



There's a good chance you already know what the PlayStation 4 (PS4) is. Sony's video game console is often touted as being one of the best-selling of all time, with over 100 million units shifted worldwide. With over seven years of polishing and fine-tuning under its belt, you'd expect the console to be one of the safest around. While this is overwhelmingly true, there are still things parents should be on the lookout for whether they're children are starting it up for the first time or they're already experienced users.



What parents need to know about PLAYSTATION 4



SAFETY CONCERNS

PlayStation users are able to add each other as friends by simply inputting another player's username and sending them a friend request. If accepted, they can chat openly from the console's dashboard, including voice chatting in a private party. If players know each other, this can be a great way to talk privately while in games, without having to interact directly with others. But, similarly, if a stranger adds a child and is accepted as a friend, they have direct access to them.



ACCESS TO PERSONAL INFORMATION

The PlayStation Network (or PSN) is essentially used to house all the other PlayStation services (like PlayStation Plus and PlayStation Store) under one roof. Accounts are free and come in two forms; master accounts and sub accounts, with master accounts having access to the parental controls on a console. If a user's ID and account password were compromised (if a child was tricked into revealing it or if a hacker obtained the details otherwise) then it could provide access to personal information or banking details.



ONLINE BULLYING

Sometimes in an online game, players will be able to freely chat with each other. While these interactions will mostly be positive and about having fun in a game, some people will take this opportunity to use offensive or abusive language or may just want to aggravate other players. In some cases, it may amount to harassment, trolling or cases of online bullying.



ADULT CONTENT IN GAMES

The PlayStation offers a huge variety of different games, all with different age ratings. From shooting games to driving, sports, educational titles and everything in between, they all need special attention when considering a purchase, as some can contain adult content or explicit language with isn't always suitable for young children. The best way to know what a game involves is to check out its PEGI rating which will be on the game box, or on the website page before you buy. Remember that these ratings serve as a guide, and the ultimate choice lies with parents to know what is acceptable and appropriate for their children.



SCREEN ADDICTION

The PS4 can provide hours of entertainment. As well as being an avenue to play games, it provides the ability to browse the internet, watch live TV or stream video services such as Netflix, Amazon or YouTube. Such is the variety, that it can be easy to switch between modes and rack up time in front of the screen. Some children may also find it difficult to control the amount of time they play games, potentially leading to gaming disorder.



Safety Tips for Parents & Carers



CREATE 'CHILD FAMILY MEMBER' ACCOUNTS

The PS4 allows parents to set up different accounts for different family members, including children. This will allow you to control different aspects of your child's PS4 experience including the ability to set age restrictions on gameplay, limit play time sessions, disabling chat messaging and the ability to access the internet.



DISCUSS PSN RISKS WITH YOUR CHILD

It's always a good idea to discuss with your child how to stay safe on the PlayStation Network and how to respond if people they don't know contact them. Advise your child to report anybody who upsets them or makes them feel uncomfortable and to never share personal or private details or images with anyone online. You can also block other users if they are abusive or your child feels threatened by their behaviour.



SET MONTHLY SPENDING LIMITS

It's a good idea to set a limit on how much can be spent on things like new games, or for skins or card packs in games like Fortnite and FIFA. This can be done using your master family account and then selecting your child's account. Go to Applications/Devices/Network Features from where you should be able to select Monthly Spending Limit and adjust it as you see fit.



IMPLEMENT PRIVACY CONTROLS

Sometimes it's easier to block potential risks at the source when playing online. Through Network Features, you can select whether a child's sub account can communicate with others while on the PSN or whether they can view content created by other players. This means disabling the ability for your child to communicate via chat or messages or displaying and entering comments for friend requests and game invitations. It also means you can block videos, images and text created by other users from view.



SET AGE RATING LEVELS FOR GAMES, DVDS AND BLU-RAYS

As well as controlling what age rating level of a game your child can play, you can also set appropriate controls for DVDs and Blu-Rays. To set this up, simply go through the Family Management setting and then Applications/Devices/Network Features and select the type of content you would like to restrict.



LIMIT PLAY TIME

Play time can also be managed through the PlayStation's parental controls. On the family manager accounts, go to Settings, Parental Controls, Family Management and select the child account you'd like to limit play time for. From here, set a Time Zone, then configure the Play Time Settings to preference.



KEEP ACCOUNTS SECURE

To stop children from changing parental controls and adjusting their own limits and restrictions, you can create a system restriction passcode to disable guest login and set up a log-in passcode so that only you can access your account. To protect against hackers, you can activate 2-step verification (2SV) which will alert you of any new logins. You can also set up a password at 'checkout' in the PlayStation Store so that there is an additional layer of security if anybody attempts to make any unauthorised purchases.



Meet our expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.



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