ONLINE SAFETY NEWSLETTER

Providing online safety information for Parents

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The chances are if you have a child that likes gaming, they will have asked to play the new craze Fornite: Battle Royale. This is a spin-off from the game Fortnite that is available for PC/Mac, Xbox/Playstation and iOS (Apple tablets and phones) but not yet for Android.

Fortnite: Battle Royale is a 100-player last person standing shooter rated PEGI 12 for violence. Players are dropped into a game map and have to shoot the other players to win the game. During the game, players can collect and unlock weapons, build structures to hide or defend themselves and try to avoid the storm that damages all players outside the safe zone. During the game, the land available is reduced so survivors are

forced closer together. The last survivor is the winner.

Players can play solo, duos or in squads of four and it can be played across different platforms. While the content is violent, it is cartoon-like rather than gory. The game is fun and humorous. Fortnite: Battle Royale contains both voice and text chat so young players might be exposed to mature language, but this can be switched off. Popular Youtube gamers such as DanTDM are playing this game on their channels and Epic the game manufacturer is adding new features all the time – an android version of the game is expected in the next few months. Each game can last about 20 minutes so one of the major issues is the length of play. Depending on your child, you may need to instigate a timer

system for play based on finishing the next game as kids will not want to stop the game in the middle as their team mates will be cross and they will lose points they've earned in the game.

The game is free, but there are many opportunities to buy items within the game, such as Premium Battle Passes that allow you to unlock different items until the end of the season.

Parents need to know:

- Multi-player, multi-platform, last player standing shooter rated PEGI 12
- Voice and text chat available
- Free to obtain but in-app purchases available
- Each game lasts 20 minutes so players can end up playing for a long time

My child is being bullied online

Schools and the police receive many reports from parents and carers that their child is being bullied online. If your child reports this to you, you need to consider the best way of supporting your child. Online bullying can take many forms: it can be sending of mean or unpleasant messages either individually, in group chat, or posts on social media, or excluding someone from groups; it could also include threats to harm someone or editing of photos to make it look like someone has shared a nude image of themselves. It can

happen on messaging apps, social media, gaming networks or any platform where people can communicate. The person or people responsible can be someone known or someone unknown. Sometimes anonymous accounts will be set up purely to bully someone else; sometimes someone will access someone else's account in order to cause trouble for the person. Most bullying behaviour is not criminal and is therefore not a policing matter (see later for school and police action).

Bullying is where a person or group are targeted on an ongoing basis. Some of what is now labelled as bullying is actually a friendship issue or where there is a falling out between friends. Sometimes, a young person makes a genuine mistake by sharing or posting something they shouldn't and it escalates quickly and becomes an issue for a larger group of young people. It is important to be clear about what has actually happened and whether the incident is a friendship issue or whether it is bullying. The former issues

can be unpleasant, but are unlikely to be as damaging as the potential consequences of bullying.

Research from the *Ditch the Label Annual Survey 2017* has shown online bullying rarely happens on its own; there is normally face to face bullying of some sort going on as well. This is one of the reasons that schools have the primary responsibility to deal with all forms of bullying under their behaviour policies. The main things that young people are bullied about are their appearance, attitude towards interests or hobbies and grades at school. While 1 in 2 young people in the survey said they had been bullied, nearly 9 in 10 young people said they had not bullied someone; but two thirds of the sample had said something abusive to someone else online. Those young people with a physical or learning disability or on the autism spectrum or who identify as LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) are most likely to be bullied. Those young people that spend longer online are more likely to have received abusive comments and also to have been unpleasant to others.

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internetmatters.org

What are the effects of online bullying?

Evidence shows that bullying can increase social anxiety, depression, self-harming and suicidal thoughts in young people. The difference with online bullying is that a young person can be bullied 24 hours a day and it can be easy for the people responsible to just create another account and for the bullying to continue if a victim tries to block them. Some parents and professionals will advise young people to remove themselves from their technology if they are being bullied, but the difficulty for many young people is that much of their social life is lived on Instagram and Snapchat or via gaming platforms, so removing this will reduce the positive aspects of online communication as well as the negative ones.

What can you do if your child is having issues online?

Firstly, check out what is really happening. If it is a friendship issue then speak to your child to see if it needs dealing with or whether it is likely to sort itself out. If they need assistance, then you might be able to speak to another parent or speak to the school. If you feel that your child is being bullied by young people your child knows, your first conversation will usually be with your child's school. Even if the other young people are at a different school, the schools can work together to resolve the issue. Schools can put in place sanctions or might look to do a restorative conversation to try and get the friendship back on track. The police only need to be contacted where you or the school believe something criminal has happened, or in the holidays or other times where school is not available. If police are contacted and the matter should be being dealt with by the school, it will usually be passed to the Safe Schools and Communities Team (SSCT) to liaise with the school to find out what action has already been taken. Where school request, where parental permission is given, and where it is appropriate to do so, SSCT staff can speak with young people to assist the school in resolving the issue. In the unlikely event that the incident appears to be criminal, it may be passed to investigators to see if a formal police response is required. If you are unhappy with the school's response when you have reported bullying to them, please follow the school's complaints procedure, which will normally involve putting your concerns in writing to senior members of staff. It is not appropriate to complain about the school on social media or to name staff or young people.

How else can you help your child avoid bullying?

- Think about what access to devices and apps your child has. If they have lots of communication with friends when they are too young to understand the problems, they are more likely to be a victim or perpetrator of bullying
- Ensure your child knows how to block or report and other safety tools on the apps they use
- Reassure your child that they can come to you for help if they have problems
- Do not make unpleasant comments or threats to young people, other parents or the school on your child's behalf - this may have to be dealt with formally if reported to the police and may make the situation worse for your child.