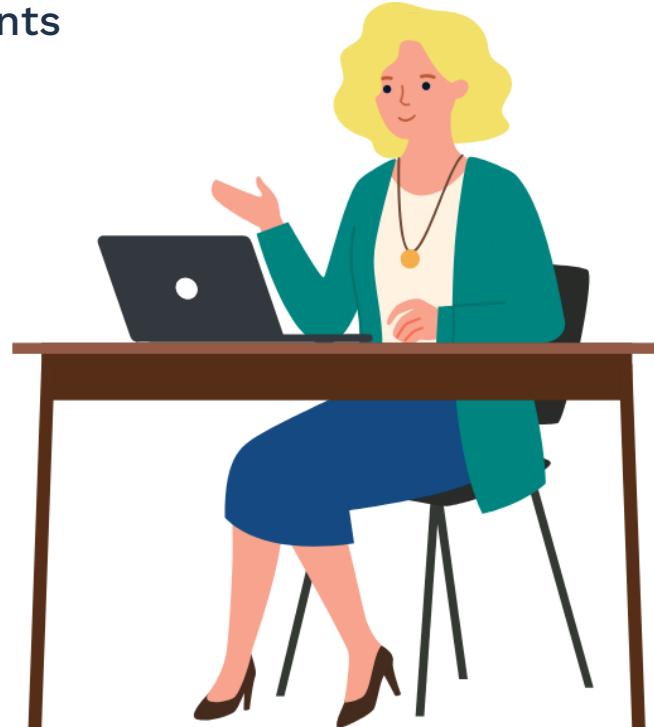




Guidelines for setting up a gaming club

Creating safer online environments



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Why has this guide been produced?

These guidelines are designed to help schools set up and facilitate organised gaming activities for students and to ensure planned activities are safe and conducted in the best interests of students.

This resource should be read alongside school and/or education sector child protection, safeguarding, and acceptable use policies and procedures.

We recommend using this guide in conjunction with eSafety's other Toolkit for school resources, such as Prepare 3 – [New technologies risk-assessment tool](#).

The benefits and risks of gaming

As a form of digital play, gaming has been associated with a wide range of benefits for children and young people. Introducing a school gaming club can be a positive way to:

- promote inclusive co-curricular activities
- increase digital competencies
- engage students to build social connections
- increase a student's sense of belonging through collaboration
- develop social emotional skills like self-regulation, leadership, and problem-solving
- strengthen physical skills like fine motor, hand-eye coordination, and reaction time.

While gaming can provide many benefits, coordinators must be aware of and address potential risks within school contexts:

1. **Exposure to inappropriate or harmful content** – online games incorporate a wide variety of content. Some are classified according to their suitability for certain age groups. Coordinators should consider warnings about themes, violence and language. Be aware of classifications, know how to block games showing age-inappropriate content. Always provide close supervision and monitoring. Visit the [Australian Classification website](#) to check classification ratings for a wide range of computer games. Visit [The eSafety Guide](#) to see if a game or platform is suitable for your students' interests and ages.

Some games may not be classified. Coordinators should consider if the game is suitable for your students' interests and ages before allowing access.

Avoid games and gaming sites that allow co-mingling of children and adults. Live streaming platforms are popular and can broadcast live and pre-recorded gaming videos and provide social networking and chat options for users. Be aware that services of this type may be age restricted. See eSafety's [Social Media Age Restrictions Hub for more information](#).

2. **Unsafe contact and loss of privacy** – online gaming may involve sharing personal information, as this is part of connecting with others and building community. It can also be part of the account set up process. This may pose a risk to students' privacy and data security.

Teach students what is safe to share online and ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent unsafe contact. Set up school-based accounts with students so that you can choose safe settings from the start. Help them select usernames and profile pictures that don't reveal personal information that could identify them (such as their real name, date of birth, address, phone number, school name or photograph). Make sure game features are adjusted to match students' ages.

Ensure the school can install up-to-date security software on all devices. This will help to protect against viruses and malware. For more information on in-game communication, see eSafety's – [Playing Games with Others](#).

3. **Conflict and cyberbullying** – the competitive nature of gaming can lead to conflict and aggressive behaviour among students. Co-create clear standards and expectations with students to reinforce upstander behaviour and encourage help-seeking.

Most online multiplayer games include ways to talk with others such as using text or voice chat, private messages, sharing content and gifts. Some of these types of communication have more risks than others, and some are harder to supervise.

It's best to introduce communication in games slowly. Think about the interactions you don't allow offline and whether this applies online – such as regular conversations with people they haven't met in person or private chats with adults.

While every game can have different online features, most games offer tools to limit or block communication between players. Consider restricting communication to gaming club students only. Report abusive behaviour by users outside of the gaming club directly to the gaming platform. This includes player actions and content that violates game rules or codes of conduct. [The eSafety Guide](#) has information about how to report these serious rule violations.

4. **Problematic use and supporting balanced engagement** – as gaming is a highly engaging activity, some students may find it more challenging to manage their time or to transition away from play. Educators can help by creating predictable, structured and supportive environments in gaming clubs to support all students.

As part of the gaming club activities, consider setting clear expectations, such as specifying the amount of time that will be dedicated to game play (and signalling the end of play time in advance to flag and support transitions to other activities). Schedule in some short and calming game-related screen-free activities and set aside time for gaming club members to get to know each other to foster social connection. Reach out to student wellbeing and mental health specialists if you have concerns about students' problematic use or if you observe heightened distress during gaming.

For students who identify as neurodivergent, further suggestions can be found on eSafety's [Being neurodivergent online](#).

1. Getting started

Set-up for success

Define purpose and goals

- Clearly outline the objectives of the gaming club. Is it being set up for fun, skill development, teamwork, or a combination of these? Will it be open to all students, or do you want to engage specific students for targeted skill development? Will the club be involved in tournaments or eSport competitions?

Find the right champions

- Nominate a school staff member to be the ‘club lead’ and others to form a support team. Some schools may recognise staff involvement through co-curricular allocations. We recommend the club lead joins the [eSafety Champions Network](#) so they can connect with others and make online safety a priority at their school.
- Consider enlisting the expertise of a [Trusted eSafety Provider](#) who can help build awareness and develop online safety strategies. Review school policies and procedures.
- Use eSafety’s Prepare 1 – [Online safety self-assessment tool](#) and Prepare 2 – [Checklist for developing online safety effective policies and procedures](#).

Decide on the type of gaming

- **Offline games** are played alone or with other students in the same room using the same device, typically a console. Students are not connected to the internet, which can minimise risk. Offline gaming gives you more control over students’ gaming experiences and can be safer and more suitable for younger students.
- **Online games** are connected to the internet and are usually played with others (often called multiplayer games) using different devices like computers, smartphones, virtual reality headsets, and connected gaming consoles. Online gaming gives you less control over students’ gaming experiences and can expose students to more varied risks.
- **Games can also be classified by genre**, for example, battle games, real-time strategy games, shooter games, or simulation games. More information on popular games can be found in [The eSafety Guide](#).

Work closely with your IT team and consider what works best for your school. Investigate your school’s policies and liaise with appropriate school leadership to consider risk factors and financial implications.

Choose the right device – PCs versus consoles

Consoles are a specialised type of computer designed for playing video games. They are a good entry level option because they:

- are easier for staff to use and manage

- are more affordable in terms of equipment costs
- have a range of inbuilt safety and privacy functions.

On the downside, consoles can't be used to access some of the eSport gaming titles that may be popular with students. Keep in mind that consoles are limited to the games available in their app store. Before purchasing, gather student feedback to ensure their preferred games are compatible with the console being considered.

PCs (or personal computers) may be a better option for schools with more established online safety practices and greater available resources. They are also a good option for schools interested in competitive eSport gaming. PCs provide the higher-end gaming experience, access to a range of eSport title games and are more closely aligned with professional eSports.

However, there are some challenges with PCs, including:

- greater set-up costs
- additional risks that require safeguards (for example, internet browsing, webcams, microphones)
- the need for more support from school networks and security systems
- more ongoing maintenance.

Tablets might be more portable but often come with riskier features like camera access. They may also make it harder for groups of students to play together, are constrained by the games available via their specific app store and may not have all preferred games available.

Planning and permissions

Set up the space and tech

- Consider physical accessibility, outside visibility, security of equipment and inclusivity.
- Explore the technology required, including access to safe devices, programs required to run games and an appropriate space.
- Accounts or logins used for gaming and eSports should be allocated and managed by the school. For example, students may require a special gaming-only email address, so they don't have to use their everyday student account. Personal accounts should not be used for school gaming club activities.
- Consider how students will communicate with each other while they are gaming. eSafety recommends direct communication over headsets or the use of in-game communication features where possible.
- When it comes to in-game communication, audio communication may easily be restricted, but in-game chat may not be. Ensure expectations of students are clear for in-game communication.
- Where online communication is used, this should be restricted to students participating in the club and be always supervised by staff, in line with duty of care policies and procedures.

Research and select games

- Choose games that align with school policies and values. Use the [Australian Classification website](#) site to identify age-appropriate games.
- Websites like [Common Sense Media](#) can help identify games with educational value and positive messaging.
- Consider educational games or those that promote skills like teamwork, leadership and problem-solving.
- Consider students' data privacy for each game.

Assess and mitigate risks

- Use [The eSafety Guide](#) to identify risks associated with the platforms, apps or games. Highlight any relevant responding, reporting and referral pathways. eSafety's Prepare 3 - [New technologies risk-assessment tool](#) can help guide the overall planning process.
- Identify potential risks associated with the technology and games and make sure your risk mitigation strategies are in place.
- Ensure child protection and safeguarding professional learning is maintained for all staff members.

Obtain permissions

- Present a clear plan to school leaders, parents and carers that includes the purpose of the club, games that will be played, risks, mitigation strategies and how parents or carers can raise concerns.
- Seek formal permission to begin set-up and promotion of the activity. Keep records of these.

2. Engage and facilitate

Create a safe space

Establish guidelines

- Promote the club through appropriate channels and consider maximum enrolment numbers and targeted age groups.
- In initial meetings, develop clear guidelines covering club values, respectful interactions, approaches to disagreements and attendance. Where possible, support students to co-create these guidelines underpinned by the school and/or education sector acceptable use of technologies policy. Ensure expected standards of behaviour set out by the game or platform are included.
- Consider having students sign a club member's agreement, which outlines the conditions of membership, and share this with parents and carers.

- Clearly communicate the consequences for breaching the conditions of participation to parents/carers, staff and students.

Create a safe online environment

- Ensure all staff involved in the club have a strong working knowledge of games and platforms that will be used, particularly the risks and mitigation strategies.
- Emphasise the importance of online safety. Educate students about responsible gaming, respectful communication, how to handle online challenges and when to seek help. Use eSafety's [Best Practice Framework for Online Safety Education](#) to support you.
- Ensure all staff members understand the relevant policies and their professional responsibilities when interacting with students. Make sure staff use a school-based email address and account, and never their private emails or personal gaming accounts. School staff should not engage with students in gaming environments outside of gaming club time.

Guide and coordinate play

Set out the required commitment

- Establish a regular schedule for club meetings. This can help build routine and help students and their parents/carers to plan accordingly.

Facilitate the gameplay

- Provide active adult supervision during club meetings. As well as monitoring gaming activities, staff can encourage teamwork, provide scaffolding for skill development, and support students to resolve conflicts. This helps to establish a safe, positive and supportive environment.
- Incorporate educational elements into gaming experiences such as strategising and working collaboratively to solve in-game problems.
- Help students with strategies to manage their screen time. Emphasise the importance of schedules, setting time limits, taking regular breaks and ensuring participation in other activities such as learning, outdoor activity and time with friends offline.
- Create an inclusive environment where all students feel welcome. Introduce a variety of games to cater to different interests and skill levels. This can help make the club fun and engaging for a diverse group of students.
- Recognise and celebrate the achievements of club members, whether completing a challenging level, working well in a team or demonstrating mutual respect, fair play, and fun!

Stay connected with the community

- Keep parents and carers informed about the activities of the gaming club. Address any concerns they may have and encourage involvement, such as parent and carer gaming or information nights.

- If you wish to share information, updates and resources related to the club with club members, parents and carers, and school staff, please be aware that age-restrictions may apply to platforms that some schools currently use for educational purposes and to communicate with their students and communities, so you may need to explore alternatives.

Get more competitive

- If your school is interested and ready to participate in competitive gaming or eSports, connect with a gaming platform organiser or eSport provider for more comprehensive advice on how to manage this safely.

3. Manage online incidents

When things go wrong during gaming, there are a range of reporting options available. The most appropriate avenue for reporting will depend on the harm or incident that has occurred. The eSafety [Toolkit for Schools](#) has a range of resources that can help schools [navigate online incidents](#).

As well as following your school and/or education sector policies and procedures, there are some other important considerations when responding to an online incident:

- Prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the child or children involved. For more guidance, refer to eSafety's Respond 6 - [Tips for supporting students involved in an online incident](#).
- Use eSafety's Respond 1 - [Online incident assessment tool](#) and associated quick reference guides for [online incidents](#), and [serious online incidents](#). Always report to the game or platform directly as part of your response.
- Inform students and parents/carers about reporting pathways – during and after school hours. The [eSafety report abuse portal](#) explains what can be reported, how to collect evidence, the process of reporting and other support options available.

4. Level up support

- Proactively inform classroom teachers, school psychologists and/or wellbeing teams about the gaming club and encourage them to be involved where possible.
- Think about individual student needs. Some students might require greater support to participate and build healthy gaming habits. eSafety Online Safety Grant Program recipient Amaze has developed a range of resources to better [support children and young people with autism](#) to gain the benefits of gaming.
- Work with the school wellbeing team to identify indicators that a student might need more support with managing their gaming and consider referral pathways to specialist support.
- Check in regularly with students participating in the club and ensure they know the available support options.

- If parents/carers raise concerns about managing gaming-related behaviour at home or have questions on how to keep their child safe while they're gaming, take their concerns seriously. eSafety has a [gaming guide for parents and carers](#) with tips for encouraging positive gaming habits, staying safe when interacting with others in-game, managing money in games and guidance on responsible content creation and sharing.
- If you or a parent/carer have concerns about a child's mental health or wellbeing, follow your school and/or education sector advice about referrals for additional support. The headspace [guide for families on gaming](#) can help determine when more support is needed, what it can do to assist and pathways for accessing support. eSafety has a list of [counselling and support services](#) that can be filtered by type of support, issue, audience and state/territory.