arrangement, such as being looked after by foster carers; living with extended family or friends in a kinship care arrangement; or previously in a care arrangement, for example where the child is now subject to a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order.

⁴ Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP23. Does your child play games at home or elsewhere in any of these ways? Base: All parents of 3-17s (n=4,600)

⁵ Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP23. Does your child play games at home or elsewhere in any of these ways? Base: All parents of 3-17s (n=4,600)

Who children game online with

Children aged 8-17, and parents of 3-7-year-olds, told us that gaming is an important way to spend time with friends, siblings and other family members, helping them socialise, chat and stay connected even when they're not physically together.

Playing with friends and family is one of the most common ways children game online. Of all children aged 3-17 who game online, almost all (96%) say they do this *at least sometimes*, while more than half of them (55%) game with friends and family *all or most of the time* they play.

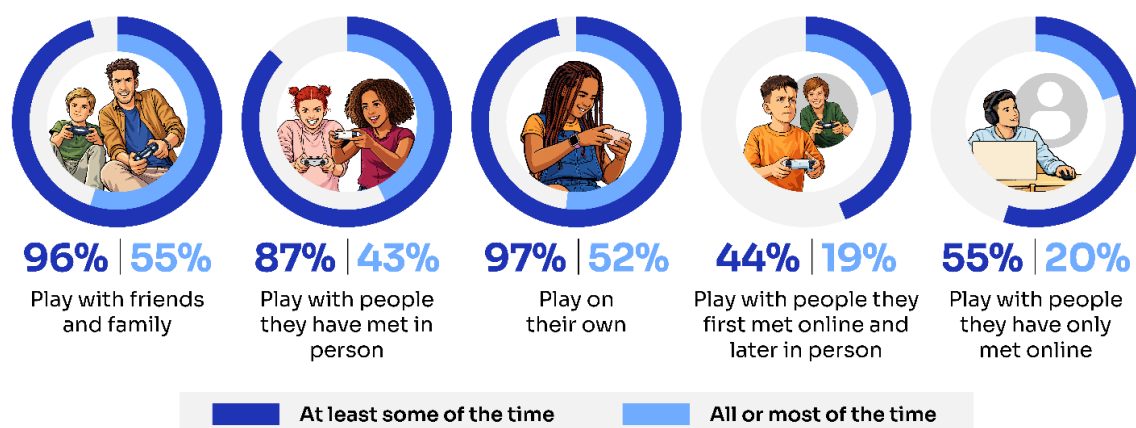
Playing with other people they know in real life is also very popular, with nearly nine in ten (87%) doing this *at least sometimes* and around four in ten (43%) doing so *all or most of the time*.

However, online gaming also extends children's social networks beyond people they know in real life. More than half (55%) of children aged 3-17 who game online say they play with people they have only met online *at least sometimes*, while one in five (20%) do so *all or most of the time*. Just under one in ten (8%) say they do this *all of the time*, suggesting it is the only way they play online.

Playing with people they've only met online is more common among children with a limiting or impacting condition than those without a condition (31% vs 16%), and among children from minority ethnic backgrounds than white children (26% vs 18%). Children from ABC1 socio-economic-group households are also more likely than those in C2DE households to do this (24% vs 15%).

Frequently, online relationships can move beyond gaming. More than four in ten (44%) 3-17s who game online say they have, *at least sometimes*, played with people they first met online and later met in person. One in five (19%) say they do this *all or most of the time* (including 6% who say they do this all of the time).⁶⁷

Figure 2: Who children aged 3-17 game online with



Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP26B/QC44B: Summary Table - When you/your child plays games online, how often do you/they do each of the following. Base: All of 3-17s AND play games online (n=1,719)

⁶ Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP26B/QC44B: Summary Table - When you/your child plays games online, how often do you/they do each of the following. Base: All of 3-17s AND play games online (n=1,719)

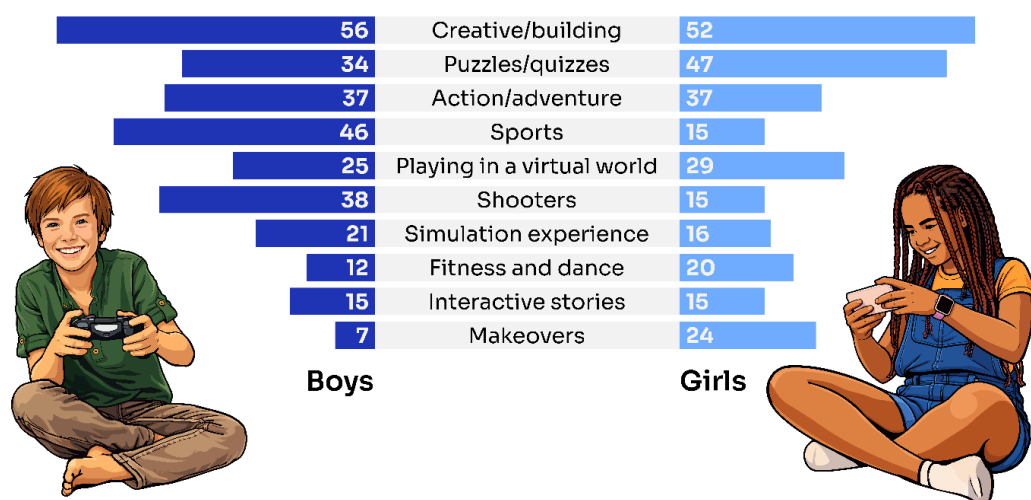
⁷ Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP24/G2: Which of the following types of games do you/they play? Base: All of 3-17s AND play games on an electronic device (n=2,541)

What types of games children play on devices

Overall, creative and building games are the most popular genre (54%) among children aged 3-17 who game on devices, favoured by both girls (52%) and boys (56%).

However, there are notable differences by gender among other types of games. Girls are more likely than boys to play puzzle and quiz games, fitness and dance games, and makeover games. Whereas boys prefer sports, action/adventure, shooters and simulation games.⁸

Figure 3: What types of games children play, by gender



Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP24/G2: Which of the following types of games do you/they play? Base: All of 3-17s AND play games on an electronic device (n=2,541)

⁸ Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP24/G2: Which of the following types of games do you/they play? Base: All of 3-17s AND play games on an electronic device (n=2,541)

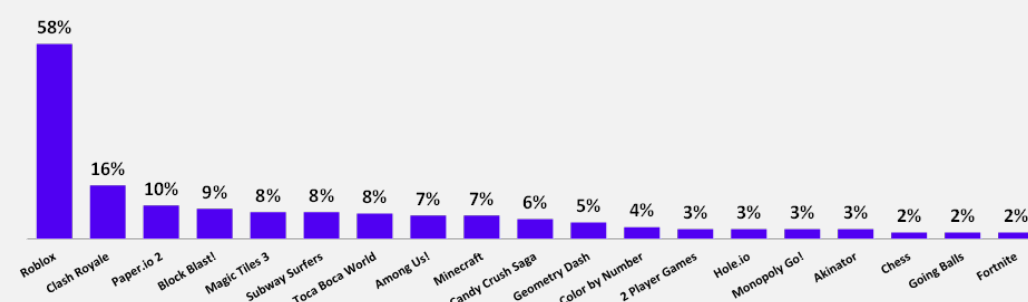
Case study: Roblox is the most widely used gaming app among children

Roblox is a gaming platform where millions of users build, play and share immersive 3D games and experiences. Its users range in age from 5 to over 25+ years old, with the platform taking an age-based approach to safety with separate, more controlled accounts for the younger users. Those under 16 can be placed into either a 'Roblox Select' account (for those aged 9-15) or a 'Roblox Kids' account (for those aged 5-8), which both have built-in guardrails that help keep users in age-appropriate environments, and give parents more visibility and control.¹¹

According to Ofcom's Children's Passive Measurement research, Roblox is the most widely used gaming app among UK children aged 8-14 across smartphones and tablets (reach does not include measurement of gaming consoles).¹²

Almost six in ten use Roblox for gaming (58%), a far higher proportion than reach of other gaming apps (see figure 3).

Figure 4: Top 20 gaming apps by proportion of online 8-14-year-olds visiting in a month



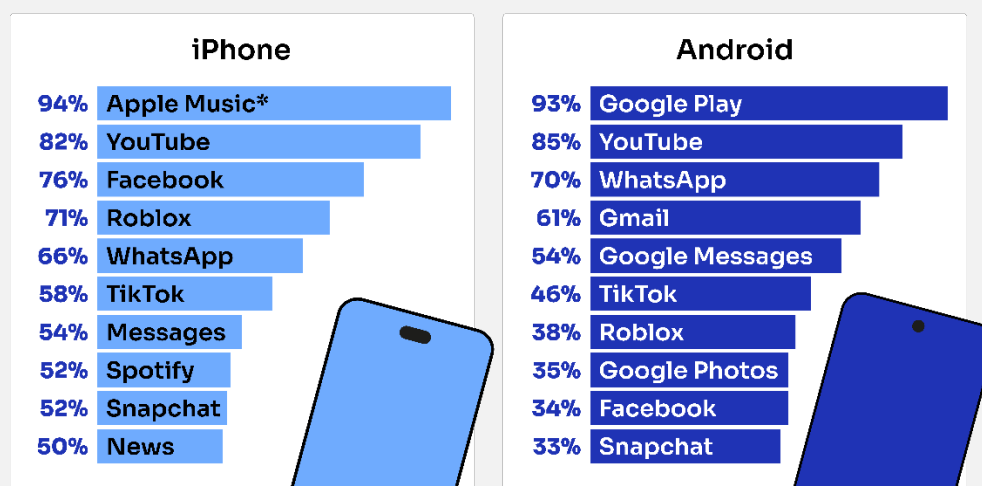
Source: [Children's Passive Online Measurement \(2026\)](#). Note: All visits of >1 second are included in the data but this does not imply that a visitor is actively using a service – accidental visits, visits that can't get beyond a log-in page, visits that are blocked by age assurance and visits to sites that are used to authenticate access to another site are all included in the visitor numbers. Does not include games console use.

¹¹ [Roblox Safety Center - Safety Policies & Resources | Roblox](#)

¹² Source: [Children's Passive Online Measurement \(CPOM\) 2026](#). In this study we collected data from a nationally representative sample of 701 children, passively measuring their use of websites and apps across the smartphones, tablets and computers that they use to go online. It does not include gaming consoles which is a key online activity for some children. Our *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes report* notes that games consoles are the most common device for children to play games on (50%), along with mobile phones (50%) and tablets (47%).

The study also found that Roblox is one of the most popular apps *overall* among 8-14s. In terms of app audience size, it comes fourth behind YouTube, WhatsApp and Facebook, and is the only gaming app in the top 10. However, it is more popular among iPhone users than Android ones. It remains in fourth place among iPhone users but appears in seventh place among Android phone users.¹³

Figure 5: Top ten smartphone apps, Android phones vs iPhones, based on a proportion of the total selected smartphone app universe: 8-14-year-olds (in month)



Source: [Children's Passive Online Measurement \(2026\)](#). Note: *Visitors to the Apple Music app may not have an Apple Music subscription and may be using the app to access downloaded content and listen to/view this content offline. Base: Android phone: 238; iPhone 283. All visits of >1 second are included in the data but this does not imply that a visitor is actively using a service – accidental visits, visits that can't get beyond a log-in page, visits that are blocked by age assurance and visits to sites that are used to authenticate access to another site are all included in the visitor numbers.

However, time spent on the Roblox platform declines significantly with age, indicating its particular attraction to younger children. Teenagers aged 13-14 spend the least amount of time on it, at just 12 minutes on average a day. This increases to 27 minutes among 10-12s, and up to 40 minutes on average among the youngest age group of 8-9-year-olds.¹⁴

¹³ Source: [Children's Passive Online Measurement \(CPOM\) 2026](#). App visits on smartphones and tablets only. It does not include gaming consoles which is a key online activity for some children. Our *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes report* notes that games consoles are the most common device for children to play games on (50%), along with mobile phones (50%) and tablets (47%).

¹⁴ Source: [Children's Passive Online Measurement \(CPOM\) 2026](#)

Children in our Media Lives study reported that they also enjoyed watching others game, in particular on Roblox, meaning their play is, at times, more passive.¹⁵

“There’s one [creator] with a letter K.... [they stream] Roblox...there’s like some quizzes and stuff for you to see and I just do them.”

Caleb (age 9)

“I watched this guy’s live, he was playing a Roblox game...they have like 3 million followers. They were playing 99 nights...I thought they were, like, funny and stuff.”

Amber (age 13)

Participants also found a social appeal on the platform, beyond their existing friendship groups. This was done via integrated play using the chat function¹⁶, regularly adding players they met within the game to their friends list, regardless of whether they knew them in person or not.

“I just like having friends...I just friended, like, lots of people so I don’t feel that lonely...if there's only two friends, it'll be a bit too weird. I don't really have that much friends, like in school.”

Caleb (age 9)

¹⁵ Source: [Children's Media Lives 2026](#)

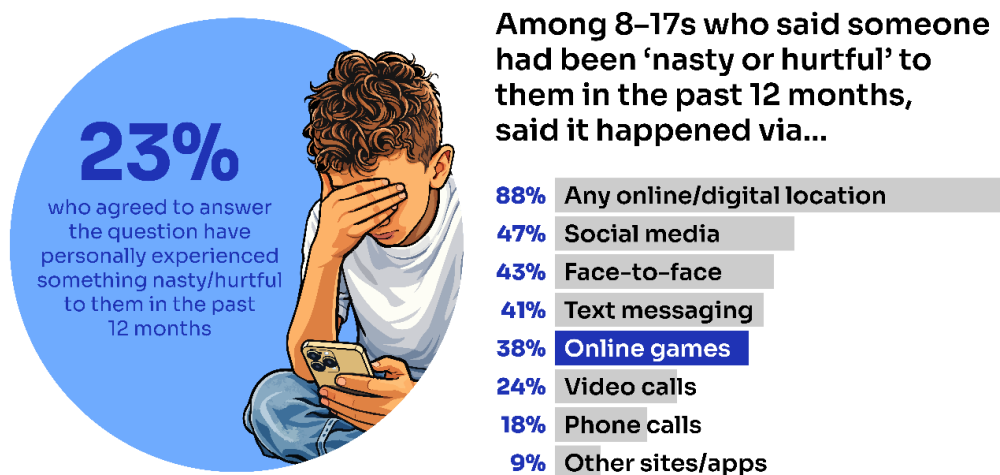
¹⁶ Within Roblox's new age-based accounts, chat is disabled by default for 5-8-year-olds, whilst types of chat available increase gradually for users aged 9-15. Additionally, users can only chat to other users in a similar age band, with the exception of trusted friends.

Experience of nasty or hurtful behaviour while gaming

Unfortunately, negative experiences during gaming can be common for children. Among 8-17-year-olds who reported someone being nasty or hurtful towards them in the past year, 38% of them said this had happened through online games. Boys were more likely than girls to have this happen to them personally (48% vs 29%).

Overall, 88% said they had experienced such behaviour in an online or digital environment, with online gaming coming third in the list (47% via social media, 41% via text/messaging).¹⁷

Figure 6: Where children experience upsetting behaviour



Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QC55: When somebody was nasty or hurtful to you did it happen in any of these ways? Base: 8-17s who say this has happened to them (n=335)

¹⁷ Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#)

. QC55: When somebody was nasty or hurtful to you did it happen in any of these ways? Base: 8-17s who say this has happened to them (n=335)

How parents in the UK feel about their child gaming

Parental concerns about gaming

The biggest type of concern among parents and carers of 3-17-year-olds who play games online is their child talking to strangers through games or via the chat functions (64%). This is followed by concerns about bullying by other players (60%), exposure to inappropriate content such as violence, bad language or disturbing material (59%), and pressure to make in-game purchases (51%).

Levels of concern vary. Parents of girls are more likely to be concerned about their child talking to strangers or being bullied within the game, than parents of boys. Parents and carers of looked after children are particularly concerned about gaming content, with 85% worried about the content of games their child plays, compared with 58% of parents of non-looked after children. In contrast, parents of children from C2DE socio-economic households are generally less likely to express concerns overall about their child's online gaming, than those in ABC1 households.

Older parents are also less likely to express concerns. Parents aged 45-64 are less likely than other age groups to say they have concerns about their child's online gaming, while those aged 18-24 and 45-64 are less likely to say they actively supervise their child's online activities.¹⁹

In-game purchases

Our research into persuasive design features and potential child financial harms from 2025 found that over half of children aged 8-17, who had gamed in the last month, reported they had bought something whilst gaming during that period (53%). Just under a third of them had bought something directly on the game they were playing (31%), while one in five bought via the console store (21%).²⁰

Our qualitative research showed the uneasiness this can cause parents, despite their varying levels of confidence in their own digital skills.²¹

“I’m generally good with digital tasks, but what kids are looking at is a completely different world.”

Parent of younger children

The study found that some parents set boundaries or restrict what their child can and cannot do online, including personally overseeing all in-app transactions. Some parents said they typically manage and control purchases by using their own payment card to complete online transactions,

¹⁹ Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP74A_D_E_F: To what extent are you concerned about these aspects of your child's games playing? The possibility of them talking to strangers while gaming, whether within the game or via the chat function? Base: Parents of 3-17s AND their child plays games on electronic devices (n=2,522)

²⁰ Source: [Children's online spending and potential financial harm: quantitative research](#). G1 - Now we have some questions about gaming. Do you play games at home or elsewhere in any of these ways? G3b - In the last month have you spent any money on something whilst gaming? This could have been using your own money or someone else's. Just a reminder that we will not share these answers with anyone. Base: 8-17-year-olds who have played games on any device in the last month (n=2,084)

²¹ Source: [Persuasive design features and potential child financial harms – qualitative research](#)

allowing them to monitor and regulate their child's spending. However, while this approach gives parents oversight, it can also inadvertently increase their vulnerability to financial harm if card details are saved to the digital platform and remain accessible to the child.

"I can use my two cards, one's a [pre-pay] card, so there's nothing more you can spend. Because about four years ago, my 10-year-old was going on my phone, he was playing a game in the back of the car, he spent over 400 pounds from my bank account. He didn't even know, he just kept going with the game. It comes up on screen and you just tap it. I did manage to get a refund."

Parent of younger children

Some parents therefore preferred the more proactive approach of removing card details after making each purchase, to help avoid unauthorised spending altogether.

Rules for safer gaming

The majority of parents of 3-17s who play games have gaming rules for their child, but 1 in 10 say they don't set any at all. More than half of parents told us they set rules for their children around how much time they can spend playing games (56%). Around half had rules about when the child can play (51%), playing games with appropriate content (50%), games with appropriate age ratings (49%), and spending rules (48%). Just over four in ten (43%) set rules around who they can play with.

"The only thing we do, we try to do is like to reduce his, you know, screen time... So we try to, you know, let him replace [Roblox] with other things... Like when, you know, like take our phone and like my own phone, he knows the password. So the other one we put a password so he doesn't have access to it."

Participant's (age 9) mum

Rules around gaming also decrease as children get older. Nearly all parents of 3–7-year-olds and 8–12-year-olds (both at 96%) set at least one rule, compared to 8 in 10 (80%) parents of 13–17-year-olds.²²

²² Source: [Children and Parents' Media Literacy tracker data tables \(2026\)](#). QP67: *Do you have any of these rules about games that your child plays at home or elsewhere??* Base: Parents of 3-17s AND their child plays games (n=2,522)

Helping to make children who game safer online

In the UK, there are important rules in place to protect children who game online. The Online Safety Act applies to online services where users can interact with each other, or create, share or upload content, including many gaming platforms.

Sites, apps and services in scope of the Act are required to assess the risk of illegal content and content harmful to children appearing on their service and put measures in place to protect their users.

This includes content relating to suicide, self-harm, eating disorders and pornography. Online services must also act to protect children from misogynistic, violent, hateful or abusive material, online bullying and dangerous challenges.

Ofcom is the UK's online safety watchdog responsible for enforcing these rules. Services that fail to put measures in place to protect their users should expect enforcement. Ofcom has the power to impose fines and – in very serious cases – apply for a court order to prevent the site or app from being available in the UK.

Since online safety rules came into force, we've secured a number of changes on some of the most popular games, including Roblox, PlayStation and Xbox, which are making a difference in keeping children safe online.

Change is happening, but our rules will not eliminate every risk online. That's why Ofcom is also helping families take simple steps towards a safer online gaming experience.

Gaming can be a positive part of children's lives. Helping children stay safer online is not about stopping them from gaming. We're also supporting families to build simple habits, use available safety tools and have regular conversations about who children are playing and interacting with online.

Parents Power Up!

That is why Ofcom's Parents Power Up campaign focuses on three simple actions that every family can take: Check, Chat, Change. Parents don't need specialist gaming knowledge to help their children stay safer online. Small actions, taken regularly, can make a meaningful difference.

Check.

Parents can check that the correct age is set on devices, games and platforms, understand the age ratings of the games their children play, and review the privacy and safety features available. Taking a few moments to check settings can help ensure children are accessing age-appropriate experiences and using protections that have been designed with younger users in mind.

Chat.

Parents can talk openly and regularly with their children about gaming. This includes discussing what they enjoy playing, who they play with, how they interact with others, and whether anything online has made them feel uncomfortable or upset. Our research shows that gaming is often about social connection as much as gameplay, making these conversations an important way for parents to understand their children's online lives.

Change.

Parents can make simple adjustments to settings, routines or habits to support safer and more positive gaming experiences. This might involve updating privacy controls, restricting contact from unknown players, enabling safety features, reviewing purchasing permissions or agreeing healthy family boundaries around gaming. Small changes can help families create gaming experiences that are right for their children.

Ultimately, gaming is now a normal and valuable part of growing up for millions of children across the UK. The aim is not to take gaming away from children, but to help families feel confident navigating it together. By taking a few minutes to Check, Chat and Change, parents and carers can better understand the games their children play, support safer interactions online, and help ensure gaming remains a positive part of childhood.

To find out more visit ofcom.org.uk/powerup