AGE RESTRICTION

18+

What parents need to know about

GRAND THEFT AUTO (GTA)

grand theft auto

Grand Theft Auto is an action-adventure video game series where players control criminals and wreak havoc in order to complete missions and progress through the game. During the early stages of the game, it solely focuses on completing missions to go up a level. However, as the game grew more popular the makers of GTA decided to introduce a narrative to each edition of the game. The aim of this was to increase user engagement, making gamers believe that they were not just playing as the character, but they became the character. Grand Theft Auto is accessible on a number of devices including: PlayStation and Xbox, desktop computers, PSP, Nintendo DS, and Mobile.

Top Tips for Parents

THE RISK - PLAYING WITH STRANGERS

When buying GTA V you automatically have access to Grand Theft Auto Online, a version of the game that allows players to play online. They can play alone, invite players to a game, or be involved in public 'sessions' where people will be picked at random to play. When you first load into a game you are automatically placed into an open lobby, meaning you play with random people. The 'social club' is GTA's very own social platform where users can bet money, share in-game photographs (which users can like and comment on), and even message other users directly.

What parents can do

To prevent your child playing with strangers on the game, you can change the settings to ensure they only play with their approved friends list. Upon signing up to the 'social club', it automatically sets a player's visibility settings to 'everyone', meaning their name and profile information is made public. Parents can alter this by changing the visibility settings to 'only me'.

WARNING!

Due to the nature of the game and the age restrictions, GTA includes content that is inappropriate for anyone under the age of 18, including sex, nudity, violence, profane language, and substance abuse. These are the main components that make up the game - you have to do certain things and witness certain things in order to move on in the game. Exposing your child to this type of content could affect their morals and understanding of right and wrong. Additionally, your child could become desensitised to similar situations, reinforcing the fact they would find it hard to differentiate between right/wrong and good/bad.

THE RISK - ONLINE HACKERS

Hackers can make money by helping users cheat in the game. They can do a number of inappropriate things, including killing people, stealing weapons, spawning money into the game, and even raping other characters. Spawning money tends to be a gamer's most popular choice, being able to buy $100,000,000,000 (of in-game currency) for as little as five US dollars.

What parents can do

Actively monitor your child's online activity. These websites are very easy to find, meaning children and young people can easily navigate their way to these wesbites and pay for hackers. Not only is this an illegal activity, but you have the risk of giving your personal information to someone who may misuse it.

THE RISK - ADDICTION

Addiction is a risk with any game. Game developers use persuasive design techniques to force users to invest their time, and often money, in a game. Within GTA, your character is able to progress through the game for completing missions within a certain time frame, encouraging children to keep returning to the game. Gaming addiction is now a recognised health condition and the side effects are concerning, including sleep deprevation, decreased attention span and erratic emotional behaviour.

What parents can do

There are a number of things you can do if you are concerned about your child's screen time, including setting time limits within the home, especially during meal times and before bedtime. Talk to your child and ask why they are spending so much time on the game, and enourage healthy alternatives such as outdoor activities and spending quality time with friends and family.

THE RISK - LIVE CHAT

When playing GTA online, players have the option to use a microphone to broadcast their voice live to other players involved in the 'session'. These live voice chats are not moderated, meaning anything could be said, including inappropriate language, as well as verbal forms of bullying.

What parents can do

Talk openly with your child about not giving away personal information. Also remind them that conversations can be recorded, which could damage their online reputation. Depending on the device/platform, there will be ways to mute conversations. Make yourself aware of the device's/platform's individual settings and ensure that your child knows how to block and report.

THE RISK - MICROTRANSACTIONS

By completing missions and partaking in certain activities you earn in-game currency. This allows you to buy things such as prostitutes, vehicles, weapons, ammo, new outfits, cars, apartments and more. However, the items that are available to buy often have a high price that require a lot of game time, meaning the items are pretty unrealistic to buy.

What parents can do

If you do not want your child to make payments, ensure your card is not associated with their account. If you are happy for your child to make payments in the game, but want to limit spending, we suggest purchasing a pre-paid gift card for your child. These can be purchased in specific amounts which will allow you to limit how much your child spends and removes the need for a credit or debit card to be used with their account.

SOURCES:
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2103188/parentalguide
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gaming/news/grand-theft-auto-v-has-made-money-film-history/
http://www.techaddiction.ca/addiction-to-video-games.html

National Online Safety

A whole school community approach to online safety

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