DOING IT TOGETHER
Advice for parents

Have the talk!

About gaming I mean, not the other talk.
I mentioned earlier in the mag that I'm a games player, not every day, normally about once a week; recovering from a bad back I spent a lot longer than usual playing games on my Playstation over the Easter holidays. I know first hand how time flies by, how engrossed and excited you can become, particularly if it's a high-intensity game.

It's an interesting talk I sometimes have with children, specifcally about the amount of time they spend playing their games, what they enjoy so much about their games, and the emotions they feel, particularly when they have to come of their game. The latter part, emotions, is incredibly important to understand.

To non-gamers, a game is just a game, but to gamers it's far more than that; for many children and young people it's a hugely important part of their social life. Just playing a game over and over would become quite boring after a while, but playing with friends and sometimes others around the world it's a very different story.

It's equally important to understand the game as well. One of the most frequent concerns I hear from parents is the negative behaviour experienced when their children are told to come of their game.

To give you an example, imagine you were doing a really important piece of work; you've been intensely working on it for 30 minutes and achieved a lot, you're finally getting somewhere. Then, all of a sudden, you lose power or the laptop crashes. You've lost everything and you've got to start again

This is a common issue I hear from children, they're told to come of their game but aren't given enough time to get to the next save point in the game or complete a level. Everything they have achieved has just been lost.

Whilst not a solution to all their behaviours, that talk with your children can be quite revealing to understand what they're doing, why they're doing it and importantly, the range of emotions they go through. Ask them why they play that particular game, what is it about the game that is so appealing? Is it the game, their friends? Ask them about levels and save points; many games are quite different, some allow to save wherever you want, others have particular save points you have to get to, some auto-save. This can be a lifesaver when it's time for dinner, just giving them a time warning (10 minutes till dinner) can help with some of those negative emotions.

Alan Mackenzie

Image Credit: Epic Games

Where it can go wrong.

The game is violent, the weapons and battles are brutal, but no more so and perhaps less so than many games out there due to it's colourful cartoon design. But the main risk for children and young people are harassment and malicious comments from other gamers, of varied ages. Top Tip is to ensure for the younger kids that parental controls are on and that you have them set to inform you and control who they're playing against. Best to keep it to people they know well offline. Also set time limits on the games. Each battle takes 20 minutes so if you set it for 30 mins to an hour they should get 2 games in. As with most games it's designed to become addictive so they may get ratty if kicked off during a game. So just use your judgement

In the US, Fortnite Mobile has caused uproar in schools with students and teachers. Students report wifi problems as 'everyone's on Fortnite', distraction in class and one teacher said 'instead of socialising all they do is play Fortnite'. Maybe that is Socialising-2018. Either way it's the latest craze to disrupt schools and homes and looks like it's here for a while.

Parental Controls

Parents have a couple of options here. If the game is being played via Xbox or PS system it's always a good idea to set up the Parental controls on your particular device which can help with limiting the time spent playing the game as well as preventing purchases being made to advance the game.

On Smartphones (ioS and Andriod) if you use a third party parental control solution this should be able to help with screen time management as well as limiting the time spent playing the game or indeed other apps – many parental control apps allow parents to allocate a daily time limit on games.

It's also a good idea to ensure that on both iOS and Android 'in-app' purchases are disabled so you don't get any billing surprises. According to a recent article on 9to5Mac 'Fortnite for iOS generated over $1M of in-app purchases during its' first 3 days on the App Store, with the game reaching the top of the App Store charts in 47 countries soon after its release.

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