

St Mary's Priory Catholic Infant and Junior Schools' Weekly Newsletter

26th January, 2023

'Love one another; Always do our best; Take care of ourselves and the world around us'



Cricket at St Mary's

This afternoon, the Junior School had some special visitors from Sunrisers Cricket.

Players, Cordelia Griffith and Eva Gray, came to play a game of cricket with the children, followed by a Question and Answer Session.

Bunny visit makes Owl Class very hoppy!

Owls had such fun learning about Chinese/Lunar New Year! We made our own instruments and shared home learning where children made animals of the Zodiac and lanterns. We also celebrated this Zodiac year by meeting and learning about the rabbit Bobby Blue!



Mental Health Awareness

As part of Haringey's Great Mental Health Day, all the children in both the Infant and Junior School, have been focusing on acts of kindness to others in our community!

Attendance winners!

Infant School:	Junior School:
Woodpeckers 97.5%	5C 100%

Punctuality winners!

None	3N 0 lates
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When:	What:	Who:	Where:	Time:
Each Friday until 10th February	Middlesex cricket coaching	Pupils in KS2	Astroturf	All day
7th and 8th February	Parent Teacher Consultations- booking will be available via Arbor	Years 1-6	Infant/Junior Halls	3.40-6pm
13th- 17th February	Half term break- school closed	All pupils		

Reminders

- School uniforms- please make sure your child wears their tie (Juniors/optional for Infants), a white shirt (no polo t-shirts) and black shoes (no trainers). SLT will be checking uniforms next week and sending home reminders to parents.
- Follow us on Twitter! @stmarysrcpriory to see weekly updates from our classes!



KS1 SATs preparation

A special thanks to our Year 2 team, Ms O'Driscoll and Ms Denise for sharing their knowledge with our Year 2 parents and carers on Thursday.

The parents learnt some of the ways that the children are taught so that they can support their children at home.

Well done, team!



Stars of the Week



Owl Class	David	Erica
Robin Class	Khiearna	Josselyn
Swan Class	Triana	Iggy
Woodpecker Class	Isabelle	Daniel
Dove Class	Cain	Valeria
3N	Ashley	Isha
3M	Dawood	Joshua
4B	Isabella	Louise
4M	Nana	Lucia
5C	Miracle	Ketsia
5J	Hanan	Alexandra
6B	Jeremy	Ainhua
6D	Klaudia	Sophonias

Congratulations to our Stars of the week!
These pupils have worked exceptionally hard to stand out amongst their peers. Well done everyone!



Link to our Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/StMarysRCPriory>



What's been happening at St Mary's this week?

Make sure you check out our school's Twitter account to keep up to date with what our pupils are getting up to!

St Mary's Priory Catholic Infant & Junior Sc... @StMarysRCPr... · 1h ...
It's a crossover tweet! The [#DigitalDoves](#) have joined forces with the [#WebsurfingWoodpeckers](#) to create their own games using block coding!



St Mary's Priory Catholic Infant & Junior S... @StMarysRCPr... · 5h ...
As part of Haringey's Great Mental Health Day, all the children in both the Infant and Junior School, have been focusing on Acts Of Kindness to others in our community! 🥰❤️ [#GreatMentalHealth](#) [#HaringeyCouncil](#)



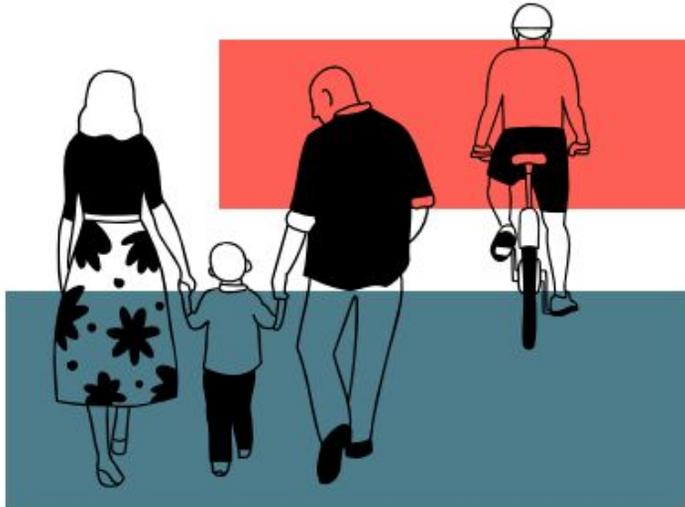
St Mary's Priory Catholic Infant & Junior ... @StMarysRC... · Jan 26 ...
Owl's had such fun learning about Chinese/Luna New Year!
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LOCAL WALK + RIDE



↑
Info here!



Next Event:

29th
Jan

11am

Chestnuts
Park Cafe

Haringey Clean Air Group
Working together to tackle air pollution



**Haringey
Streets
for People**

Healthy
Streets
St. Ann's

LIVING
STREETS
GROUP
Haringey

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

TWITTER

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Twitter is a social media network which allows users to post short messages ('tweets') of up to 280 characters. Tweets can consist of text, photos, videos, audio, links, polls and GIFs – often linked by hashtags if they share a common theme or message. Hashtags receiving high levels of interest are said to be 'trending'. Twitter users can engage with other people's posts by liking, retweeting (sharing) or tweeting back (commenting on). Since the entrepreneur Elon Musk acquired Twitter in October 2022 for \$44 billion, he has implemented several major changes to the platform.

INTERACTION WITH STRANGERS

Tweets are public by default, meaning that anyone can view and interact with posts, follow someone and send direct messages. The concern here is that young people may therefore connect and communicate with strangers. Some individuals may follow a young person's Twitter account simply because they have similar interests; however, others may turn out to have more sinister intentions.

FIXATION ON VIEW COUNT

Twitter has recently introduced a 'view count' feature – telling users how many people have seen their tweet (even if they haven't reacted to it). Previous research has found that unfavourable comparisons with other social media users can cause young people to experience feelings of insecurity, jealousy and low self-esteem – leading to an obsession with increasing their numbers.

TROLLS AND BULLYING

The anonymity offered by fake profiles encourages some users to send tweets designed to provoke a reaction; to disrupt conversations; to spark an argument; or to harass the recipient. Such trolling and bullying can impact the mental wellbeing of both the target and anyone who witnesses it. Encourage your child to come to you if they experience such behaviour on Twitter, or if they see it taking place.

PAID-FOR VERIFICATION

Previously, if a Twitter profile displayed a blue tick icon, it meant that the owner – usually a celebrity or a major organisation – had been verified as genuine. Now, however, anyone can pay for a Twitter Blue subscription to receive the tick, with the platform carrying out limited checks on the account's authenticity. This could easily lead to more fake accounts impersonating real people or companies.

CONTENT MODERATION CHANGES

In late 2022, Twitter stated that their 'policy enforcement will rely more heavily on de-amplification of violative content: freedom of speech, but not freedom of reach'. No policies have changed yet, but this wording suggests they may limit who can see posts rather than removing them. While supporting free speech, this could encourage an environment where some toxic content remains online.

HIJACKED HASHTAGS

The hashtag (#) is one of Twitter's most recognisable facets, allowing users to find specific trends or topics. But the sheer volume of tweets each hour can rapidly distort a hashtag's meaning; an initially innocent search term can quickly end up returning inappropriate results. This is common with 'trending' hashtags, as people know that using them will get their tweet seen by a larger audience.

Advice for Parents & Carers

SET ACCOUNTS TO PRIVATE

To reduce some of the fear of your child's tweets being seen and shared by anyone, you can always make their account protected. This means that your child has to give approval for another user to view their posts. You can change Twitter's privacy settings so that your child can't be messaged directly by other people on the platform and their geographical location won't be shared.

EXPLORE THE NEW SETTINGS

Previously, any user could reply to anyone else's tweets. However, the new conversation settings let your child determine who can reply to their posts – either by selecting everyone (the default option), people they follow or only people they mention (using the @ symbol). This improvement has given users extra control, providing them with more protection from trolls and online abuse.

FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING

It can be difficult for anyone to ascertain if something online is real or false, but particularly for young people. Encourage your child to check several reputable sources to determine if a story they've seen is true; remind them to watch out for scams and think about the message's possible motive. Emphasise that it's not a good idea to retweet something if they aren't sure it's correct.

PAUSE BEFORE POSTING

It's important that young people think about what they're about to post and whether they might regret it later. Twitter has developed 'nudges': little prompts which appear if someone is about to tweet using harmful or offensive language. These nudges promote more positive online behaviour by giving users an opportunity to pause and consider their words before they post something.

ENGAGE SAFETY MODE

When Safety Mode is activated, Twitter checks for abusive or spammy behaviour such as hurtful language or repeated negative replies. The platform then flags these suspect accounts and blocks them from responding to your child's tweets. The autoblock function then prevents these accounts from interacting with your child's again for seven days.

BLOCK, REPORT OR MUTE

If someone is upsetting your child on Twitter, you can block and report them. Blocking stops them from messaging or following your child, while reporting an account alerts Twitter to investigate possible misuse. The 'mute' feature, meanwhile, keeps tweets from a specific account (or which include certain words) out of your child's timeline. The other user won't know that they've been muted.

BE CAREFUL WHO TO FOLLOW

As accounts are no longer being as rigorously verified under the 'blue tick' system, it's essential that young Twitter users understand what this means, in terms of people not necessarily being who they claim. Anyone who your child only knows online is still a stranger, regardless of how long they've been communicating for. Remind your child never to disclose personal information on social media.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

OF WORLD WARCRAFT

AGE RESTRICTION
12+

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

World of Warcraft originally launched way back in 2004, and since then the game has blossomed into a major entertainment property. It's spawned spin-off novels, merchandise and even a Hollywood movie adaptation... but why are we still talking about it in 2023? World of Warcraft's most recent iteration, Dragonflight, launched last November and marks the game's ninth major expansion. This latest addition has attracted a whole host of lapsed players back to the game – as well as newcomers jumping into the realm of Azeroth for the first time.

ALWAYS ONLINE

World of Warcraft is an MMORPG, which stands for Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game. Players create a character and head off on mythical quests to earn rewards and become more powerful. The game's environment is absolutely vast, and it can only be played online on a PC or Mac – so there's a high probability of young Warcraft fans wanting to monopolise the family computer.

REGULAR EXPANSIONS

As is common with many MMORPGs, World of Warcraft's developers, Blizzard, release regular expansions for the game (usually every 18 months to two years). So although there's still plenty of content for young players to experience right now, there will almost inevitably be a requirement to continue buying future expansion packs, which tend to cost around £50.

IN-GAME PURCHASES AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Just like its genre contemporary Final Fantasy XIV, World of Warcraft requires a monthly subscription fee to play. It's currently £9.99 per month (although you can get it cheaper by signing up to a longer subscription). There are also many items which can be purchased from the in-game store that don't affect gameplay, but instead offer cosmetic alterations to a player's character.

VOICE AND TEXT CHAT

Because World of Warcraft is played exclusively on PCs and Macs, it's easy for users to type out text messages if they aren't comfortable using voice chat. If you'll forgive the pun, that's a double-edged sword because – although there's less chance of them being harassed verbally – it puts young players at increased risk of being trolled or receiving spam through the in-game messaging function.

SIMULATED VIOLENCE

The fact that World of Warcraft is almost 20 years old means that even its most violent battles look slightly cartoonish compared with the level of authenticity in many more modern games. The exception tends to be Warcraft's in-game cutscenes: animated sections which move the plot onto the next stage. These offer more realistic visuals, but they still aren't overly gory or scary.

POTENTIAL FOR ADDICTION

World of Warcraft can trigger a powerful "just one more quest" mentality in players (especially young ones) as they rush to secure the next dopamine hit from levelling their character up or earning a new item or weapon. It's also a game that doesn't have a definite 'end' – because as soon as a player finishes levelling up one character, they can start afresh with another one.

Advice for Parents & Carers

MANAGE PLAYTIME

World of Warcraft can be an extremely enjoyable game to play with friends, but it's important that your child doesn't let their adventures crowd out school work, socialising or anything else they also enjoy. You could, for example, consider imposing playtime limits – such as a set number of hours to play Warcraft per week, or restricting it to particular days or just weekends.

MAKE IT A REWARD

If your child is excited about getting the next World of Warcraft expansion, you could consider using it as a reward for completing their weekly tasks (you could even call them "quests"! like tidying their room or doing their homework. This will demonstrate that you're happy for them to play the game but will also help them to build good, productive habits, reinforcing that hard work earns rewards.

SIGN UP FOR THE FREE TRIAL

Warcraft's monthly subscription effectively "pays" for the regular new content, but there's also a sizeable free trial that lets new players explore the world of Azeroth without paying a penny. Players can play up until level 20 for free, which is easily several hours' worth of gameplay. If your child does take this option, we'd suggest minimising in-game spending by not linking a bank card to their account.

REMEMBER THE AGE RATING

Due to mild violence and the occasional use of offensive language, World of Warcraft has been rated as appropriate for players aged 12 and over by PEGI (the Pan-European Game Information system, which gives games their age certificate). It isn't really suitable for anyone below that age, so you may potentially have to explain this reasoning to your younger children if they want to play it.

ADVENTURE TOGETHER

Warcraft can certainly be addictive, but playing it together is also a great way to spend time with your child. The game's focus on cooperative questing and battling enemies can make it feel like you've accomplished something as a team, and you'll also be in a prime position to spot any early signs of addiction. Just remember to apply gaming time limits to yourself as well as your young ones!

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is Games Editor of technology and entertainment website Dexerto and has been working in the gaming media for these years. A long-time gaming enthusiast, he is also a parent and therefore a keen advocate of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his articles have also been published on influential sites including IGN and Techradar, among others.



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Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/aug/29/world-of-warcraft-video-game-addict> | <https://worldofwarcraft.com/en-us/start>

STAY SAFE ON NEW DEVICES

Whether you're an internet newbie or a pro at surfing the web, it's always important to keep online safety in mind. We've pulled together a list of top tips to make it easier for you to protect yourself and your devices in the digital world - helping you steer clear of hazards like misleading information and vicious viruses. There's never a bad time to refresh your internet safety knowledge, but it's an especially smart thing to do before you start using any shiny new devices!

Be suspicious of new information

SHOW RESPECT TO OTHERS

TELL A TRUSTED ADULT IF SOMETHING UPSETS YOU

DON'T CHAT WITH STRANGERS

BE HONEST WITH PARENTS & CARERS

TAKE BREAKS FROM BEING ONLINE

ASK PERMISSION before downloading anything

AVOID SHARING PRIVATE PHOTOS

Stick to trusted apps

TAKE NOTICE OF AGE RESTRICTIONS

DOUBLE CHECK YOUR NEWS SOURCES

Don't give away personal information

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St Mary's Online Safety Tips

Here at St Mary's we consider online safety a priority, we acknowledge that the world our children are preparing for is becoming increasingly online. Therefore, we have compiled the following tips in order to support you in guiding your child through digital experiences.

Set Up Parental Controls

Home internet providers can offer parental controls for your family. There are 2 ways of achieving this:

- Use a filter from your internet provider to control the content that you and your family see. Some providers allow different settings for each user.
- Set up any device connected to your home broadband. How you do this depends on your provider and you'll need to access your home router. You can ask your internet provider for help setting this up.



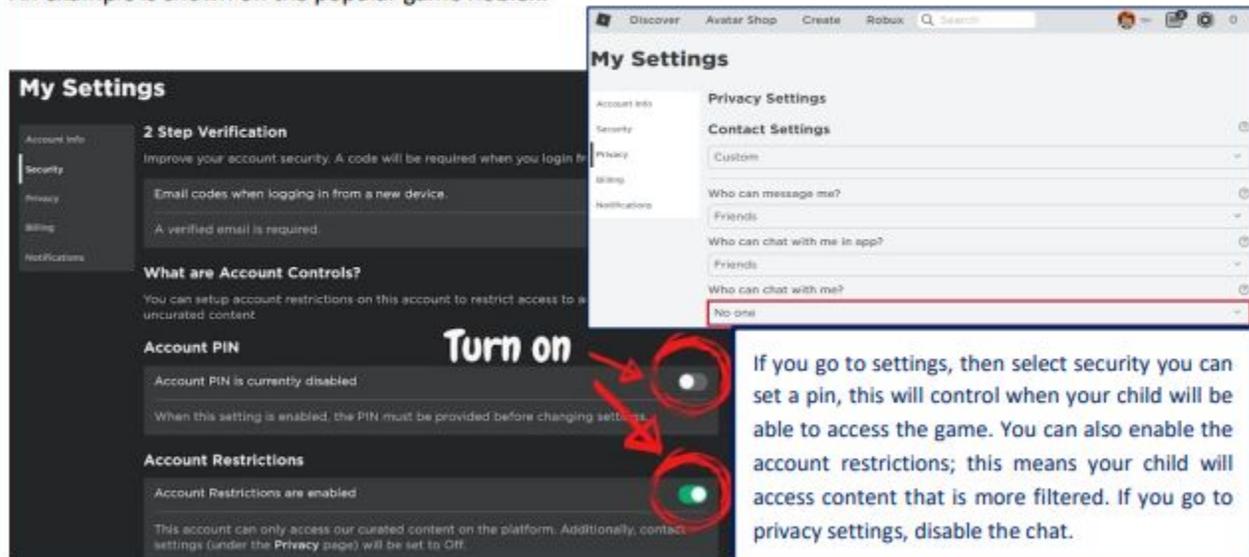
Check the settings on any games or device that your child is on.

Settings icons usually look like a gear like this: 

On some devices you can control the following:

- Turn off chat functions to stop your child from talking to people they don't know
- Restrict games based on age
- Turn off in-game purchases, or set a limit.

An example is shown on the popular game Roblox:



Turn on

If you go to settings, then select security you can set a pin, this will control when your child will be able to access the game. You can also enable the account restrictions; this means your child will access content that is more filtered. If you go to privacy settings, disable the chat.

Have devices in a supervised area

Remember that parental control tools are not always 100% effective and sometimes, unsuitable content can get past them, so don't rely on them alone to protect your child.

The best way to ensure your child is safe is to monitor their behaviours online. It is not reasonable to expect young children to regulate their own behaviours online, just as we would not expect it to be reasonable for a child to arrange what they have for dinner each night, we as adults must guide the children in their choices.

Avoid headphones or headsets, unfortunately there is plenty of content that appears to be aimed at children but have inappropriate themes. Remember, just because something is a 'cartoon' doesn't mean it's for children.

Open a Discussion

- Talk to your child and ask them to show or even teach you how they use the internet, learn which websites or tools they like to use and why. Learning together can often open opportunities to discuss safe behaviour with your child.
- Always ensure your child knows how to block or report people online who send nasty or inappropriate messages or content. Encourage your child not to retaliate or reply.
- Make sure your child knows to tell an adult they trust if they see something online that makes them feel scared, worried or uncomfortable. This will only begin with
- Children love talking about games! If you ask them what their mission is, what the game is about or even play a short game with them, you can learn a wealth of knowledge about what your child enjoys online. This will allow you to look it up in your own time to scan whether it is appropriate or safe for your child.
- Discuss the SMART rules listed below for guidance, the children would have been taught these guidelines to follow when online. Support them in understanding them and realising their application.

Learn the SMART rules



Safe: Keep safe by being careful not to give out personal information when you're chatting or posting online. Personal information includes your email address, phone number and password.



Meet: Meeting someone you have only been in touch with online can be dangerous. Only do so with your parents' or carers' permission and even then only when they can be present. Remember online friends are still strangers even if you have been talking to them for a long time.



Accepting: Accepting emails, messages, or opening files, images or texts from people you don't know or trust can lead to problems — they may contain viruses or nasty messages!



Reliable: Someone online might lie about who they are and information on the internet may not be true. Always check information you see or hear from the internet or social media.



Tell: Tell a parent, carer or a trusted adult if someone, or something, makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, or if you or someone you know is being bullied online.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

An estimated one-third of children have a social media account, so it's important that trusted adults know what content young people are consuming, what they're posting and the interactions they're having. On social media, it can be easy to go down 'rabbit holes' that aren't beneficial to our wellbeing. As platforms grapple with managing such 'legal but harmful' content, lives are being impacted – sometimes to tragic effect. We might be daunted by the scale of the tech giants and their content which so entralls young people, but we can still help children to be aware of their mental wellness: recognising when something isn't OK... and knowing what to do about content that upsets them.

1. UNDERSTAND THE ALGORITHM

Algorithms rank content by user interest: someone who regularly interacts with sports news, say, will see the latest results at the top of their feed. Likewise, if a user browses content that can cause harm, that's what will be recommended to them in future. Someone who's had a bad day and looks for posts which reflect their mood will find similar content being suggested to them more and more.

2. AVOID THE MAIN FEEDS

Avoiding the default feeds on social media platforms limits the amount of recommended content that's shown. Users can opt to only scroll through the accounts they follow, use restricted modes, or highlight posts that they don't want to see more of. Explore the platform safety settings to see how you can take control of what your child's phone shows them when they open the app.

3. DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE SEEN

Chatting about what your child's seen online keeps you aware of the content they're interacting with. Don't assume that platforms are screening out inappropriate material, or even that your child would recognise content as being harmful. Discuss who they follow, what posts they like and what comes up in their feeds: if alarm bells ring, it could be time for a more in-depth talk or to seek support.

4. LEARN HOW TO HIDE CONTENT

If your child stumbles across unsuitable content on social media, there's the option to hide that post as well as indicating you'd prefer any similar material not to be suggested in future. On some platforms, you might also be able to block posts that contain specific words, which is an excellent way to start taking control of what your child sees online.

5. SET DAILY LIMITS

Phones and most apps can tell you how much they're being used. Spending too long online can mean a child misses out on other activities that are important to all-round wellbeing. You could set some family rules – for everyone to follow – around device use, such as screen time limits and tech-free spaces: involving your child in creating this agreement makes them more likely to stick to it.

6. MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITY

Keeping a discreet eye on how your child is using social media can help ensure they're not entering potentially dangerous situations. As they grow up, of course, children need space to exercise their independence – but you can still occasionally ask to see what they're looking at. Be transparent about your own social media use and try not to sound judgemental about your child's.

7. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Even for adults, it's tempting to check an email or message as soon as the alert sound pings. Push notifications encourage people to open their apps and spend time on their device, so turning them off will help your child to practise mindful use of tech. Most of us have other things that we need to focus on as a priority – and those notifications will still be there later, when we have more time.

8. USE DEVICES TOGETHER

Giving children internet-enabled devices and complete freedom to explore platforms on their own can result in exposure to hugely damaging content. You could consider making a particular area at home a designated space to use phones, tablets and so on – making it much easier to monitor what content your child is viewing and (if necessary) steer them away from any potentially harmful paths.

9. ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mental health professionals often highlight the importance of exercise, quality time with loved ones, a balanced diet and restful sleep for our mental wellbeing. Spending hours on social media can cause us to sacrifice other activities that our brains need to feel well – so encouraging your child to put down their phone and enjoy something that doesn't involve a screen can be immensely beneficial.

10. TALK ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Most platforms default children's accounts to private, so only people they've accepted as friends can see their posts. This reduces the risk of bullying or unkind comments, but – just like offline life – the digital world can still make children feel as if they need to act or look a certain way to fit in. Talk to your child about peer pressure, and listen to any concerns so you can provide the support they need.

Meet Our Expert

Shazia Sarwar-Azim is executive headteacher at a specialist primary school and, as an emotional therapy coach, works with school leaders to focus on the SEND, mental health and wellbeing agenda. A passionate advocate for vulnerable learners, Shazia is a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching and the author of *The Rainbow Within*, a book which supports children with SEMH needs.



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-5324995>
<https://aprousonline.com/insights/social-media-digital-well/>

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II

The Call of Duty (CoD) series is a worldwide gaming phenomenon, with millions of copies sold every year. While 2021's release, Vanguard, wasn't quite as well received, this latest entry – Modern Warfare II – has so far proved a massive commercial success. A sequel to the recent Modern Warfare reboot (and not to be confused with the original Modern Warfare 2, from back in 2009), the game is an online shooter which features – unsurprisingly – extreme violence, rendered in realistic graphics. Amid the explosions and political nature of the plot, there's much for parents to be aware of.

AGE RATING

PEGI
18

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

VIRTUAL VIOLENCE

Like most of its predecessors in the franchise, Modern Warfare II carries an 18 age rating from PEGI (the Pan-European Gaming Information system, which assesses games' content for suitability). This means players will encounter – according to PEGI's wording – depictions of "gross violence, apparently motiveless killing, or violence towards defenceless characters".

OFFENSIVE CHAT & MESSAGING

Most CoD players are likely to spend the majority of their time on Modern Warfare II in online multiplayer mode. This entails competing against – or cooperating with – strangers on the online battlefield. The fast-paced, cut-throat world of CoD means that communication through the game's voice chat and direct messages often turns heated and aggressive, which may upset younger players.

IN-GAME PURCHASES

Modern Warfare II follows the 'battle pass' model of games like Fortnite. For a fee – usually around £10 – each 'season' (every three months or so), players will be invited to complete extra challenges to earn new weapons and equipment. Different tiers of battle pass (costing more money) enable them to achieve this more quickly, while items can also be purchased from the in-game store.

POLITICAL SENSITIVITY

Previous CoD games have been accused of attempting to "rewrite history": failing to correctly attribute alleged war crimes to the US military, for example. The semi-fictional version of history presented on screen can cause players to misunderstand past conflicts and the real reasons they took place. This could lead to young people developing a distorted, inaccurate view of world politics.

AN ADDICTIVE EXPERIENCE

Multiplayer mode in Call of Duty titles revolves around levelling up your character to unlock new weapons, abilities and equipment. The process is designed so that it doesn't take too long to see an improvement, and the feeling of making meaningful progress can keep players hooked for hours. It's easy for gamers of any age to lose track of time, but younger ones are especially susceptible.

Advice for Parents & Carers

RESPECT THE AGE RATING

Based on accurately recreating combat situations, Call of Duty games are unflinching in their portrayal of war. Limbs are shot off and explosions send gore flying, while the previous Modern Warfare featured a lengthy interrogation and torture sequence. With Modern Warfare II offering the same style of brutal realism, it's worth reiterating that the PEGI 18 age rating is there for a reason.

CLOSE OFF COMMUNICATION

Unless they're playing with their real-life friends, it may be worth closing communication channels if your child plays Modern Warfare II. There's less of a team focus than in many other online combat games and therefore no real need to interact with strangers. Call of Duty fans can be intensely competitive, so even a single action by your child could provoke a barrage of abuse from strangers.

SET SPENDING LIMITS

If your child is likely to be tempted by buying that 'must-have' weapon or item, consider removing your bank details from the console or computer to prevent indiscriminate spending – and an unwelcome bill. Pre-paid cards could be an option for in-game purchases, allowing you to control how much your child can spend in advance – and helping them learn the basics of budgeting.

TRY OTHER MODES

If it seems that your child only ever plays Modern Warfare II in multiplayer, you could try out the Spec Ops mode with them – formulating strategies while enjoying each other's company. You could also play multiplayer together, taking it in turns to ensure regular breaks. Another alternative is the game's campaign mode, featuring bespoke missions and scenarios which follow an overarching plot.

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is Games Editor of technology and entertainment website Dexerto and has been working in the gaming media for three years. A long-time gaming enthusiast, he is also a parent and therefore a keen advocate of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his articles have also been published on influential sites including IGN and TechRadar, among others.



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Sources: <https://pegi.info/what-do-the-ratings-mean/> | <https://www.gamesradar.com/call-of-duty-modern-warfare-ii-accused-of-rewriting-history-to-blame-russia-for-consumers-of-war-crimes/>

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

AMIGO

Amigo is a social platform which purports to connect strangers from around the world – and, with built-in translation software, it reduces the expected language barriers. Focusing heavily on one-to-one chat, video calls and live streams, Amigo encourages its users to build up online relationships and unlock exclusive features such as private video and audio calls: essentially, the more that people chat, the more functions become available to them. This is an app designed with mature users very much in mind and is therefore definitely not recommended for children.

AGE RATING

18

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

ONE-TO-ONE COMMUNICATION

While online chats and livestreaming are a great way to communicate with people that children can trust (such as friends and family), Amigo encourages users to connect with complete strangers and develop a friendship through private chats, calls and videos. This will be a clear red flag for most parents, due to the possibility of a child encountering inappropriate content or an online predator.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTACT

Within minutes of signing up for our trial of Amigo (and without using a profile photo), users of the opposite sex were messaging with suggestive statements such as "You're just my type" and "Let's have fun". While the app's stated intent is to help people build friendships, some users obviously seek to take those relationships in a more mature and amorous direction.

MEMBERSHIP COSTS

Like many apps that are free to download, Amigo's business model is centred on in-app purchases. Users are encouraged to pay for VIP membership – enabling them to send more messages each day and boosting their profile's visibility. People can also buy coins (again, for real money) which allow them to send virtual gifts and further increase the number of messages they can send daily.

LACK OF AGE VERIFICATION

Amigo makes no secret of the fact that it's for people aged 18 or above. There's no age verification, however, so a young person could simply sign up under a false date of birth. The app's algorithm claims to match users of similar ages (making them more compatible), but either the algorithm isn't very reliable, or most users have entered a fake age which doesn't correspond with their profile pic.

REWARDS FOR REPEATED USE

Amigo gifts virtual coins to users if they reply to messages within 10 seconds, while there are also daily rewards for posting comments, sharing a video, getting likes or simply opening the app. It also encourages increasing 'Intimacy Levels' with other users to unlock extra features: once someone's online 'friendship' reaches Intimacy Level 3, they can hold one-to-one video calls with each other.

Advice for Parents & Carers

MONITOR DOWNLOADS

As well as frequent catch-ups with your child about what they've enjoyed doing online, you could consider taking the additional step of physically checking their phone every so often to see which apps they've installed. The safest option could be to enable 'ask to buy' (Apple) or 'purchase approvals' (Android) on their device, meaning your authorisation is needed to download any apps.

RESPECT AGE RESTRICTIONS

Apps have age restrictions for a reason, and Amigo is very definitely a mature content platform. Given that many of Amigo's users apparently use a bogus date of birth, you might want to remind your child about the implications of setting up a fake profile – such as being exposed to messages and videos that make them feel uncomfortable or feeling pressured into chatting with strangers.

BLOCK, REPORT, DISCUSS

Many children already know that connecting with strangers online is dangerous, but it never hurts to refresh their memory. Whatever communication apps your child uses, make sure they're fully aware that if anything online makes them feel uncomfortable, scared or upset, then they can block the user responsible, report the content, take a screenshot as evidence and come to tell you straight away.

ACTIVE LISTENING

If your child does approach you with a concern, make time to stop what you're doing and actively listen. Let them talk without interrupting or showing any judgement, then discuss their options and the possible solutions: this empowers them and reassures them that you're there to be supportive. If the issue is one that has put your child at risk, however, you may wish to contact the police.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about MINECRAFT

AGE RATING
7+

Minecraft is a beloved classic of modern gaming. First released in 2011, this open-ended 'sandbox' game of building and exploration still has over 140 million players who happily return to play it at least once every month. Minecraft has also been utilised for much more than just entertainment: it's sometimes used in schools to teach children coding, and it's also employed as a tool for computer-aided design, which is another valuable skill. Encouraging creativity and problem solving, Minecraft has plenty to offer gamers of all ages, and it's available on almost all video game platforms.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

PUBLIC SERVERS

Joining a public network (called a server) lets your child potentially interact with strangers through text chat. Some servers focus on building, while others are dedicated to role-playing – encouraging direct player interaction. Anyone can join public servers and connecting to one is relatively simple. Public server IP addresses (and therefore someone's location) are easy to find with search engines.

GRIEFING

Some people in Minecraft delight in purposefully damaging or destroying another player's creation. This is called 'griefing' and is a form of bullying: it intentionally spoils someone else's experience in the game by deleting hours of their work and forcing them to start from scratch. Many public servers treat griefing as a severe offence and frequently ban offenders.

ADDICTIVENESS

Minecraft's gameplay is relatively simple, and the outcome (when a child has built something new, for instance) can be extremely gratifying. This can make the game highly addictive. It's easy to lose track of time while playing Minecraft, causing committed young players to forget about other activities like homework or enjoying family time.

SCARY ELEMENTS

The visual design and gameplay of Minecraft is purposefully child friendly, so there's nothing too untoward in the game. However, some of the 'baddies' that can be encountered might prove a little too scary for very young players. In the game, certain enemies come out at night and are accompanied by audio – such as zombie moans and skeleton bone rattles – that may unnerve young ones.

ADDITIONAL PURCHASES

After initially buying the game, players can make optional extra purchases for cosmetic items and other bonuses. Minecraft Realms is an optional online subscription (requiring regular payments) that lets users run a multiplayer server to play with their friends. Most games consoles also need an active subscription to enable online play – so online gaming can quickly become an expensive hobby.

Advice for Parents & Carers

RESEARCH CONTENT CREATORS

There are a lots of Minecraft content creators who release helpful videos about the game on YouTube and Twitch. Not all of these, however, are suitable for children. Watching these content creators' channels yourself first is a safe way to find appropriate Minecraft videos to share with your children. This also helps you learn more about the game itself, and how your child plays it.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT MODE

Selecting 'Creative' or 'Peaceful' mode allows children to play Minecraft without having to contend with enemies. It's also a great way for you to get used to playing the game with them, since the difficulty level is lower. This allows you to work together on a long-term project, creating something special without the threat of moaning zombies or creepers damaging your build.

HOST A PRIVATE SERVER

The easiest way to find a safe server for your child to play on is to make one yourself. Hosting a server prevents strangers from finding it, unless they've been given the necessary joining details. A private server also lets you control who's allowed to enter and – if necessary – to ban someone who shouldn't be there. This is the closest equivalent to parental controls in Minecraft.

ENCOURAGE BREAKS

It's easy for the hours to fly by while your child is playing Minecraft, so reminding them to take regular breaks is essential. This is a useful way for them to learn good time management, which they'll benefit from as they get older. It will also teach them to play their favourite games in moderation – limiting addictive behaviour and allowing them to manage their day better.

TALK ABOUT STRANGERS

At some point in their lives, almost everyone needs to have contact with a stranger online. Talking to your child about online safety, therefore, is essential – as is having a plan in place for dealing with any hostile or difficult strangers. Ensure that your child knows never to tell a stranger about themselves online, and that they should come to you straight away if they do encounter a problem.

Meet Our Expert

Clare Godwin (a.k.a. Lunawolf) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2015, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Lunawolf Gaming and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.



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