At 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 issues 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 ANIME

Anime, which originates from Japan, is currently one of the most popular sources of entertainment in the world. This style of animation goes back to the mid 20th century, with a broad audience ranging from children to adults. Known for its epic stories, anime often crosses over with video games and other avenues of pop culture via adaptations or spin-offs – such as Cyberpunk: Edgerunners, an anime web series based on the popular video game, Cyberpunk 2077. The most common intersect, however, is manga: a form of graphic novel from which most anime is adapted.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some people assume that anime is safe for children purely because it's animation. However, a large amount is actually geared towards adults, often featuring swearing, graphic violence and nudity. Many anime series follow dark storylines, such as Cyberpunk: Edgerunners, which has swiftly become known for its extreme gore, sexual content and disturbing depictions of mental health conditions.

COMMON CROSSOVERS

It's easy for children to get drawn into anime through its many crossovers into video games, such as Fortnite and Call of Duty, while anime art styles are often used for other products, due to its popularity. Titles like the RPG Genshin Impact may look quite cute and accessible, but its loot-box mechanics can introduce young players to behaviours that have much in common with gambling.

DECEPTIVE APPEARANCE

It's easy to mistake anime graphics for a sign of harmless, child-friendly content. This style (big eyes, colourful hair and cute voices), however, can disguise some extremely adult themes. Yandere Simulator, for example, strongly resembles a child's game at face value, thanks to its art style, but in reality it features incredibly dark themes such as murder, kidnapping and torture.

ROBLOX REPRODUCTIONS

There are hundreds of user-created Roblox games which take their inspiration from anime and manga. While many of these titles will be perfectly age appropriate, there are some that prefer to focus on the storylines of adult and horror anime. Death Note, for example (based on the manga and anime series of the same name) would probably be extremely disturbing for most younger players.

MATURE MANGA

The majority of anime is adapted from manga: a form of Japanese comic book. Manga usually features an age rating on the back cover, and it's worth bearing in mind that just because it's a comic, that doesn't mean it's suitable for youngsters. In fact, most popular manga leans heavily towards darker subject matter, which is unquestionably aimed at an adult audience.

ADULT THEMES

Hentai is a type of manga, anime and video game which revolves around characters engaging in explicit sexual encounters. While anime of this kind is usually only found on pornography sites, some gaming platforms – such as Steam – *do* allow the sale of these titles (referred to as 'H-Games' in the community) and even feature them on the front of their store page when sales are on.

Advice for Parents & Carers

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Despite all the problematic content, there's still a lot of anime out there which is completely child friendly. Pokémon and One Piece are all long-running anime shows which have family-friendly stories and content. Make sure you check for age ratings and content warnings on streaming platforms when deciding if a particular anime series is suitable for your child.

IT'S NOT JUST TV

Anime is most often in the format of a TV series, but it is also presented as films. Studio Ghibli is often referred to as 'the Japanese Disney' due to the quality and number of films they produce. Most of their movies are fine for children, though they often feature more mature subject matter than western animation: Grave of the Fireflies, for instance, is set in Japan during the Second World War.

WATCH WITH YOUR CHILD

Anime covers a multitude of topics, so it's easy to find something that the whole family can enjoy. Anime shows typically involve action and adventure, superheroes, romance, comedy and much more. Watching this content alongside your child isn't only a way to spend quality time together – it will also help you to spot quite quickly if there's potential for any difficult topics to arise in the show.

CHECK GAMES' FEATURES

Often, crossovers with video games simply involve using anime characters as 'skins' to modify the appearance of characters while playing (as in Fortnite, for example). If your child's interested in an anime-inspired game that you're unfamiliar with, however, look online at the game's features and for any content warnings to gain a clearer idea of what your child might be exposed to.

Meet Our Expert

Daniel Lipscombe is a writer specialising in technology, video gaming, virtual reality and Web3. He has also written 15 guidebooks for children, covering games such as Fortnite, Apex Legends, Valorant, Roblox and Minecraft. With work published by the likes of PC Gamer, Kotaku, Pocket Gamer and VG247, he has reviewed more than 50 games and products over the past year.

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