Gaming

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Some parents and guardians think that online games are simply a form of entertainment. However, children also have the chance to exercise important life skills while gaming. They may use their imaginations and employ problem-solving strategies to overcome obstacles. They may also practice their social skills through online interactions with other gamers.

Using instant chat features, forums, and voice-enabled interactions, children can communicate and collaborate with gamers all over the world. Unfortunately, these features can also expose children to people who may not have their best interests in mind.

Risks of Gaming

Many online games have communication features which allow their users to interact anonymously. Some people may take advantage of this anonymity to target children. For example, predators may send inappropriate content or use a game's communication functions to arrange in-person meetings. Cyberbullies may harass fellow gamers and online scam artists may promise virtual goods in an effort to get credit card information.

Some game consoles allow Internet access as well, so it is important to be aware of their communication features. Predators have sent children inappropriate content through game consoles in attempts to coax them into reciprocating or meeting offline.

Happy New Year!

Sister Catherine Powers, C.N.D.

97% of online teens (ages 12-17) play computer,Web, portable, or console games. 27% of them game with people they first met online.

Help Children Game Safely

Parental involvement is critical when it comes to helping children game more safely. Take an active interest in the games that your child plays and wants to buy. You can research games' ratings and content on www.esrb.org. This website is maintained by the Entertainment Software Rating Board which rates thousands of games each year.

- Know which safety features are available on the gaming equipment that your child uses—a headset may have voice-masking features, for example.
- Keep gaming consoles in an easy-to-supervise location and be aware of other places where your child may be accessing games.
- Tell your child never to give out personal information while gaming or agree to meet anyone outside of the game.
- Teach your child not to respond to anyone who is being rude or bullying while playing the game.
- Set rules about how long your child may play, what types of games are appropriate, and who else may participate.
- Have your child check with you before using a credit or debit card online.