

ONLINE GAMING & CHILD SAFETY

Information for Parents, Educators, and Caregivers



A resource provided by the
U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts



ONLINE GAMES ARE SOCIAL PLATFORMS – NOT JUST ENTERTAINMENT



Millions of kids interact with strangers daily.

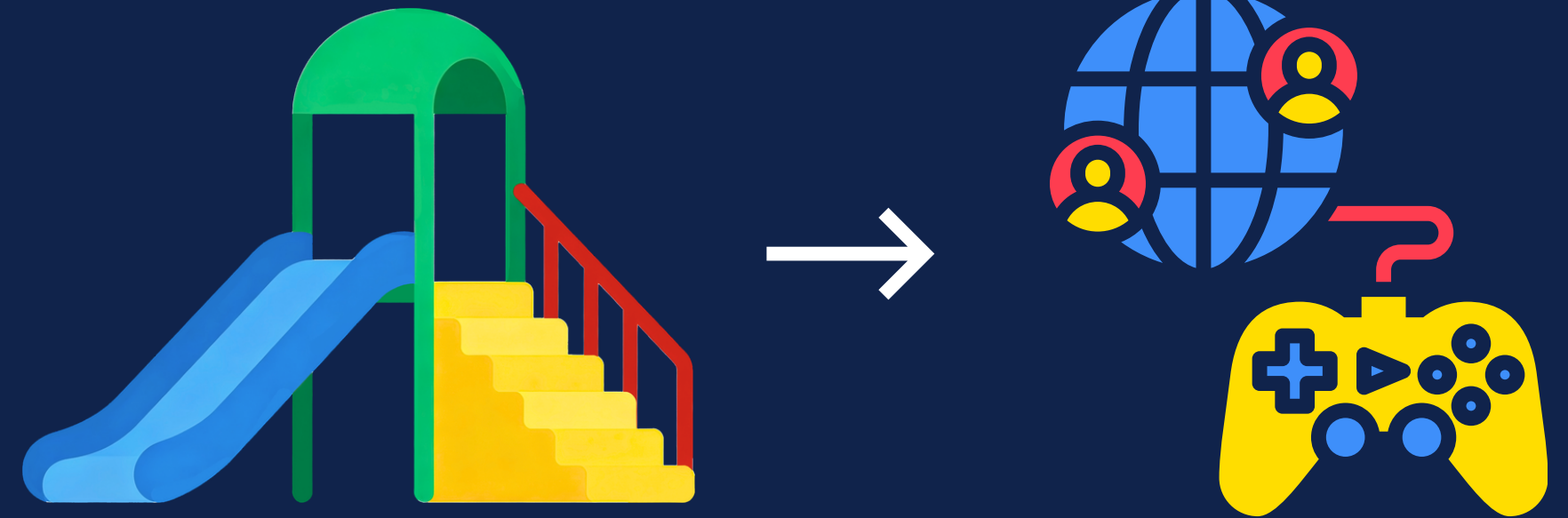
Most interactions are harmless, but some are not...

Online games are used every day by kids, and by **predators**.

WHY GAMING PLATFORMS ARE HIGH-RISK

🔍 **Predators go where kids are** ✕

Today's "playground" = online games



Popular platforms offer built-in chat features + voice communication

Easy to blend in as a "friend," "teammate," or "mentor,"
and **build trust overtime**



THIS IS NOT HYPOTHETICAL



These popular games have been used in **federally-prosecuted child exploitation cases** in MA

Cases often began with routine in-game interactions

IT DOESN'T START WITH SOMETHING OBVIOUS



Friendly interactions



Invite to join private chat
or smaller group



Gradual escalation

Personal questions

Emotional bonding

Testing boundaries



COMMON TACTICS PREDATORS USE



By the time it's obvious, the relationship
may already feel real to the child

PLATFORM SHIFTING

Let's move to Discord

ISOLATION

Don't tell your parents,
they wouldn't understand

DESENSITIZATION

Gradual introduction of sexual
and/or violent topics

CONTROL & COERCION

Threats, guilt, blackmail

WARNING SIGNS



- ⚠ Secretive about gaming or devices
- 📱 Sudden new “online friend” they won’t explain
- ✗ Moving conversations off-platform
- 🎯 Increased anxiety, withdrawal, or irritability
- 🔌 Receiving gifts, game currency, or perks from unknown users



Patterned behavior will often show up gradually ✕

KIDS OFTEN MISREAD ONLINE INTERACTIONS

*It's just online,
not real life*

*They're just someone
I game with*

*Everyone else has
public profiles*



REALITY CHECK

If someone can interact with
your child, they can:

Learn about them

Build trust

Manipulate them



**ONLINE ACCESS IS
REAL-WORLD RISK**

WHAT YOU CAN DO



*Maintain practical guardrails
that reduce opportunity
for victimization*



VISIBILITY

Keep gaming in shared or visible spaces at home

Know what platforms your child uses



CONTROLS

Review privacy settings and chat settings for each platform/app

Enable “Ask to Buy” feature in Family Sharing to manage app downloads

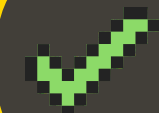


BOUNDARIES

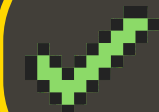
No sharing personal info

No “app switching” with people online without permission

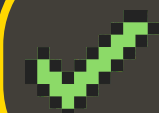
BEST PROTECTION: **BE A TRUSTED ADULT**



Make it safe for your child to tell you anything



Stay calm – even if what they share is serious



Check in regularly, don't wait for something to feel wrong

If they don't feel safe telling you, you don't get a chance to help

IF SOMETHING HAPPENS: **ACT QUICKLY**

1 MAINTAIN EVIDENCE

Take screenshots
Save usernames + messages
Do **not** delete anything



2 TALK - UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED

How and when did this start?
What platforms were used?
What was shared?

REMEMBER: THIS IS NOT THEIR FAULT

3 CONTACT LAW ENFORCEMENT

Follow their guidance before reporting to platforms
Report to CyberTipline by calling 1-800-843-5678
or visit www.cybertipline.org

For more information, visit:

www.justice.gov/usao-ma/project-safe-childhood/project-safe-childhood-resources

