



8 July 2016

To: parents and carers of primary age children

Dear parent or carer,

I am writing to draw your attention to a worrying increase in reports of primary school age children playing games rated as 18+.

All video, computer and downloadable games are given an age rating under the PEGI system. The age ratings are 3, 7, 12, 16 and 18.



These ratings do not indicate enjoyment or intellectual level – they mean that the content is unsuitable for anyone below that age. 3 and 7 are advisory ratings, but it is a criminal offence for a retailer to supply a 12, 16 or 18-rated game to a person below that age. As well as age ratings, games will usually include a list of the types of content included. For example:



I believe that it is unacceptable knowingly to allow primary age children to play games with an 18 rating, whether supervised by an adult or not.

For a game to attract an 18 rating, it will mean that the content is such as to cause a reasonable viewer to react with a sense of revulsion. To take one example, the popular game “Grand Theft Auto” in its various versions includes all of the following:

Violent activity; bad language; stealing cars; nudity; having sex with prostitutes; “lending” your girlfriend to other players; dealing in class A drugs; managing (pimping) a group of prostitutes and controlling them with physical violence; and deliberately provoking a gang war between different ethnic groups.

I believe primary school children could be left more vulnerable to online grooming and abuse through being exposed to early sexualised behaviour and extreme brutality, and through being contacted by older children and adults they do not know.

Advice from police to schools is that any primary age child who is known to be permitted by a parent or carer to access any game or associated product designated 18+ should be referred to Children's Social Care on the grounds of neglect.

As parents you can avoid your children accessing such unsuitable content without your knowledge by enabling the parental controls. Virtually every internet-connected device has parental controls built in, but they are always switched off by default.

The QR codes below can be read by most mobile phones and will take you to detailed instructions on how to set products for maximum safety. Left to right, they are for iPod Touch/iPhone/iPad; Android phones and tablets; Microsoft Xbox; Nintendo Wii and Sony PlayStation. If you don't know how to use QR codes, ask a young person in your family to show you.



Wii



The askaboutgames.com website also gives information about setting parental controls, video game ratings and offers suggestions on how video games can be an enjoyable experience for all the family.

I would also recommend that all parents visit the CEOP Think U Know website for more information on keeping your child safer online: www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

Kind Regards,

Deborah Lightfoot
LSCB Independent Chair