

What parents need to know about Steam



What Parents & Carers Need to Know about STEAM

Steam is a computer gaming digital distribution platform and storefront. It is the biggest platform for desktop or laptop-based gaming, with a range of more than 30,000 games available. The platform has become a lively social environment for many gamers, and allows people to trade, sell and buy gaming items for real money. Valve, the developers behind Steam, have also released different hardware that works with the platform, including the Steam Deck – a hand-held console that lets users play their favourite games while away from their computer.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

UNSUITABLE GAMES
Among the 30,000+ games on the platform, there are many that aren't appropriate for children. Individuals can view and download games featuring adult content if they verify their age – but of course, it's easy to enter a false date of birth online. This can lead to children and young people finding games that they shouldn't have access to, featuring violence or profanity, for example.

SPENDING SPREES
Steam hosts regular sales – including some where game prices are reduced by up to 80%. Some sales promotions also include a mini-game or event which encourages users to spend more money. The sales can be an excellent time for young gamers to purchase the titles they've been wanting, but the attractive discounts can also promote impulsive buys driven by the fear of missing out.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS
Steam isn't a social media site, but it certainly shares some of their elements. Users can add other people as 'friends', for example (whether they know them in real life or not), and then communicate privately with them using text or voice chat. The platform also hosts public discussions and groups for socialising. Steam users can also leave comments on the profiles of other players.

ENABLE PARENTAL CONTROLS
Steam does have some limited parental controls that can restrict exactly what games someone's account can view and access. This can be set up by navigating to the 'Family' tab in 'Settings', then selecting 'Manage Family View'. The platform then allows parents and carers to share a Steam account with their child and limit them to age-appropriate games.

SHARE A LIBRARY
Using Family Library Sharing lets everyone at home share games across accounts (while still keeping their accounts separate). The entire game library from each account is shared with the other account holders – a great way to avoid having to purchase a different copy of the game for each of your children. However, if two users want to play the same game separately, you would need to buy it twice.

MEET OUR EXPERT
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POTENTIAL SCAMS
Sadly, Steam's immense popularity has made it a lucrative destination for internet scammers. The most common ruse is phishing: scammers send links to other users, aiming to trick them into entering their login details – which are then stolen. Once in control of the account, the scammer sends messages to everyone on the victim's friend's list, in an attempt to hijack their accounts too.

SHADY TRADERS
The Steam Community Market is a built-in trading area where players can trade resources for their games on the platform. Gamers can exchange items, or buy and sell them using real-world currency. It's possible for unscrupulous users to be scammed through bad trade deals, and Steam doesn't usually get involved when this happens. There are also third-party trading websites, which can be risky to use.

SPARSE AGE RATINGS
Steam is a digital distribution platform for games of all kinds, including ones not rated by regulatory bodies. Getting a game rated takes a long time, and can be expensive, so developers only tend to follow that process when releasing a title that will be primarily sold in shops. Most games on Steam, therefore, don't have an advisory age rating on the store page.

USE GIFT CARDS
Having payment methods (like card details or PayPal) linked to a Steam account makes it very easy for a child to purchase new games or spend money on items in the marketplace. An excellent and safe alternative would be to buy a Steam gift card and let your child make their purchases with that instead – putting a manageable cap on how much they can spend on the platform.

APPLY STEAM GUARD
Steam Guard is an optional additional layer of security that protects accounts. Installing it ensures that anyone attempting to log in to that account also needs to provide authentication via their phone or email. The computer that your child uses Steam on can be authorised to prevent having to provide separate authentication for each login.

SAFE MODDING
Modifying a game to customise it or to introduce new content – known as 'modding' – is common on Steam. There's nothing inherently good about modding, but installing the wrong mods can be disastrous: they can stop games from working properly, or at all. Steam's mods are unlikely to contain viruses or malware, but it's still possible – so ensure your child reads the mod's reviews first to avoid anything dangerous.

Advice for Parents & Carers

National Online Safety
#WakeUpWednesday

www.nationalonlinesafety.com @natonlinesafety /NationalOnlineSafety @nationalonlinesafety

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Steam came into being simply as a means for software developers Valve to distribute their own games (including the popular Counter-Strike, Half-Life and Dota series), but swiftly evolved to host third-party titles as well. These days, players can find A-list gaming franchises like PUBG, Apex Legends and Grand Theft Auto among the platform's most-played games.

It's a model that clearly works: in some recent years, as many of 15% of the total computer game purchases globally have been made through Steam. With a growing volume of users – the majority, by default, spending at least some money on the platform – it's no surprise that scams are among Steam's pitfalls. Trusted adults should check out our #WakeUpWednesday guide for the full story.

Steam also provides the facility for its 120 million monthly users to interact, chat, and swap tips and strategies, as well as trading resources for their preferred games. While this added fresh layers to the platform's functionality, it also opened the door to individuals wishing to contact young users for sinister purposes – including swindling more naïve gamers with unfair trades.

Considering that items can be bought and sold on Steam for real money, this represents an obvious risk for young people. Less worldly players are also more likely to volunteer personal information if they think it will help them secure that 'unmissable' deal. Our #WakeUpWednesday guide profiles the potential threats on Steam that trusted adults need to be aware of.

To download the guide please [click here](#)