

Stay safe while playing online

Get behind the wheel of a supercar, fight terrorists, score the winning goal, defend kingdoms against evil hordes, sink pirate ships, solve mind-bending puzzles, or just be the last one standing... in the world of online gaming, you are spoilt for choice. Age is not a factor, either: there are activities for young and old to enjoy. Online gaming can be exciting and a place to hang out with friends as well as meet new people.



But not all online experiences are alike and some can be troublesome. Unfortunately, there are people online who are not the right fit and can even be dangerous. Fortunately, they are far and few between, but it doesn't hurt to take a proactive stance towards online safety.

The teams at Bravado Gaming have a lot of experience playing online, both with friends and strangers. They offer some advice on how anyone can start playing safely.

General rules of thumb

There are many types of games online, ranging from serious competitive PC titles to ad-hoc mobile sessions. Each is different and engages with different players online. Most happen on public servers, which means that people you don't know might join the game. In some cases, you don't even have direct contact with other players. But more and more titles are adding ways to communicate in the sessions, such as typing in a chat box or using online voice chat.

If there is communication, you should be careful about what you share, said Dillon 'Lithium' Charalambous, captain of Bravado Gaming's Call of Duty team.

"Don't give out any personal details on a public platform. Even if someone messages you directly, don't give information out there. You don't know who they are. Gamers have a long tradition of playing with nicknames or gamertags. Stick to those until you join a group where you get to know the people involved."

On rare occasions, someone might try to provoke you into engaging with them directly. Just ignore this kind of baiting. If they persist, report them to administrators.

But a more urgent concern is what people send to you, said Jana 'SaltyMonkey' Du Toit, captain of Bravado Gaming's all-female team, Bravado Finesse,

"Don't click on any links sent to you by people who are not your direct, real-life friends. Just like bad links on email and social media, these could be used to plant dangerous software on your system or send you to a dangerous website."

Scams are becoming more common on gaming platforms. Some are designed to go after online valuables, such as rare items or high-level characters, which are sold illegally once stolen.

But criminal also use game interactions to access other information, such as your banking details. Phishing - a criminal tactic that uses a fake version of a real site, such as a banking login page - is very common. Gamers playing online titles such as Guild Wars and PUBG are frequently targeted with phishing messages and emails. It doesn't help that many players often use similar emails addresses and passwords for their gaming as for their private and business credentials.

Find safe places to play

As mentioned earlier, most online gaming will happen on public servers. This means the game can be accessed by people other than those you know. The alternative is a private server or to play in private games that are protected by passwords.

"Playing public games is not a bad thing and even necessary if you want to take part in ranked matches," said Bravado Gaming's CEO, Andreas Hadjipaschali, referring to matches that raise your public rank for a game. "Good public game servers are policed by administrators and reporting tools. If someone bothers you or if something concerns you, contact one of the administrators. You can also report the person, though don't do this for frivolous things or you could be marked as an abuser of the system."



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Barry Louzada 8 Jun 2017



Most online games will connect to public servers that are hosted by the game's developers or publishers - the people who build and sell the game. But some games allow third parties to create their own servers. Again the same rules apply: don't share personal information and do engage with administrators if there are problems. If the problems don't go away, change to a different server.

Gamers looking to play competitively will want to find servers that cater to that. These will often be hosted and supported by eSports teams and enthusiasts. To find those, plug into the relevant communities, said Wasim 'Wass' Rajah, captain of

Bravado Gaming's FIFA team:

"The main thing here is getting yourself onto social media. Once you are on there, the links open up. There are certain organizations from who, if you follow them, you'll get word of most tournaments, like ACGL, Zombiegamer, Mettlestate and VS gaming."

You can also follow Bravado's social media accounts and women can reach out to the all-ladies team Bravado Finesse for a bit of feminine support and guidance.

Going online as a minor

If you are still very young - or you are concerned about your kids going online, there are a few extra precautions you can take. Though there are people online who prey on younger gamers, they are thankfully an extreme minority. Still, the above rules of careful communications are more important than ever.

As a parent, you should accept that online gaming is as part of a player's world as being part of a sports team. So it is better to arm your child with the right skills, as well as keep open channels with them, said SaltMonkey:

"Urge your child to have an open and honest relationship with you in terms of their gaming. They should know that it is okay to speak to you about what is happening in the virtual world and that you won't get mad. Therefore, be accepting of gaming and try to meet them halfway."

It should also be a definite rule that only adults are allowed to install games and other software on the machine used for games. There is a real risk of dangerous software being sent through bad links, some masked as games. This is particularly dangerous on mobile devices, where it is not hard to disable safety measures and install unauthorised apps.

But even official apps and in-game purchases can be a danger - to your credit card! Even though some services have put measures in place to limit such activities, it's prudent to keep an eye on credit card transactions. If a minor needs to make an online purchase, an adult should do it for them.

Finally, always set the profiles of young players to private, stopping anyone unauthorised from looking at their details. Even seemingly innocuous tidbits, such as the child's age and gender, can be used against them. Staying anonymous is good.

Online gaming is a lot of fun. It's a way to participate, to make friends, build confidence and blow off steam. Unlike the caricature of lone spotty teens hiding in basements, online gamers draw from every walk of life. That can spell danger. But take the right steps, keep the right attitude, and everyone can have a safe online experience.

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