



What is Minecraft?

Minecraft is one of the biggest computer games in the world, with more than 144 million copies sold. It is a sandbox game where players can build houses and other creations, explore vast environments and play with other people online. Multiplayer in Minecraft - available through player-hosted and business-hosted servers - enables multiple players to interact and communicate with each other on a single world. It's with this online element where some dangers can come from.

What does it look like?



Main Concerns for Parents

MINECRAFT

Predators target children on Minecraft

The majority of Minecraft users are children, so it's no wonder that predators may use the game to target them. Some adult players will even pretend to be children. There have been reported cases in which young people have been asked for explicit photos of themselves and even more serious cases in which children have been persuaded to meet these people in real life.

Cyberbullying

Even when playing with friends, your children are not 100 per cent safe on Minecraft. This is due to cyberbullying as so called 'friends' are given a platform in which they can throw mean insults in the way of your child, gang up on them with other players and make them feel like there's no escape.

Communication with strangers on 'servers'

A huge part of Minecraft is played on online multiplayer servers where pretty much anyone can join. This means it is simple for players to have direct contact with strangers, which can lead to uncomfortable situations as not all strangers simply want a 'fun game'. The fact that strangers don't know your child personally may make it easier for them to be unpleasant due to the false perception that there are no repercussions. Servers are most prominent on PC and less so on consoles and other devices.

Viruses/Malware:

There are several websites that offer downloads for unofficial Minecraft addons. These often contain viruses that can infect your device and potentially even try and find personal information from you or your child.

Minecraft: Better Together

This is a new version of Minecraft that is currently being Beta tested on Windows, Android and Xbox One. It aims to allow players on different platforms to play with one another and uses public servers. While this can already be done on the original version of Minecraft, this will make it much easier for your children to play with and talk to people they don't actually know. However, you do need to opt in to using 'Better Together' and can carry on using the original version. This version should have a full release in 2018.



Limit multiplayer to 'only play with friends'

This is an option that can be found in the Settings. It can also be reinforced further by monitoring your child's play every now and then to ensure they are playing on servers with people they actually know and not strangers. Always explore the parental controls on whatever platform your child is using.

Disable or monitor online chat

In this feature, players in a server can type comments into a text box for others to see. However, to avoid potentially inappropriate comments, you can follow these steps to turn it off:

- Select Options
- Toggle the Chat button to 'Hidden' or 'Commands Only'. Bear in mind that your child will no longer be able to enter cheats or similar commands on Hidden.

Play on 'child-friendly servers'

These are servers that tend to have strict rules to try and keep the environment safe and appropriate and many even have 'whitelists' which involve filling out an application to be allowed to join the server. This proves that you're not a bot and helps weed out any potentially harmful or inappropriate people from using the server. Obviously, these can never be perfect and there's always a risk of dangers slipping through the cracks, but prominent examples of child-friendly servers include the following:

- Autcraft
- InterCraften
- Kid Club
- Minesquish

Play on single player or local multiplayer only

While there are ways to play Minecraft relatively safely online, you may come to the decision that your child simply isn't responsible or trustworthy enough to partake in this yet. If you think this is the case, ask them to only play on single player or multiplayer with friends who are with them in the same room. For further reassurance, disconnect the device from your Wi-Fi connection.

Be careful of YouTube tutorials

Many Minecraft users turn to YouTube for video tips on improving their gameplay and finding new techniques. Although many videos are age-appropriate, some include sexual references and bad language. It is best to sit and watch Minecraft YouTube videos together with your child.

Pick the right Minecraft platform

Minecraft is available for computers - with Windows, Mac and Linux versions, consoles including the Xbox 360 and Xbox One, PlayStation 3 or 4, and mobile apps. Make sure you consider which system you want to use before your child starts building their empires.



Use the Pause menu

You can add new friends, mute, report or block someone, right from the pause menu in-game. You can also set custom permissions for each player in your world or realm or use pre-set permissions levels.

Try Xbox Live Settings

When you are logged in for Xbox Live Multiplayer, you can set privacy settings and multiplayer preferences. Children and teens are restricted from making changes to their own privacy and online safety settings. Only a parent using the Microsoft family service can change Xbox privacy and online safety settings for a child account.

Scan Mods for malware

Minecraft mods add content to games to give more options to interact and to change the way the game looks and feels. But while mods can bring fun, it's important to consider that downloading and installing mods could potentially infect your computer with a virus or malware. In 2017, security company Symantec said that between 600,000 and 2.5 million Minecraft players had installed dodgy apps, which hijacked player's devices and used them to power an advertising botnet. Keep a good malware scanner installed on your devices, make sure it's up to date, and always check the permissions a new app requests before you install it.

Set time limits & learn

Set time limits to ensure playing with Minecraft is complemented by other activities. Or take time each day to sit down next to your child and watch them play to learn what they are getting from the game and how they are using it.