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LET'S TALK POSITIVE PLAY!

Nine out of ten tweens use social media and gaming apps ([Tween Cyberbullying in 2020](#), Cyberbullying Research Center and Cartoon Network). We often hear negative things about online gaming, but the truth is, there are many positives. Kids love socializing and playing with others in online gaming communities, and the vast majority want to play positive and be a force for good. Yet just like with in-person interactions, young people don't always know what to do when things go wrong in online games. As a parent or caregiver, you can arm yourself with knowledge and tools to help kids in your life have positive experiences, protect themselves and others, and most of all, have fun!

After watching Cartoon Network's PSA with your child, take the following three steps to help your child play positive in online games:

STEP ONE: Learn what your child experiences when playing games online.

Lots of positive things can happen during online game play, such as:

- Kids **improve social skills** through playing with friends and can learn to **collaborate**.
- Some games reward good sportsmanship, and kids can learn how to **play fairly** and **lose with grace**.
- Games provide a space to grapple with challenges, fail and try again, helping children to **increase their resilience** and reframe failure as an opportunity to try again.

However, with social interaction opportunities, in what can be a competitive environment, negative behaviors can arise. Unfortunately, 1 in 5 tweens have experienced cyberbullying ([Tween Cyberbullying in 2020](#)). Ways to learn more about your child's gaming environment include:

- **Name the Game:** Know what games your child is playing and explore them - popular online games have resources to make sure the games are safe and appropriate for your child.
- **Ratings & Reviews:** Like a movie, a game's rating can give you insight into how appropriate it is for your child.
- **Moderation Tools:** Look for moderation protocols in the game such as muting, blocking, reporting, unfollowing and filtering people. With these protocols available and activated, your child can learn how to take control of their game play time and learn how to keep themselves safe and positive when playing online.

STEP TWO: Create a safe and trusted space for conversations. Ask your child questions and show genuine interest. Don't just wait for something to go wrong or talk to them only when you have critical things to say. You want to gain their trust and show your support. Here are some ways you can start to develop a healthy rapport with your child about online gaming and help them become more self-reflective.

Show genuine interest. You might ask:

- What's your favorite game and why?
- Has anything ever happened in a game that is scary?
- What game have you spent the greatest number of hours on?
- Is there a game you used to like and now don't?
- Or a game you thought you'd like/hate but didn't?
- Who do you most enjoy playing with and why?

TIP: Parental negativity and over reactivity will make it difficult for your child to feel comfortable telling you if they hear language or get sent messages that make them uncomfortable.

Talk to your child about their experiences. Using scenarios is a great way to help your child think about what they might do if faced with negativity. These proactive conversations provide strategies should things go wrong. Here are some issues that kids report happen most often:

- Scamming: Players force them to give them things, like in-game currency, and threaten to end friendships if they don't comply
- Aggressive behavior and Overreactions: Using excessive profanity or negative gestures, or making threats
- Biased behaviors: Targeting players because of aspects of their identity - real or perceived - such as race, gender or socioeconomic status



Consider using the scenarios below to spark conversations with your child. Ask kids what, if anything, they could have done differently. Talk to them about what they should do next and ask them how they think they should proceed.

You are playing a competitive game online as a team with two friends. All of the friends are in separate places and chatting while playing. One player on another team makes a mistake that hurts your team. A player on your team gets really upset and starts to put negative comments in the chat. What should you do?

One day you log into your favorite multiplayer, sandbox game to find that a part of a building you had been working on had been destroyed. You have an idea of who may have done it because it has happened to a few of your friends before. What do you think the best way to handle it is?

STEP THREE: Create positive family gaming values, guidelines and strategies. Create guidelines for gameplay that help your child learn how to spot when something is going wrong and to use strategies for solving problems on their own. Start by discussing the points below.

- Where should gaming happen? Maybe you can create an area in your home where kids (and adults) can play in an open or shared space.
- How can we recognize when we need a break from gameplay? What does your body feel like when you need a break? What does your brain feel like when you need a break?
- Learn about and discuss privacy settings and talk about why the settings need to be used. Make sure your child's profile is private and encourage them to pick a fun gamer name that does not include their real name. Remind your child not to share personal details with people they don't know.
- Talk about the language of cyberbullying, and the roles that people take on: Cyberbully, Target, Bystanders, and Upstanders. If someone is being bullied online, your child should feel empowered to be an Upstander and stand up for the child being targeted.
- Make a list of strategies that can be used to combat negative behavior such as blocking and reporting players that are being negative, telling an adult when something happens, ignoring the behavior or walking away and taking a break.
- Talk about strategies that can be used to create a positive online community. How can we include others? Remind your child that this is a world that he or she is creating. It is everyone's responsibility to make and keep that world positive and safe.

TIP: When kids are involved in the creation of strategies, rules and boundaries, they are more likely to follow them.



Now take what you've learned together you are ready to create your Family Code of Conduct!

