

Safer Online Gaming



Key Points

- While the world of gaming offers many enriching experiences for young people, some video games contain mature content, which raises questions about how parents can best protect their children.
- Microsoft's approach to children's online safety includes technology tools; education and guidance; policies and practices for moderating content and addressing online abuses; and partnerships with government, industry, law enforcement, and others to help create safer, more trusted computing experiences.
- Microsoft believes that online gaming concerns can be addressed with a combined approach of family education and involvement along with voluntary industry rating systems such as ESRB, PEGI, and CERO.

BACKGROUND

Video and online gaming offers a wide variety of content for many audiences. As with all forms of entertainment, not all content is appropriate for or acceptable to all people, and many have expressed concern about the potential harmful effects of games on children. Some governments have responded to these concerns by restricting access or banning certain video games because of sexually explicit or violent content.

The gaming industry has taken the initiative by adopting voluntary ratings systems, including the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) ratings in the United States, the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) ratings in the European Union, the Computer Entertainment Rating Organization (CERO) in Japan, and others.

These widely recognized rating systems provide descriptive information about game content, which merchants are encouraged to display, and which parents can use as guides for buying video games. PEGI is used across more than 30 European countries, and a 2008 survey found that 93 percent of European consumers recognize PEGI labels. A 2011 survey found that 65 percent of U.S. parents "regularly check a game's rating before making a purchase." A "secret shopper" program by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 2011 found that 87 percent of U.S. merchants refused to sell games with a mature rating to a minor.

Regardless of the brand of entertainment products a family owns, or whether children play games, watch movies, video chat, or otherwise interact online, it is vital that parents understand the ever-changing digital world that captivates children's attention and imagination. Parents must understand rating systems for video games, movies, and television, and decide if they want to use tools like family safety settings to help protect children by limiting Internet access, content, and the amount of time children spend on games.

MICROSOFT APPROACH

- **Technology tools.** Microsoft was the first to introduce ratings-based parental controls, called Family Settings, on the Xbox.
 - » Console Safety Settings for the Xbox 360 include the ability to enforce content ratings for games, movies, and television shows; set a pass code to restrict who can change Family Settings; and set limits on console play time using the family timer.
 - » Online Safety Settings for Xbox LIVE enable parents to create individual profiles for each child that are appropriate for their age and maturity. They can specify what activities children can participate in (such as multiplayer gaming, video chat, text or voice messaging), who they can communicate with, and who can see a child's profile or friends list.
- **Partnering with safety advocacy groups, industry, and government.** Microsoft, together with more than a dozen organizations—including the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children—launched a national outreach campaign in 2009. The Get Game Smart campaign encourages parents and caregivers to talk to their children about video games and digital media.
- **Consumer education and outreach.** Microsoft's work is incomplete if consumers do not know how to use the technology, tools, and resources that are available to them; it's important to continue educating parents and families about these resources. Microsoft provides these in the Microsoft Safety & Security Center, and the Get Game Smart website.

- **Internal policies and practices.** Microsoft's efforts to promote safety include developing company-wide policies, standards, and procedures for its products and services that connect with the Internet. The company enforces a code of conduct for users of its gaming services, and moderates content and interactions to address issues such as abuse, illegal activity, and inappropriate material. Many Microsoft services contain a Report Abuse link to Microsoft's www.microsoft.com/reportabuse website.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Microsoft supports a vibrant ecosystem that allows game developers and publishers to create products and content for customers of all ages. At the same time, the company wants to give parents and caregivers the knowledge and tools they need to make informed decisions about the quality and appropriateness of interactive games and programs that their children play and watch.
- Microsoft believes that the combination of voluntary industry rating systems, family education, and parental involvement provides the best solutions for addressing concerns about gaming and other online entertainment.
- Microsoft supports many efforts to create and enforce laws against child exploitation. The company works with the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children, INTERPOL, and other organizations to help governments strengthen and enforce laws to stop the possession and distribution of child pornography.



Helpful Resources

Safety resources for video games and online media
www.GetGameSmart.com

The Microsoft Safety & Security Center, with age-based guidelines for Internet use
www.microsoft.com/security

The International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children
www.icmec.org

Entertainment Software Ratings Board
www.esrb.org

Pan European Game Information
www.pegi.info

Computer Entertainment Rating Organization
www.cero.gr.jp