PC 5504 DIX
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Date

Dear Parents & Guardians

No doubt over the coming festive period your children may well be lucky enough to receive a new Xbox, Playstation or computer game of some kind. As this is a topical theme for this time of year I'll pass some relevant information on this topic and '**gaming'** in general. I have also added some direct links providing further information.

The internet has changed the way that young people play games and socialise. Games can be played against anyone in the world, at any time & for as long as they want. Almost anything that connects to the internet will allow you to play these games – desktop computers, laptops, consoles, like Playstation or Xbox, or even mobile phones.

Gaming is great fun, but just as with anything online, there are risks you should help your child to avoid. It's important that you're involved in your child's experiences, even if it feels like a different world! Here are some simple ways to help your child 'game' safely.

Check The Age Rating

Just like with films, you should check the game's age rating before allowing your child to play. The organisation 'PEGI' set age ratings for games and classify their content according to what is appropriate for different age groups.The rating will help you decide whether the game is suitable for your child. For information on game ratings, visit: http://www.pegi.info/en/index/.

Talk to Them About The Games They Play
Ask your child what is hot, and what is not! Get them to tell you about the game and, if they (and you) can bear it, play against them!

You might want to ask them:

What they like about it?

Which of their friends play it?

Who are their friends on the game?

To tell you about their character and profile?

It is important to stay up-to-date and regularly ask your children about the games they play and the people they are friends with.

For more information about safe gaming, including setting parental controls on different games consoles, visit the Association of UK Interactive Entertainment' site http://ukie.info/playsafe

Know Who Their Talking Too

Most of the popular online games are played by adults and children alike. Therefore, your children need to be aware of the information that they share and the people they talk to.

It's never a good idea to share personal information such as their name, address, email address, passwords, telephone numbers or the name of their school with people they don't know and trust in the real world. Talk to your child about how people can sometimes lie online or pretend to be someone else. Encourage your child to keep gaming friends 'in the game' and not to invite them to be friends on their social networks.

Set Boundaries

Some online games are virtual worlds which never end, where missions can take hours to complete. It's important to set limits on the amount of time your child spends playing online. Be aware of how long they spend gaming and set rules, as you would for TV, it would be unfair to expect your child to achieve their full potential in a school day, if they are playing computer games until the early hours of the morning. Also, ensure that they take regular screen breaks – at least five minutes every 45-60 minutes.

Know What To Do If Something Goes Wrong

Things can go wrong when gaming, whether that's someone being mean, inappropriate or asking you to do something that you're not comfortable with. It's important that you and your child know what steps you can take in the game to block & report people & how to report & seek support from other services

The below link is a very short film entitled '**Where's Clause'**, it shows some of the concerns around young children and gaming. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IOOn2wR8bU

I always try to make parents and pupils aware of the www.thinkuknow.co.uk website. If you have not explored it please do so, it has loads of really useful and practical advice for parents and young people on internet safety etc. There is also a very good 30 minute film entitled *'The Parents' and Carers' Guide to the Internet',* this can be viewed via the following link thinkuknow.co.uk/parents

Please also be aware that **Safer Internet Day** is fast approaching, **11th February 2014**, check the following site for further info www.saferinternet.org.uk/ .

I hope you find this information practical and useful and that it helps reduce the risk of a negative internet related experience. I'd also like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and best wishes for the New Year.

Visit www.thamesvalley.police.uk, for local Police information,

Regards, PC 5504 Dix