Guidelines for setting up
a gaming club

eSafety Toolkit for Schools
Creating safer online environments

These guidelines are designed to help schools set up and facilitate organised gaming activities for students. **This resource can be used alongside school or sector standards or policies, to ensure planned activities are safe and meet expectations.**

Legislation, policies and other requirements can vary across states, territories and sectors and these high-level considerations will help to guide your decision-making and planning for gaming activities. School staff need to be familiar with the legal and ethical responsibilities set out in local policies and procedures. Youth Law Australia offers valuable information about laws relating to schools and the internet, phones and technology.

We suggest you use this resource in conjunction with eSafety's other Toolkits for Schools.

The benefits and risks of gaming

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

- promote a more **inclusive** range of co-curricular activities
- increase **digital competencies**
- **engage** students to build social connections
- develop skills in **self-regulation**
- strengthen **fine motor, leadership** and **problem-solving skills**
- increase a student's sense of **belonging** through collaboration.

While gaming can provide many benefits, it's essential that coordinators consider and mitigate potential risks within the school context. There are a range of risks to consider:

1. **Exposure to inappropriate content –** online games incorporate a wide variety of content and are classified according to their suitability for certain age groups. Coordinators should be aware of classifications, know how to block games showing age-inappropriate content, and always provide close supervision. Visit the [Australian Classification website](#) for more information.

2. **Unsafe contact and loss of privacy –** gaming online may involve sharing personal information, as this is part of connecting with others, building community and part of the account set up process. This may pose a risk to students' privacy and data security. Coordinators can support students to understand what is safe to share online. Schools must also ensure that the right safeguards are in place to prevent unsafe contact with others.

3. **Conflict and cyberbullying –** the competitive nature of gaming may result in conflicts, disagreements and/or aggressive behaviour among students. Clear standards and expectations – co-designed with students – can reinforce upstander behaviour and encourage help-seeking to promote safe and positive gaming environments.

4. **Problematic use –** as gaming is a highly engaging activity, some students may struggle to manage their time or to switch off at the agreed times. Organised gaming clubs may provide an opportunity to promote strategies to support more balanced usage of time.

1. Get 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?

Find the right champions

- Nominate a staff 'club lead' and a range of staff willing to support the club. Some schools may recognise staff involvement through co-curricular allocations. Recommend the club lead joins the eSafety Champions Network so they can connect with others and make online safety a priority in your school.

Review school policies and procedures

- Use eSafety's Checklist for developing online safety effective policies and procedures.

Decide on the type of gaming

There are different ways to enjoy gaming and esports. The two key differences are whether the gaming is online or offline.

Offline gaming can still be multiplayer and use a console to play games, (for example, using Nintendo Switch to play Mario Party). Students are not connected to servers or cloud-based, which can minimise risk. Offline gaming gives you more control over the student's gaming experience.

Online environments are connected to the internet and can expose students to more risks.

Work closely with your IT team and consider what works best for your school. Investigate your school's policies and liaise with appropriate school executive members to consider any risk factors or financial commitments.

Choose the right device – PCs versus consoles

Schools will need to decide whether PCs or consoles are the best choice for their gaming club. For example, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch and XBox.

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
- they are more affordable in terms of equipment costs
- they 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.

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

There are some challenges however with PCs. These include:

- greater set-up costs
- additional risks that require safeguards (for example, accessibility of internet browsing services and web cams)
- the need for more support from school networks or security systems
- greater ongoing maintenance required.

Planning and permissions

Set up the space and tech

- Consider physical accessibility, outside visibility, security of equipment and inclusivity for all students.

- Explore the technology required, including access to safe devices, programs required to run games, and an appropriate space.

- Consider if students require a special gaming-only email address so they don't have to use their student account. Personal accounts should not be used for 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 supervised by staff at all times, in line with duty of care policies and procedures.

Research and select games

- Choose games that align with school policies. Use the **Australian Classifications website** 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. The Toolkit for Schools **New technologies risk-assessment tool** can help guide the overall planning process.

- Ensure that any potential risks associated with the technology and games selected have been identified and make sure your risk mitigation strategies are prepared and ready to use.

- Ensure child protection/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 and mitigation strategies, and the process by which parents or carers can raise any concerns.

- Seek formal permission to begin set-up and promotion of the activity.
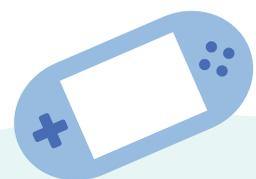
2. Engage and facilitate

Create a safe space

Establish guidelines

- Promote the club through appropriate channels, and consider maximum numbers and any targeted age groups in the school.

- In initial meetings, develop clear guidelines for the values of the club, interactions with others, approaches to disagreements and attendance. Where possible, support students to co-create these guidelines. Ensure expected standards of behaviour set out by the game or platform are included. It may be useful to have students sign a member's agreement, which outlines the conditions of membership and share this with parents and carers.

- The consequences for breaching the conditions of participation need to be clear and outlined 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 the mitigations.

- Emphasise the importance of online safety. Provide education to students about responsible gaming, respectful communication, how to handle online challenges, and when to seek help. You can use eSafety's [Best Practice Framework for Online Safety Education](#) to support you.

- Ensure all staff members understand the relevant policies and processes, and their professional responsibilities when interacting with students. Make sure staff use a school-controlled email address and account, not their private emails or gaming accounts. They should not engage with students in gaming environments outside of game club time.

Guide and coordinate play

Set out the required commitment

- Establish a regular schedule for club meetings. This can help build a sense of routine and allows students to plan accordingly.

- Ensure students are aware that club activities shouldn't impact the time they spend gaming.

Facilitate the gameplay

- Ensure adequate adult supervision during club meetings. As well as monitoring gaming activities, staff can encourage teamwork and support students to resolve conflict which will help to establish a safe and supportive environment.

- Consider incorporating educational elements into the gaming experience. You could discuss strategy or work collaboratively to solve in-game problems.

- Help students identify strategies to manage their screen time. Emphasise the importance of balancing gaming with 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 it is completing a challenging level, working well in a team or demonstrating good sportsmanship.

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 establish a platform to share information, updates and resources related to the club (like a website, email list or online forum), ensure it is appropriately moderated and monitored regularly. eSafety's Guidelines for social media use, video sharing and online collaboration provides some helpful tips.

Get more competitive:

- If your school is interested and ready to participate in competitive gaming or esports, we recommend connecting with a gaming platform organiser or esports 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 the mandated requirements for your school or department, 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 Tips for supporting students involved in an online incident.

- Find out about responding and reporting online incidents using eSafety's Online incident assessment tool and associated quick reference guides for online incidents, serious online incidents, and sharing of explicit material. As well as following the reporting steps in these guides, it's important to send a report to the game or platform directly, as part of your response.

- Make students and parents and carers aware of the pathways for reporting during and after school hours. The eSafety report abuse portal provides information about what can be reported, how to collect evidence, the process of reporting and other support options available.

4. Level up support

- Ensure classroom teachers, school psychologists and/or wellbeing teams are proactively informed 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 or build balanced 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 possible indicators that a student might need more support with managing their gaming and the referral pathways.

- Check-in regularly with students participating in the club and make sure they are aware of the support options available.

- If parents or carers are raising concerns about managing gaming-related behaviour at home, or have questions on how to keep their child safe while they're gaming, you can refer them to the online gaming guidelines on eSafety Parents webpage.

- If you, a parent or carer have concerns about a child's mental health or wellbeing, follow your school or sector procedures for advice about making referrals for additional support. The headspace guide for families on gaming can help determine when more support might be required, what they can do to assist, and pathways for accessing more support.