



Minecraft is one of the world's most popular video games, especially with young children.

This presentation is a quick overview of the game for parents – what it is, why it's so popular and what you should know about keeping your children safe when they play it.



This section of the presentation introduces the game and answers some common questions parents might have – why is it so popular, is it appropriate for children etc.

What is it?

- Users explore different landscapes and build things with blocks.
- Minecraft can be played in five modes – survival, creative, adventure, spectator and hardcore.

- One of the world's most popular video games.
- 'Sandbox' game – players create their own experience by interacting with the game's virtual world.



Minecraft doesn't come with a strict set of rules or a clear progression you have to follow.

It's a sandbox game, so users can build and explore at will without following a linear structure (in contrast to a progression-style game, where players move through a set series of levels and objectives).

Depending on how it's played Minecraft fans might explore existing worlds or build their own.

In the image above, for example, a user has replicated a house from the film *Up*. Lots of Minecraft fans build structures from their favourite movies and TV shows, and many also come up with their own ideas.

The game has different modes, with a range of difficulty and experience options. In creative mode, for example, players have access to infinite building resources. In spectator mode, players can fly around and observe the virtual world but not interact with it in any way. Survival is the game's original mode and requires you to build shelter, find food and (sometimes) ward off hostile creatures to stay alive. Hardcore works similarly to survival, but at a higher difficulty level. In adventure mode it's harder to break things, but many of the other features are the same.

Why is it so popular with children?

- Totally customisable – encourages kids to be creative and decide how they want to play.
- Can be played socially or alone.
- Can be played at any skill level.



One reason for Minecraft's popularity is the amount of flexibility it provides for its users. It's often compared to Lego for the digital age, so it's not hard to see why it might appeal to children.

As a sandbox game, players customise their experience by interacting with the game's virtual world. They can explore their surroundings, use found materials to build structures or (in some modes) interact with other creatures.

Minecraft can be played with other users or alone, meaning it's good for socialising with friends and for getting some alone time. And because it can be played at pretty much any ability level, even young children can enjoy new adventures without having the more advanced skills needed in some other games.

Is it appropriate for young children?

- Terms and conditions say users should be 13 or older, but it's rated seven by PEGI and played by lots of young children.
- It's often compared to virtual Lego – nothing about Minecraft is inherently inappropriate for children.
- If you let your child play there are lots of ways to help them stay safe.



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Like lots of popular apps, games and sites, Minecraft's terms and conditions say only over 13s can make an account. This isn't a judgement of the game's age appropriateness – it's down to US legislation on collecting data from children. If under 13s play Minecraft in the UK no laws are being violated.

PEGI stands for Pan European Games Information. It's an age rating system designed to help European consumers make informed decisions on games' appropriateness. Minecraft has been rated 7, meaning it's generally appropriate for all ages but may include some sounds or images that could scare young children. In Minecraft the 7 rating is because there's some mild non-realistic violence when monsters pop up in some modes (this can be turned off) and the game can (but doesn't have to be) played online. While PEGI ratings are legally enforceable in the UK, the 7 rating is only advisory – it's not against the law to sell Minecraft to children under 7.

If you decide your young child is ready to play Minecraft there are some simple things you can do to help them stay safe and enjoy the game – we'll discuss some tips in the second half of the presentation.

Benefits of Minecraft

- Focus on building and exploring encourages creativity, problem solving and critical thinking.
- Children who play with friends could improve teamwork skills.
- Some parents of children with autism say the game can improve social skills and communication – there’s even a server for children with autism and ADHD.
- Minecraft has been used in education to teach children about maths, computing, geography and more.



There’s an increasing recognition that some games can have educational and social benefits for children. Minecraft is often used as an example.

Because Minecraft focuses on building things from scratch and exploring new worlds, it encourages young people to think creatively and apply their problem solving skills to challenges in the game, just as building a model or exploring offline might.

Minecraft can be played alone or with others – and kids who play with friends might improve their teamwork and collaboration skills. Some parents of children with autism have credited the game with improving their kids’ communication and social abilities.

Some teachers are even using Minecraft in lessons – for instance building an accurate model of the school. Minecraftedu.com was created to provide a version specifically for use in education.

Staying safe



The second half of the presentation covers some things to watch out for on Minecraft and basic tips for staying safe.

Single player vs multiplayer

Single player

- Safest mode.
- Users play by themselves and can't use the chat function to communicate with anyone else.
- Might be more appropriate for very young children.

Multiplayer

- Server-based version that lets multiple users play together in a single world.
- Players can communicate using the chat function – press T and then Enter to display the chat to others.
- Has some risks but can still be used safely.



You can play Minecraft alone or with other users.

Single player is the safest way to play Minecraft – because users can't communicate with anyone else there's no risk of bullying, bad language or coming in contact with someone your child doesn't know. If you have a very young child who wants to try Minecraft, this might be one of the best ways to start out. It's also a good way to learn some basic skills and get comfortable with how the game works before playing with friends.

Multiplayer is a server-based version of Minecraft that lets users play together. You can join a private or a public server, or even start your own.

Users in multiplayer can communicate using the game's chat function. Some servers also allow voice chat.

Being able to communicate with other players – sometimes including people you don't know – naturally has its risks, but there are also advantages to multiplayer and there are lots of things you can do to make it safer.

Staying safe on multiplayer

- The safest multiplayer option is a private server, where only known friends and family can join.
- You can also search for profanity-free or family friendly servers.
- The chat function is great for collaborating with friends, but remind your children to be very careful about talking to anyone they don't know.



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There are lots of advantages to the multiplayer version, and if your kids are Minecraft fans they'll probably want to try it at some point. You can play socially with friends, collaborate on ambitious building projects and explore extensive virtual worlds that other users have already built.

The safest way to play in multiplayer is to create your own server and only allow known friends and family to join. Your child can also see if any of their friends have already set up private servers.

If starting a server isn't an option or your child is interested in joining a larger community, a simple search for family friendly servers should turn up some good options. They mostly rely on a mix of whitelisting (meaning one of the server's admins has to approve new users) and moderator-enforced rules on language and behaviour to create communities that are appropriate for children.

Minecraft YouTube videos

- Some users watch fan-created YouTube videos to learn more about the game.
- These videos are very popular – 3.9 billion views in March 2015.



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Minecraft YouTube videos (fan-created films, usually of a user exploring or building something in the game) are hugely popular. They are the most watched gaming content on YouTube, with 2.5 billion more views than second-place gaming franchise Grand Theft Auto in March 2015.

There's a sample video embedded in the slide – you can show a bit of it to give a sense of what some of the channels are like. This video is by Stampy, who runs a very popular Minecraft YouTube channel that's appropriate for kids.

Double click on the image above to display the video and then press play. If the embedded video doesn't work, you can copy the URL:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvZJZCCq7DI&feature=player_embedded

Minecraft YouTube videos – are they safe?

- Depends on the video – some contain profanity or sexual references, or encourage bullying.
- Minecraft doesn't have any particularly upsetting content – but the monsters that appear in some modes might scare young children.
- Lots of Minecraft YouTube channels are specifically designed to be family friendly – like Minecraft Dad, SuperKevinCraft and Stampy.



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Minecraft videos are often perfectly fine for children to watch. But some have content (especially profanity) that might be inappropriate for young kids.

The videos are user-generated and they can be uploaded by anyone – so some include swearing and sexual references, and there won't always be an advance warning for inappropriate language. Some people also bully other Minecraft users (for example, by destroying things they've built, known as griefing) and might discuss or encourage these techniques in their videos.

And as we've already mentioned, some modes feature attacks by monsters (like spiders, skeletons and creepers). They're not very lifelike (they're made from cartoonish blocks) and the attacks don't show realistic violence, but videos that show the monsters might still scare very young children.

Fortunately there are lots of Minecraft YouTube channels specifically designed to be family friendly. Stampy (the example from the previous slide) is one of the most popular. MinecraftDad makes videos that feature his family playing together and SuperKevinCraft is a teen whose channel mostly features him and his friends building things together – he even takes requests from fans.

A simple online search for family friendly Minecraft YouTube channels should turn up

lots more options – but it might be worth checking some of them out before very young kids start watching.

In addition to the videos, there are online forums about Minecraft where users discuss techniques and features of the game. Minecraft has fans of all ages and these forums aren't necessarily appropriate for children. If you have a young child with a question about Minecraft, you might want to help them with their research to make sure they don't turn up anything inappropriate.

Top tips for staying safe

- Have young children play in single player or on a private/age appropriate server only.
- Remind kids using multiplayer to be careful about sharing personal information or talking to people they don't know.
- Report inappropriate behaviour to a server moderator.
- Look for family friendly YouTube channels and pre-screen them if you're worried about profanity or upsetting content.
- Turn off monsters by playing in creative mode or setting difficulty to peaceful in survival mode.

The logo for PitDA, featuring the text 'PitDA' in a white sans-serif font inside a light blue circle with a green shadow effect.

If your young child plays Minecraft, here are five basic tips to keep in mind.

It's safest for young children to play in single player or on a server you know is age appropriate. You can set up your own, join a friend's or search online for an appropriate option – there are lots of servers specifically designed to be safe for children and families. Some are whitelisted (meaning they require an application to control who joins) and some let anyone join but control user behaviour through strict moderation and banning players who act inappropriately. Some family friendly servers even control behaviour that automatically detects and deals with banned language.

Even in a server designed to be appropriate for all ages, your children should be careful about talking and sharing personal information with people they haven't met offline (just like anywhere on the internet).

If someone makes your child uncomfortable (using profanity, bullying, etc) you can report them to a server moderator. If they've broken the rules they can be banned (temporarily or permanently).

If your child wants to watch Minecraft YouTube videos you can point them towards some of the age appropriate channels we mentioned (or help them find others – there are plenty of options). For very young children it might be a good idea to watch some of

the videos in advance, to make sure you're happy with the language and content.

Finally, if your children are very young and you're worried about the monsters that come up in some modes, you can play without them. Just set the difficulty to peaceful in survival mode or play in creative mode.

Reporting

- Minecraft doesn't have a centralised reporting function for inappropriate behaviour.
- In multiplayer you can usually report to a server's operator (or moderator).
- Anyone acting sexually inappropriate towards a child anywhere online should be reported to CEOP <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Ceop-Report/>.
- Remind your children that they can always come to you if something makes them uncomfortable.



You can't report inappropriate behaviour to Minecraft or Mojang (the company behind the game, now owned by Microsoft).

But because this should only ever be a concern in multiplayer mode, your child will normally be able to report to their server's operator (the most common term for a moderator in Minecraft). Depending on the rules of the server, reporting a user might result in them being banned from the server (temporarily or permanently) or warned about their behaviour.

Although Minecraft is generally very safe, there are risks to any internet use. If your child plays Minecraft in multiplayer mode and chats with other users, you should remind them about the types of behaviour that are never acceptable - that adults who try to talk to them about sex, for instance, are breaking the law and should be reported to CEOP.

Because Minecraft doesn't have a centralised reporting function and the rules depend on what server you're using, it can be confusing to figure out how to report upsetting behaviour. Make sure your child knows they can always come to you for support if something happens and they're not sure how to handle it.