Gaming:

Why do children and young people like to play games over the internet?

Gaming can be great fun, and can be a place where young people play and chat to each other. Gaming chat is often focused solely on the game, and young people will often swap user names to ensure that they can get to the next levels.

What are the risks to children and young people when gaming?

Gaming sites can be fantastic fun for young people, however as with any online technology - there are risks. The three main risks are:

- **Addiction**

Online gaming can occasionally be addictive for young people. They can become so involved in the gaming communities that they lose touch with their offline friends, in favour of spending time with online users playing games. Young people often spend hours every night playing games, especially when their parents have gone to bed. For this reason, CEOP recommends that the computer is kept in a family room. Parents will also then be able to monitor what games their children are playing, to ensure they are age appropriate.

- **Abuse**

Some young people who use online games can be abusive to other gamers. This can range from saying nasty things if there is a chat facility within the gaming site, to always winning and not sharing cheats or knowledge on how to progress to the next level. Young people should be encouraged that when they play online games, they treat others how they would like to be treated.

- **Risky behaviour**

There are some young people who engage in risky behaviour to obtain cheats or knowledge to progress within a game. Adults with a sexual interest in children will encourage them to engage in inappropriate behaviour for rewards including sexual acts via webcam or sex chat. Young people need to understand that their online behaviour has offline consequences and that if someone engages them in a sexual manner online that they should inform a trusted adult immediately.

How can I reduce the risks to my children when they are gaming online?

Playing games online can be a fantastic past-time for young people, but as parents you may not understand why your child spends so much time playing or how to help keep them safe.

It's a good idea to keep the computer in a family room. This is so you can monitor the games your child is playing online, to ensure they are age appropriate and also so your child won't engage in activities that could put them at risk.

This also means that children will not have the opportunity to spend hours playing games in the privacy of their bedroom after you have gone to bed!

There are unfortunately some adults who have a sexual interest in children, and will use gaming as a means of grooming them. They may encourage young people to engage in inappropriate behaviour for rewards or cheats. Young people often don't understand enough about the risks and should be encouraged to talk to an adult they trust if they are engaged by someone in a gaming area. As a parent, it's vital that you talk to your child and make sure they know how they should behave when they are gaming. They should be encouraged not to accept cheats or talk to people that they don't know in the real world. If anyone asks them to do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, they should tell a trusted adult or report their suspicions to CEOP on this website: ceop.police.uk