

Gaming or Gambling: Frequently Asked Questions

How is gaming linked to gambling?

In the last few years, the line between online gaming and gambling has become increasingly blurred. Some activities that players get involved in are so like games of chance that it is hard to see them as anything other than gambling.

- **Skin gambling** involves betting to win 'skins' (outfits for their characters, weapons and accessories). It takes place on casino-style third-party websites through games of chance like roulette and coin toss.
- **Loot boxes** give players access to items they can use while playing. These may enhance their performance, but very often they are simply cosmetic for example outfits for their characters, weapons and accessories. Loot boxes are often bought using real money or paid-for virtual currency. In most cases, players don't know what's inside the boxes when they pay for them, so it's a bit like buying a scratchcard. The temptation is for players to keep going in the hope of getting the items they want.

Should I be concerned about loot boxes?

Online games have started to depend more on in-game spending only quite recently but it's now becoming more widespread. A [report by the UK Gambling Commission](#) found that almost a third of children and young people in the UK had opened loot boxes. A surge in free-to-play (F2P) games over the last few years means that instead of paying upfront, players are encouraged (sometimes required) to buy add-on content such as loot boxes. Sixty-three of the 100 top-grossing games on the Google Play Store feature loot boxes.

What if my child wants to buy a loot box?

Make sure you agree on rules for your child buying loot boxes. You may want to know every time they do or you might let them have a certain amount of pocket money they can choose to spend. As with any chance-based game, it's possible to get hooked and keep going when you shouldn't.

Surely underage gambling is illegal?

Yes, it is: children are not legally allowed to participate in [most forms of gambling](#) — but the rapid changes in technology make it difficult for the law to keep up with all new types of digital gambling. Loot boxes are not classified as gambling in the UK and so are not regulated by the UK Gambling Commission. Other European countries, like Belgium and the Netherlands, do classify loot boxes as gambling.

Aren't games rated by age?

In Europe, PEGI (Pan European Game Information) rates games according to their suitability for different age groups. But since most gambling-like features aren't officially recognised as gambling, they don't influence PEGI's decisions. PEGI has said that [it cannot classify loot boxes as a form of gambling](#) because this is the responsibility of the UK Gambling Commission. As a result, children as young as seven can legally play around 50% of all games containing loot boxes.

Will parental controls help?

Activating the gaming system's spending blocks or limits will make it harder for children to go through with transactions: it's a good first step to making games a safer space for your child. But it doesn't eliminate the risk. The best way to help your child stay safer is to take an interest in the games they play, share your concerns about the potential dangers and make sure they know that they can come to you if they have a problem or anything that concerns them.

How are gambling-like features paid for?

If your child plays online games you might have heard of V-Bucks, Apex Coins or Gems. These are virtual currencies that are used to buy add-on content like loot boxes, skins or weapons, which are not essential for play. Some games reward players with virtual currency when they complete a challenge. Others require players to buy the virtual currency using debit or credit cards, prepaid cards or vouchers - and with the rise of free-to-play games, this is increasingly popular.

What kinds of games are involved?

Gambling-like features, such as loot boxes, are mostly, but not exclusively, found in games that have an online multiplayer mode — such as Fortnite, Overwatch or FIFA. Players can show off their newly-won skins and other cosmetic items to the wider gaming community (or, if the items they're betting for help performance, they can get the upper hand). It is particularly common for developers of free-to-play games to include elements such as loot boxes because they can generate a lot of money from players.

However, many paid-for games (so-called AAA titles, big-budget games from leading companies) have also taken advantage of this new gaming trend and are encouraging children and young people to spend more money on gambling-like features.

How do I know if my child might be developing harmful behaviours?

Parents know their child better than anyone so you are in a good position to keep a close eye on any changes in their behaviour. Although these signs may not necessarily mean they have a problem with gambling-like behaviour - they can help you know when to seek further support for you and your child.

Many of these signs won't necessarily mean that your child is developing harmful behaviours, but it is helpful to know what to look out for and when you may need to seek further support and guidance.

- Your child may seem more withdrawn than usual and seem irritable and anxious
- They may seem tired and have trouble sleeping
- They may seem anxious or annoyed if you ask them about any regular spending they have made on in-game purchases, that you weren't previously aware of
- You may notice regular transactions for in-game purchases

Want to speak to someone about gambling?

If you are looking for help, advice or support in relation to your or someone else's gambling, please go to [BeGambleAware.org](https://www.begambleaware.org) or contact the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133.

Find out more about Gaming or Gambling at parentzone.org.uk/gaming-or-gambling