

## **Gaming and its dangers (or beauty): How can youths protect themselves from the online world?**

By Rinn Teo | October 4, 2021, 3.00pm SGT

### **Online Gaming by Youths**

Online Gaming in general has always been a completely new environment for non-gamers. More often than not, it is commonly known as a kind of addiction, which brings about a bad impression. Compared to a person that reads as a hobby and another that games, most would assume the gamer as unaccomplished as opposed to the one who reads.

Especially for young gamers, it is a constant stigma in their life should they not know how to balance their time properly. Many cases have led such youths to perform poorly academically. With the anonymity of hiding behind a screen, online gaming could also lead these youths astray. In a recent case in Singapore, a youth had stabbed his junior in secondary school, which many believe derived from his lack of distinction between real life and online.

### **Gaming and its dangers (or beauty)**

With the many dangers stemming from online gaming, why do youths still indulge themselves in it? None other than for its beauty.

As mentioned, it is a completely new environment. It is specifically the case for each and every new game that one plays. For example, some gamers enjoy the art, such as the sceneries and character design, while others enjoy the relieve it brings that takes away the stress from everyday life, by immersing themselves in a whole new world. By meeting people from all walks of life in the game without having to expose their real identity, it gives them a sense of serenity, allowing them to speak of issues that they might have problem speaking of in-person.

However, if handled poorly, it might lead to having their identity exposed. In such cases, it happens more often with youths. For example, in genres known as MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) and FPS (First Person Shooter), gamers tend to get a little too competitive. In a game relying mainly on team effort, strangers expect a certain level of reliability from their teammates to enjoy the game matches. When one performs poorly, insults are often thrown freely, although it never leads to better gameplay and would instead bring the morale of the team even lower. When youths are thrown into these kinds of environments, such insults usually comprise of profanities, insults, and personal attacks. There are even cases where youths take it a step further and engage in voice calls through exposing their mobile number after a heat of anger.

### **How can youths protect themselves from the online world?**

Youths tend to pick up things easier when they are younger, thus by being exposed to a toxic environment, it harshly affects their upbringing. In addition to them leaking their private information on their own, it brings about a whole new kind of danger. In a worst-case scenario, stalking.

In such a rough environment, there might not be anyone who would willingly teach them the ropes. Self-awareness for young gamers is essential, but how do they go about doing so? A huge part of this falls on their parents' shoulders.

### **1. Keep it age appropriate**

Monitor the kind of games the youth is playing. Even if it might seem harmless in the beginning, most youths would try to explore beyond the parameter and end up diving too deep into the rabbit hole. Appropriate gaming should also be taught to the youth, by setting appropriate boundaries regardless of the type of games played.

### **2. ‘Gaming friends’ are still strangers in the real world**

Many inappropriate gaming partners can be found online. Gamers tend to have a different character assuming different identities to escape reality, such as older youths appearing to be younger youths. Should they be of bad influence, it could greatly affect said younger youths, which may even lead to contact in real life.

### **3. Limit information sharing**

Youths should never disclose their private information online, such as where they live or how they look like. It may lead to unthinkable risks inappropriate for the youth.

### **4. Safe gaming**

Safe gaming and cyber risks should be taught and not neglected. With the addition of gaming friends, youths are exposed to more chat groups, and they might be influenced to download or click on links that promise a new and exciting game. Such vulnerability may be exploited by cyber criminals, allowing them to gain access to private home network and devices such as cameras.

In this day and age where the online world is the primary source of communication, especially with COVID still rampaging, gaming is a good escape and opportunity to ‘meet up’ with friends that you will or would not have met in real life. Protecting one’s own private information has always been important, and in this case, youths deserve the protection and self-awareness more than ever.

## **References**

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