AYLESBURY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

E-Safety – Guide to Video Games

This guide has been written purely for information purposes. The decision to allow gaming and at what level lies with parents/carers.

Gaming......whether we are a fan or not or whether we like it or not gaming is arguably the favourite pastime of secondary school age children and of course particularly amongst boys! As with anything involving technology and particularly access to online material it is vital that parents/carers are aware of what is out there and apply the appropriate safeguards to ensure that this ever popular pastime is participated in safely.

It is no great surprise that children will always want to push the boundaries. They (and we) all did it with video and DVD throughout the late 1970s onwards and of course trying to buy cinema tickets for a film just out of chronological age reach has long been part of teenage rite of passage too! It wasn't until 1989 that the *British Board of Film Classification (BBFC)* finally bowed to pressure from the public and reluctantly followed the US lead (they went with PG13) in introducing the 12 certificate just in time for the release of 'Batman', starring Michael Keaton as the awe-inspiring flying rodent! This obviously bridged the widening gap between films rated at 'PG' and '15' as previously the inclusion of one or two instances of bad language would take even a relatively harmless family orientated film away from its intended PG rating.

However the rise of video games perhaps has taken many parents/carers by surprise. Those early 'blocky' graphics which were hard-pressed to depict anything closely resembling reality have of course been refined and the powerful consoles we have today allow games to lead the player(s) through huge and expansive worlds. The level of interaction is now on a par with reality and consequently the age appropriate game ratings have never been more important yet the 1980s thinking of them "not being real so it's OK" seems to remain.

Of course the young people will say "Everyone I know has the game, so it can't be bad or too young for me" and the parental loyalty is immediately called into question not wanting children to be mercilessly be cast out of the friendship groups they have fought hard to be part of.

Each responsible adult needs to make that decision for the children in their care but how many have actually studied the game ratings beyond the number in the box whether it be 3, 7, 12, 16 or 18? *The Pan European Game Information (PEGI)* is readily available online via their website http://www.pegi.info/en/index/id/33/ and beyond just the numbers the full descriptions of each age rating and why it is/has been applied are listed. You can also search their database for a specific game on any platform and observe the full classification information beyond the brief synopsis which is shown on the product box. As mentioned earlier trying to get into the cinema to see a 15 certificate film when you are in fact just 13 is one thing, but having read the descriptions given to 18 rated games is this then appropriate material for a 12, 13 or 14 year old?

Obviously these days, and to complicate the matters further it is not just the issue of playing a particular game at home alone or in the company of one or two friends/family members. Most games offer the opportunity to play online with other individuals whether they be local or from anywhere in the world. Again it seems to have become accepted practice amongst some to allow children access to this and then the previous argument of whether the actual game is appropriate anyway becomes a secondary issue in terms of safety. The open 'chat' that accompanies many of these games is unregulated and as will all online usernames and profile pictures you don't really know who you are making contact with.

So gaming is all bad and evil and should be banned immediately!?.....no of course not, but the correct questions should be asked to keep everyone safe. Nobody in their right mind would attempt a potentially dangerous physical activity without learning to use the equipment first or listening to important safety instructions…..the question is why would we treat gaming differently when the 'what if?' questions could have an equally tragic ending.

Other E-Safety information is available via the AGS website.