Computer Gaming – Essential E-safety Information

This special edition of the Thursday Letter is dedicated to the issue of e-safety and computer gaming. On Tuesday of this week, e-safety expert, Julia Heath, delivered a talk to parents about the issues of helping to keep children safe from harm on the internet. One of the key areas of concern raised was children playing inappropriate computer games. To those of us from the generation of Space Invaders, the idea that a computer game can be harmful and inappropriate might be surprising. So, what is the fuss about …?

What computer games are considered harmful and inappropriate?

The games that children and parents most frequently mention are Grand Theft Auto 5 and Call of Duty. Both of these games are given a PEGI rating of 18. All games are given PEGI ratings.

What is a PEGI rating?

Age ratings are systems used to ensure that entertainment content, such as films, DVDs and computer games, are clearly labelled by age according to the content their contain. Age ratings provide guidance to consumers (particularly parents) to help them decide whether or not to buy a particular product.

Why are games given age ratings of?

The rating will be accompanied by a description of why the game has been rated.

For example, Grand Theft Auto V has the accompanying advisory:

The content of this game is suitable for persons aged 18 and over only.

It contains: extreme violence; multiple, motiveless killing; violence towards defenceless people; strong language.

This game also allows the player to interact with other players online.

But it's just a 'shoot 'em up' car-chase game; that can't be so bad, can it?

The graphics in these games are extremely realistic. They are very much like watching a movie. The content of such games typically includes:

- continuous swearing;
- extreme violence being depicted against defenceless people including prostitutes – e.g. someone's head being stamped on, people being stabbed;
- sexualised content and demeaning images of women – people having sex, picking up prostitutes, assaulting lap dancers etc.;
- drug taking.

But it can't be that violent and pornographic, can it? Surely that wouldn't be allowed?

If seeing is believing, then google, .e.g. 'YouTube Grand Theft Auto sex violence'. You will find lots of clips from players who have uploaded videos. Yes, it is allowed, but that is why it is given the age rating of 18.

What is the school's view on such games?

The school's message is very clear: these games are NOT appropriate for primary school aged children. Young children are very impressionable. They do not have the maturity or experience of life with which to interpret such degrading content. Their values are being influenced for the worse. There is an added danger of children being groomed by online contacts pretending to be children.

Will my child get into trouble for playing 18 games?

Whilst the school tries to offer helpful advice to parents, we obviously cannot prescribe what parents allow their children to do at home. However, children tend to imitate what they see and hear. Children coming into school swearing, using degrading language or acting out offensive things that they have seen, will find themselves in trouble.

"But my child says that all his friends are allowed to play these games."

We talk a lot to children in school, and we know that some children are currently allowed to play these games. We also know that the majority of parents do not let their children play such games. It has always been the case (even when we were young!) that children use pester power to say that "*all my friends are allowed to … [stay up late, wear certain clothes, etc.]. It's so unfair*." Sensible parenting is about making the right choices even when children don't agree.

How can I stop my child playing these games at their friend's house?

We wouldn't let our children go to a friend's house if we didn't trust that they would look after them. Have a chat with the other parent; they will probably share your opinion. Just as importantly, have a chat with your child; explain why you don't want them playing these games at home and why you do not want them to go behind your back. In this day of being able to access the internet everywhere, educating your child is one of the best ways of helping to keep them safe.

Where can I find out more information on keeping my child safe online?

Police:

http://safe.met.police.uk/internet_safety/get_the_facts.html

NSPCC:

https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/

Think You Know

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/