

A guide to game streaming

What is game streaming?

Game streaming allows fans to watch other people playing video games in real time, interact with them via chat and – in some cases – ask questions and influence their choices.

Since the mid-2010s, streaming services like Twitch, Mixer and Facebook Gaming have become a thriving part of the \$180-billion games industry – and a popular way for children and young people to spend time online.

Because streams are live, viewers can feel like they're 'taking part' in a shared experience – like a football match. Whether they're tuning in to an international esports tournament or watching someone explore an open-world game, streams offer thousands of gaming fans opportunities to 'hang out' with internet celebrities and celebrate the games they love.

What are the risks?

- Anything can happen in real time, so streams are extremely **difficult to moderate** and children and young people are sometimes **exposed to inappropriate language or hate speech**.
 - Most streaming services don't require users to verify their ages, so children and young people can **easily access mature content**.
 - Although most streams are free to watch, there's a **strong incentive for children and young people to spend money** in order to access exclusive features.
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What are the main platforms?

Twitch

With over 15 million visitors a day, Amazon's Twitch is the biggest platform for game streaming and home to many streamers who are popular with young people, such as Tfue and TSM.

With a Twitch account, users can comment on streams, subscribe to channels for a monthly fee and buy 'Bits' (Twitch's virtual currency). Bits allow users to 'Cheer' – send special messages to the streamer which appear on the screen. The more Bits you use, the more features you can include in your Cheer.

You must technically be 13 or older to create a Twitch account, but aren't required to verify your age – and you don't need an account to watch streams anyway. Since Twitch can't distinguish between viewers who don't have accounts, there are effectively no filters for age-appropriate content.

Content may be tagged for mature audiences by the creator – but this is merely a warning, and streams featuring PEGI 18 games, such as Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto, are available to young children.

Mixer

Microsoft's Mixer may be smaller, but it boasts a loyal fanbase and has poached some of the world's top streamers, such as Ninja and KingGothalion, from Twitch.

Like Twitch, you don't need an account to watch streams – but registered users get access to interactive features like 'crowd play', which allows them to vote on a streamer's choices in certain games.

Unlike Twitch, Mixer doesn't have subscriptions – but it does include virtual currencies. 'Sparks' are earned by watching videos, while 'Embers' are paid for with real money. Embers allow users to buy premium items such as stickers and boost their comments so they appear higher up in the feed.

Again, you must technically be 13 or older to create a Mixer account, but aren't required to verify your age – and Mixer's rules actually state that [parents are responsible](#) for the content their children access. However, they have been praised for responding to reports and complaints quickly.

Facebook Gaming

Facebook Gaming was only launched in January 2018 – but its user base has grown considerably in two years.

While it looks a lot simpler and offers fewer special features, Facebook Gaming is strongly influenced by Twitch. Users can subscribe to streamers and buy a virtual currency called 'Stars' which, like Bits on Twitch, can be sent in the comment section to show appreciation.

There aren't separate accounts for Facebook Gaming. You can easily access it via the left-hand menu when you're logged in to Facebook. You must technically be 13 or older to create a Facebook account, but you don't need an account to watch streams – so like Twitch and Mixer, nothing stops children from watching age-inappropriate content.

How can I support children?

Building children and young people's digital resilience is the most effective way of ensuring that they can recognise and manage the risks involved in game streaming - and continue to make the most of their experiences online.

Digital resilience is developed by **understanding** when you might be at risk; **knowing** how to respond to risks and seek help; **learning** from your experiences and **recovering** when things go wrong.

Help them understand when they might be at risk:

- Talk to them about how game streaming can be different from TV or reality shows, because it is difficult to predict what streamers and commenters might say or do. Therefore, there's a higher risk of seeing or hearing something that they might be uncomfortable with.
- Encourage them to think critically about what they see. Because streams are free to watch, they often contain ads or sponsored content and will try to get the viewer to sign up for a subscription or spend money in other ways, like virtual currency.

Help them know how to respond to risks and seek help:

- Familiarise yourself with the different options, filters and parental controls on the streaming platform they use, where they're available.
- Ask them if they know how to report, block or mute users and channels if they see or hear something that makes them uncomfortable.

Help them learn from their experiences:

- To help them think critically, ask them what they like and don't like about the streaming platform that they use. If they mention lots of negative things, you may also want to suggest other ways that they can explore their love for gaming that don't involve streaming.

Help them recover when things go wrong:

- Check that they know who to talk to if they see or hear something that makes them uncomfortable, or receive messages that worry them.