

# Online Gaming: Privacy Risks and Strategies

Popular amongst teens, online games reflect a wide array of activities and interests. They can include sports, shooter or shooting, simulation, adventure, real-time strategy, role-playing, fantasy and educational games. Online gaming communities often use their own “lingo” in chats between players within the game. Online gaming provides an opportunity for connection, particularly with people who share a common interest. Some games have vast numbers of users, some of whom have played for many years, building a sense of familiarity or community. Some teens who are wary of meeting in person, or prefer to be able to choose the identity they present to the world, may find more flexibility and comfort online. As with any activity, online or offline, everyone should be able to participate free from harassment and abuse.

Unfortunately, many people experience online harassment while playing online games.

## **STRATEGIES TO INCREASE PRIVACY AND SAFETY**

### **Choose a Safe Username**

The ability to remain anonymous online varies depending on the gaming platform. In some games, a user can make up any screen name and choose an “avatar” or online image to represent them. When creating accounts and profiles, choose a username that doesn’t include a real name or other identifying information.

### **Be Careful What You Share**

Users often have a choice about what personal or contact information to share with other users through an online profile or chat conversations with other players. As games cross from having a conversation within the game to real life, privacy and safety concerns may increase. Games may link a player’s online presence to a specific location in order to let other gamers interact with them but this information could be misused for stalking and harassment. Protect your privacy by not giving out identifying or contact information.

### **Passwords**

Consider using different email addresses, profile pictures, and strong passwords for gaming, and for each game you play. Keeping this information separate from the rest of your life can help avoid doxing, or other users begin able to connect your gaming profile to your real life.

### **Check Your Privacy Settings**

Privacy settings can affect who can see if you're online, who you can play with and whether people can see what games you're playing. You may also be able to block players from contacting you.

### **Downloads Aren't Always Safe**

Attachments and links could install spyware or other malware on your devices. They can contain viruses that will damage your computer or mobile, and give people access to your personal data.

### **Trust Your Instincts**

If you start to feel uncomfortable, it's always ok to cease contact.

### **MEETING IN REAL LIFE**

When considering augmented reality games or meeting up in real life, here are some additional steps to consider.

1. Let a friend know ahead of time where you are going, and that you will reach out to them after the gaming session is done.
2. Leave an address and some information on where you'll be.
3. Familiarize yourself with the meet-up spot ahead of time. Only meet where you're comfortable.
4. Watch out for people saying they want to visit but need loans to be able to get to you, or who use other stories to gain your sympathy and then ask for money.

It's ok to cut a gaming session short or leave a meeting if it doesn't feel safe or fun. **Trust your instincts**

### **IF YOU'RE EXPERIENCING ONLINE HARASSMENT**

Harassment, threats, and abuse that happen "only" online should be taken seriously.

Teens experiencing online harassment and abuse may choose to report their experiences to the gaming platforms or police. Because the technology uses both hardware like computers or smartphones, as well as Internet providers and the gaming company's servers, digital evidence may be available. In addition, teens may consider taking pictures, [screenshots](#), or saving other relevant information. See our tips on [documenting abuse](#), and a [sample documentation log](#).

Online harassment and abuse may fall under a number of crimes, depending on what is happening.

### **Getting Help**

You are not alone. If you know someone who you think is experiencing online harassment, encourage them to chat with a trusted adult or seek help from one of the organizations listed below.

- [PEACE Program for Children and Youth](#) is counselling program for children and youth experiencing violence.
- [Kid Help Phone's](#) crisis line is available 24/7 by call or text
- [VictimLink BC](#) is a referral and information service for victims of crime
- [KUU-US Crisis Line Society](#) is a crisis phone line for Indigenous Youth
- [Society for Children and Youth BC's Child and Youth Legal Centre](#) provides legal support for children and youth.



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*Spark Teen Digital Dating Violence Project*

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