

What Parents Need to Know about Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II

All National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many games which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II

The Call of Duty (CoD) series is a worldwide gaming phenomenon, with millions of copies sold every year. While 2021's release, Vanguard, wasn't quite as well received, this latest entry – Modern Warfare II – has so far proved a massive commercial success. A sequel to the recent Modern Warfare reboot (and not to be confused with the original Modern Warfare 2, from back in 2009), the game is an online shooter which features – unsurprisingly – extreme violence, rendered in realistic graphics. Amid the explosions and political nature of the plot, there's much for parents to be aware of.

AGE RATING
PEGI 18

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

VIRTUAL VIOLENCE
Like most of its predecessors in the franchise, Modern Warfare II carries an 18 age rating from PEGI (the Pan-European Gaming Information system, which assesses games' content for suitability). This means players will encounter – according to PEGI's wording – depictions of "gross violence, apparently motiveless killing, or violence towards defenceless characters".

OFFENSIVE CHAT & MESSAGING
Most CoD players are likely to spend the majority of their time on Modern Warfare II in online multiplayer mode. This entails competing against – or cooperating with – strangers on the online battlefield. The fast-paced, cut-throat world of CoD means that communication through the game's voice chat and direct messages often turns heated and aggressive, which may upset younger players.

IN-GAME PURCHASES
Modern Warfare II follows the 'battle pass' model of games like Fortnite, for a fee – usually around £10 – each 'season' (every three months or so), players will be invited to complete extra challenges to earn new weapons and equipment. Different tiers of battle pass (costing more money) enable them to achieve this more quickly, while items can also be purchased from the in-game store.

POLITICAL SENSITIVITY
Previous CoD games have been accused of attempting to 'rewrite history': failing to correctly attribute alleged war crimes to the US military, for example. The semi-fictional version of history presented on screen can cause players to misunderstand past conflicts and the real reasons they took place. This could lead to young people developing a distorted, inaccurate view of world politics.

AN ADDICTIVE EXPERIENCE
Multiplayer mode in Call of Duty titles revolves around leveling up your character to unlock new weapons, abilities and equipment. The process is designed so that it doesn't take too long to see an improvement, and the feeling of making meaningful progress can keep players hooked for hours. It's easy for gamers of any age to lose track of time. But younger ones are especially susceptible.

Advice for Parents & Carers

RESPECT THE AGE RATING
Based on accurately recreating combat situations, Call of Duty games are unflinching in their portrayal of war. Limbs are shot off and explosions send gore flying, while the previous Modern Warfare featured a lengthy interrogation and torture sequence. With Modern Warfare II offering the same style of brutal realism, it's worth reiterating that the PEGI 18 age rating is there for a reason.

SET SPENDING LIMITS
If your child is likely to be tempted by buying that 'must-have' weapon or item, consider removing your bank details from the console or computer to prevent indiscriminate spending – and an unwelcome bill. Pre-paid cards could be an option for in-game purchases, allowing you to control how much your child can spend in advance – and helping them learn the basics of budgeting.

CLOSE OFF COMMUNICATION
Unless they're playing with their real-life friends, it may be worth closing communication channels if your child plays Modern Warfare II. There's less of a team focus than in many other online combat games and therefore no real need to interact with strangers. Call of Duty fans can be intensely competitive, so even a single action by your child could provoke a barrage of abuse from strangers.

TRY OTHER MODES
If it seems that your child only ever plays Modern Warfare II in multiplayer, you could try out the Spec Ops mode with them – formulating strategies while enjoying each other's company. You could also play multiplayer together, taking it in turns to ensure regular breaks. Another alternative is the game's campaign mode, featuring bespoke missions and scenarios which follow an overarching plot.

Meet Our Expert
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Modern Warfare II is the 19th instalment in the relentless Call of Duty series, which shows no sign of shedding popularity. In fact, this latest release has reportedly broken lucrative new ground for the franchise – almost unbelievably garnering \$1 billion in sales in its first ten days of availability (according to the publishers, Activision), making it the fastest-selling Call of Duty title yet.

It seems young gamers can't get enough of the high-octane gunplay that CoD offers. Their eager engagement with the game, however, can lead to hours of compulsive playing; hostile audio chat exchanges with other gamers; and a willingness to make in-game purchases to level up their character. Our #WakeUpWednesday guide has all the intel on Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II.

Fictional violence has long been woven into certain strands of childhood play – from cowboys and Indians through playground army games to emulating Star Wars characters or superheroes. CoD's recreations of battlefield conditions, however, are so pulse-poundingly realistic that it's unsurprising to hear parental concerns about the game's possible effect on younger players.

Simulated combat and the fetishisation of high-calibre weaponry may be CoD's most obvious hazard, but it's not the only pitfall. The storylines of previous instalments have been criticised for alleged political crassness, while – as ever with competitive online titles – the behaviour of other players presents a constant risk. This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide has all the details.

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