



Online Safety Newsletter

October 2023

Age ratings

There is so much that we can do online nowadays including playing games, chatting with others, watching TV or sharing our videos/photographs. One of the ways we can help keep our children safe online is by checking age restrictions/ratings as detailed below:

- **Films:** The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) rate films. This page includes a link to a 'Parents' Guide to Age Ratings': <https://www.cbbfc.co.uk/resources/viewing-films-safely-online>.
- **Video games:** PEGI provides age classifications for video games. PEGI considers the age suitability of a game, not the level of difficulty. It is important to note that PEGI do not take into consideration the chat facilities within games.
- **Apps:** Check the individual age ratings within the relevant app store. We also recommend that you download any apps and use them yourself to check their suitability.
- **Social Media networks:** All social media networks have a minimum age rating; they are all at least 13+.

Does your child have speech, language and communication needs?

Parent Zone understand that talking about life online with a young person who has speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) makes it difficult, so they have created a selection of visual and spoken resources to help you. You can find out more here: <https://parentzone.org.uk/TalkTech>

Back to school photos

With the excitement of a new school year and your child reaching a new milestone, many of us share photos of our child online without thinking about the associated risks. If you post online, then try following these basic rules:

- Don't post any photos of your child that show their school logo/name or recognisable places by where they live that can make it easy for people to find out their location.
- Never include your child's full name.
- Are there any other children in the pictures you share online? If yes, do you have permission from their parent/carer to upload it?
- Would your child be happy for your comment/photo about them to be online – remember what might be 'cute' now may be embarrassing to them in the future.
- Make sure appropriate privacy settings are on.



Alternatively, you could just share photos with those who you really want to share the photo with (grandparents etc.) via WhatsApp or iMessage rather than via social media.

Further information

CEOP have published this article which includes advice on sharing photos of your child online:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Sharing-pictures-of-your-children/>

Meta introduces more parental supervision tools.

Meta have announced new features for some of their products. Firstly, they have added parental supervision to Messenger (users must be 13+), which includes the ability to see who your child interacts with. Also, Meta have added a feature to encourage teens to set time limits on Facebook (users must be 13+) and new parental supervision features on Instagram (users must be 13+). Find out more here:

<https://about.fb.com/news/2023/06/parental-supervision-and-teen-time-management-on-metas-apps/>

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S

AGE RESTRICTION
PEGI 12

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Five Nights at Freddy's is a series of indie point-and-click horror games whose word-of-mouth success and widespread spin-off content on YouTube have helped each of the nine instalments so far to sell almost five million copies on Steam (the PC gaming platform) alone. Set in various deserted locations at night, with creepy animatronic characters suddenly coming to life, the games are rated PEGI 12 for disturbing/violent content, mild profanity and horror themes.

FRIGHTENING THEMES

Five Nights at Freddy's (FNaF for short) doesn't feature bloodshed like many horror games – but it does build tension and use jump scares, which may be too intense for young players. The sinister animatronic characters and the sensation of being trapped and defenceless could be particularly unsettling, as could the inclusion of disturbing elements such as murder or possession by evil spirits.

STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Due to FNaF's suspenseful atmosphere, it can be extremely stressful for players. Constantly checking that one's surroundings are safe is a crucial part of the gameplay and could create residual stress or even obsessive-compulsive behaviours. Several media reports have suggested that some younger children have experienced severe nightmares or sleep anxiety after playing games from the series.

IN-GAME SPENDING

FNaF doesn't foreground in-game purchasing as strongly as many other well-known games, but some titles in the series do offer additional content that promises to enhance the experience. Five Nights at Freddy's: Help Wanted, for instance, is complemented by a Halloween-themed expansion pack called 'Curse of Dreadbear' (costing £8.99), which unlocks new levels and mini-games.

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

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As a result of FNaF's popularity, a sizeable YouTube community based on fan-made content has developed around the game. While the majority of this material is still child friendly, there are a number of channels which are geared more towards mature audiences: they contain adult and disturbing themes, for example, and (in some cases) age-inappropriate language.

PLAYING IN ISOLATION

Many parents will be relieved to learn that Five Nights at Freddy's is a single-player game which doesn't include any online chat functionality. Conversely, however, this could also make playing FNaF quite an isolating experience – especially if your child is spending a lot of time investigating the game's spooky, shadowy environments alone in their room, for example.

Advice for Parents & Carers

USE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Five Nights at Freddy's doesn't have conventional parental controls. However, if you're concerned about the potential impacts of the game's themes and content, you can simply choose not to let your child play it. If they use an Android or iOS device for gaming, you can adjust Apple and Google's built-in parental controls to restrict your child's access to certain content.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Every child is different, of course, so it could be worth playing Five Nights at Freddy's yourself for a while to gauge how your young gamer might cope with the series' more frightening and disturbing aspects. If they're old enough, you could spend some time playing it together – after all, it usually only takes between two and ten minutes to complete a level.

LIMIT SPENDING

Unlike many popular titles, Five Nights at Freddy's doesn't bombard players with tempting in-game purchase offers. It's worth noting, however, that some instalments in the series do provide the option for players to spend real-world money. With that in mind, it's important to either keep a close eye on your child's expenditure or limit their access to digital payment options.

SPOT THE SIGNS

If you're concerned that your child might be spending too much time on Five Nights at Freddy's, or you're worried that the game's scary themes are taking a toll, watch out for warning signs. Young people may start to prioritise gaming over everyday essentials like schoolwork or sleep; irritability or a lack of concentration could also indicate that their gaming sessions are going on too long.

TALK ABOUT THE RISKS

Before you allow your child to play Five Nights at Freddy's, it's wise to have a conversation about the game so that they're aware of the potential risks. Ensure that your child understands that the series is purposely designed to be tense and unsettling, and that they should stop or take a break if the intensity of the gameplay is making them feel uncomfortable or putting them on edge.

Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is an experienced technology journalist with a track record of more than 10 years in the industry. Previously the editor of tech tabloid The Inquirer, Carly is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant.



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#WakeUpWednesday

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