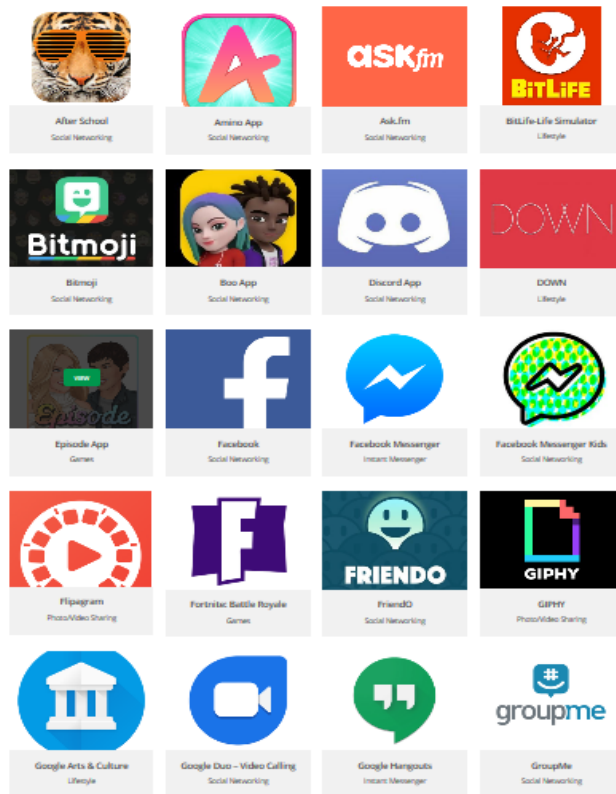# Online Safety and Digital Safeguarding

Whole School Safeguarding and Child Protection training

Apps and Trends

Apex Legends

Apex Legends is a multi-player free to play video game similar to Fortnite that captured 25 million players within a week of its release in February 2019.

Players join small 'squads' of 3 players and then fight other players to be the last squad standing. Each match is capped at 60 players (20 squads) and each individual player can pick to play as one of eight characters, (Legends) all of whom have their own special skills and offensive abilities.

To play players must create an account and supply

- an email address (which has to be verified)
- a display/user name
- their age and the game is rated as suitable for players 16+

What to be Aware of:

- The game is free to download for PC, Xbox and PlayStation Apex Legends website or from the Xbox, Origin or PS4 store and features plenty of realistic war-like violence.
- The game requires players to join a squad of three - unlike Fortnite which allows players to play solo.
- Players can be playing in a squad with people they do not know and although the game has an age rating of 16+ this only takes into account the content in the game and not the contact element, where players may be exposed to swearing and other offensive language from strangers in voice or on-screen text chat..
- As Apex Legends is an online game players will play against and communicate with players of different ages from across the world. Voice-chat is commonly used in the game in order to communicate with other players, plan strategy and navigate through the game.
  The game also offers another method of communication called 'pings'. A ping is an automated messages (both auditory and on-screen) sent to other members of the same squad. Different pings can be used to indicate different events in the game for example, asking for help or marking a location.
  In voice chat, players can mute individual players or can turn off the feature permanently. It is also possible to mute pings from other players,

however many young people find that the 'ping' feature is key to the game. The safest way to play the game is with muted voice and text chat.

- Although the game is designed so that players and their squad are competing against other players of different ages from across the world, it is recommend that young people choose their own team, joining up with friends and family members to create a squad. As most of the in game communication is with their squad members, this may be a safer option for children. If players do not select their own squad then players will get randomly allocated a squad with two strangers.

- The game is first-person shooter game, this means that players see events in the game through the eyes of their character and can mean that the visuals are more realistic.
  The game does feature violence and blood and although this is animated, there are certain moves within the game such as 'finisher moves' that specifically execute defenceless enemies. There are also options for chemical gas attacks that can be used on multiple enemies in order to kill them.

- It is possible to male In-game purchases and Apex Coins is the premium currency in Apex Legends and can be used to purchase Apex Packs, characters and items in the in-game shop. The price of Apex coins range from £7.99 to over £79.99

- Currently there is no in-game report system. The game currently requires players to make their complaints externally, instead of being able to report someone in the game for bad language, cyberbullying, or ruining the experience for others. Apex Legends may bring out a report button, however the aim of this is to specifically report cheating within the game rather than specifically inappropriate behaviours such as cyberbullying.

Fifa FIFA

Fifa is a football simulation game from EA Sports

Users create and build their own football teams based on real life teams and players. There is no inappropriate content in the game itself and users enjoy the strategy of playing as a whole team. Children should be taught not to share personal information online including user names for other apps like Snapchat and Whatsapp.

What to be Aware of

Children of all ages play FIFA however there are still dangers to be aware of:

- Gamers' can chat freely with their opponents.
- However players can chat freely with other players playing online and may be exposed to inappropriate language, comments .and behaviours.
- Personal information can be shared.
- It is safer if children play the game on mute and not with a headset.

Skin Gambling

Skin Gambling **Teenage Britain's secret habit** is virtual currency betting, where children as young as 13 years old are spending pocket money to gamble online.

For a large percentage of the UK's 13-18 year-olds, 'skin gambling' is very much part of their culture.

A skin is a virtual graphic or audio download item developed for decorative purposes such as a weapon or an accessory that changes the appearance of the characters in various video games. They're purely aesthetic - they don't increase the character's abilities or impact the outcome of the game - just how they look but, as their popularity has grown, skins have developed individual cash values – turning them into a de facto virtual currency.

Like real currency, market forces dictate the value of skins, from a couple of pence up to over £20,000 and have become currency that gamers can collect, trade, buy and sell.

In 2000, the first-person shooter game Counter-Strike was released. Players fought terrorists in warzones across the world, and the striking realism of its design made it an instant classic. 12 years down the line, in a bid to breathe new life into the game, Valve released Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO). The game remained fundamentally the same, but now players could buy or win decorative covers for their weapons known as 'skins' - costumes or designs to enhance their character or equipment.

To buy skins, players deposit money into an account on Valve's multiplayer gaming platform Steam. The cash is converted into credits, and can't be converted back again. Players use the credits to buy skins for CS:GO and other games in the Steam Market, and store their skins in their personal Steam library. The more popular the skin is, the more it costs.

As their quality and look improved, demand for skins increased, and their rise as an online currency began. Valve operates Steam on an open application programming interface (API), and unaffiliated third-party sites sprang up to allow players to purchase intricately-designed skins outside of Steam, using online payment tools like PayPal and Bitcoin. Crucially, developers have also enabled players to log in to their Steam accounts and access their skins to use as a virtual currency for other activities on third-party sites - the most popular being gambling.

Battles between players in games like CS:GO and Dota 2are streamed online for anyone to watch, either on YouTube or alternative streaming sites such as Twitch. Third party sites, such as Dota2wage.com, promote upcoming battles - and allow players to use the skins in their Steam library to bet on the outcome.

Players can bet with as many skins as they want, and while the game is live, the skins players are staking are taken out of their Steam library and locked. If the player wins the bet, they get back all their own skins plus the skins that their opponent gambled and lost, which are placed back in their Steam library.

Skins started to become a 'true' virtual currency when players became frustrated that their Steam credit balances, which had grown as they won on gambling sites, couldn't be cashed out for real money. This led to the rise of new unaffiliated sites like skins cash, which allow players to withdraw their credit balance and have it paid back onto their credit/debit card or via PayPal. At this point, skins become a true virtual currency with a cash exchange value - albeit one which shifts according to the popularity of each individual skin.

Players can use their skins to bet on the outcome of battles.

Battles between players in games such as CS:GD and Dota 2 can be streamed on sites such as YouTube or Twitch and other third party sites allow players to bet on the outcome of the battles with the Skins in their Steam Library. The victor wins the skins their opponent has gambled and these can then be converted into cash.

Skins are now used as currency to bet on casino-style public pot games of chance, like coin flips and roulette. Sites like CS:GO Fast, CS:GO Bux and CS:GO Wild run roulette spins as frequently as every 30 seconds. Players deposit their skins, which are then converted into coins or jewels of different value and used just like chips at a casino to place bets on games of chance. **These sites are not regulated and do not have robust age verification processes. With no age verification process in place on these sites, there is nothing to prevent children from gambling** away skins they may have spent tens, hundreds or even thousands of pounds to purchase.

Players can also gamble using virtual coins, which can be redeemed for cash. Coins can be purchased either by exchanging skins for their value in coins, determined by the Steam market, buying via a credit/debit card or by referring friends to play the game.

Skin gambling has only been around since around 2015/16, yet it was estimated that in 2018 around **£10 billion** was gambled online internationally. This rise, on the £6 billion in 2017, shows how quickly this trend is growing, and how the dangers should be considered as a generation of gamblers may develop within those who game online.

Use is predominantly with older children and 16 to 25 year olds, however there is an increase in Primary sector children buying virtual currency and gambling and "is a world in which gamers including young gamers navigate with ease".

Parent Zone June 2018 Skin Gambling; teenage Britain's secret

Twitch

- ‣ Twitch has over 15 million DAILY users – is a child in your school one of them?
- ‣ Gamers can live-stream the game that they're playing, along with a video feed of themselves.
- ‣ Twitch is also used for live-streaming, Drawing and Music.
- ‣ Twitch streams can be viewed on the official Twitch website and via one of the official Twitch apps which are available for iOS, Android, Xbox 360 and Xbox One.

What to be Aware of:

- ‣ Users can chat privately (this is called a Whisper) - users can limit who can whisper to them in their settings.
- ‣ Whilst it may seem harmless, many of the games being played have violent content, e.g. Call of Duty, which has a rating of 18+.
- ‣ No child-friendly filter. Content users can view, isn't restricted based on the age of the account holder.

- Chat rooms run alongside the live-stream, while it does have moderators, content can only be moderated after it is posted.
- There is advertising along the side of the site.
- Twitchers who stream also may use inappropriate language, which may be an issue especially if younger children are watching.

Gamers can live-stream the game that they're playing, along with a video feed of themselves. Users can follow broadcasters for free or else, subscribe to the channel for a fee. Gamers can get paid for streaming. Games are listed on the home page and to discover more about a specific game click on the game in the list

Safety Settings

- There is a 'Report' button beside the user's stream, however a user can only report a user once they are logged in.
- Certain words can be set as blocked in the chat, for example swear words
- In Settings, users can block messages, whispers and invites from people they don't follow.

Kik **kik·**

- Founded in 2009, Canada-based Kik claims 300 million users worldwide access its free instant messaging service.
- Kik is an instant messaging app where users send messages over the Internet via Wi-Fi or a data plan. It can be a fun, free alternative to texting.
- Kik enables users to chat one-on-one with others, to create their own personal groups or to chat in public or private groups with up to 50 members: this is one of the things that makes Kik appealing for young users.
- It is popular with teenagers, has many anonymous accounts and is easy to sign up for using false details.

What to be Aware of:

- Under their Terms of Service, Kik state that users must be 13+. On the App store Kik is given a user rating of 17+.

- If a user is under 13 and simply lies about their age to use the App they are opening themselves up to inappropriate behaviour, risky relationships and advertising aimed at older children.
- There are NO privacy or parental controls, in fact anyone can search for a username and send them a message.
- Kik does not require much personal information in order to sign up, nor does it actively encourage users to share it on their profile.
- There is no way to log out of Kik so once it is downloaded and signed in the only way to dissociate an account from a phone would be to delete or uninstall the app completely.

Safety Settings

Google Play doesn't give a specific age rating but suggests 'parental guidance' when using the app.

- There are features that allow users to block and report others – so if you know of or are responsible for a child that uses the app make it is important to ensure they learn how to use the blocking functions.
- Unlike WhatsApp, Kik doesn't need a mobile phone number; users simply make up a unique username that is linked to their account. Any information on the profile will be seen by any other user e.g. the profile photo and any associated information.
- As people tend to use the same username for different platforms a Kik username is often the same or similar to usernames related to other social media accounts. This makes it easy for people to find users and track them across different social media platforms.
- If the app is deleted and is then loaded back onto a device and the user then logs in, it will bring back all the information that the user probably deleted the app for to avoid.

#KikMe

What to be Aware of:

- Many Kik users share their username across other online platforms such as Twitter. Some social media platforms such as Instagram are banning

the #KikMe tag as content posted under the tag often is against the platforms guidelines and rules.

- They use the hashtag '#KikMe' or '#AddMeOnKik' along with their username. This is to encourage those who see their post (i.e. strangers) to add them and chat to them on the app.
- There is no moderation within group chats therefore children and young people using the app can be exposed to vile language and inappropriate content e.g. graphic images or videos posted into the chat.

Public Groups

- Public groups on Kik mean that anyone can join. Kik pride themselves on having groups for almost every interest and hobby e.g. Harry Potter or Cooking, of course there are no guarantees that the chat inside the group actually reflect the title.
- Whilst some groups are set up as '11-16 chat' –there is no meaningful age verification. This means that anyone can join the group and pretend to be within the age range. This makes it particularly attractive to predators.
- It is easy to unintentionally stumble across inappropriate content on Kik e.g. when testing searching for cooking groups; groups with names such as 'Webcam Hot S e x' appeared in the search results.

Private Groups

- Private groups can be safer than public groups; that is IF they are actually made up of a group of 'real' friends. There can be up to 50 members in a private group.
- The only way to access a private group is via an invite link or by scanning the group code. Teach children not to join a group if they don't know who is in it. Even when they do, always be careful; as people aren't always who or what they seem to be.

Kik – September 2018

Kik has featured in more than 1,100 child sexual abuse cases in the last five years. Of 29 Police Forces that supplied information to the BBC, all but one had child exploitation cases involving Kik.

A BBC Freedom of Information request sent to all 47 police forces in the UK revealed that there had been 1,147 investigations by 28 forces into offences of child sexual exploitation, grooming and image offences involving the app.

Likee 💜 (Formerly LIKE)

- **L**ikee is a short video creation platform where users can be creative, share videos, add music, and use filters.
- Accounts can be created using a phone number, Facebook, or Instagram account. Date of birth is also required - but this information is not shown publicly.
- The app uses levels to encourage users to earn more Experience Points (XP). Which are earned by opening Likee every day, watching/posting videos, fan growth and sending/receiving gifts.
- Likee features in app purchases, whereby users can buy 'diamonds' and gift these as 'beans', which can be cashed out of the app for real currency.
- Users can click the top right corner to 'reward' another user.
- Users can search different hashtags and explore content posted by others worldwide, with the option to filter by location.
- You don't need an account to watch the most popular videos, but users do need to be logged in to access video content posted by nearby users.
- Users can comment on videos, and they have the option to control who leaves comments on their posts.

What to be Aware of:

- There are no age restrictions when signing up to the app.
- The app can feature inappropriate content, including suggestive language and violence.
- An account CANNOT be made private.
- In the safety settings 'Hide Location' & 'Hide my Videos in Nearby' are automatically set to public by default.
- Users can report videos but there is no function to report a live stream or another user.

- There's scope for grooming, coercion and abuse through its gifting feature as viewers can manipulate the actions of users by gifting.

TikTok (formerly Musical.ly)

TikTok is an App where children can express themselves through uploading videos of themselves, singing, dancing, and lip-syncing.

What to be Aware of:

During an eight-day investigation into the App, Channel 4 News viewed 45 hours of live streams which revealed nearly half of the streams viewed contained inappropriate content, directed to girls as young as nine.

Other users may be live streaming content that contains inappropriate lyrics.

It is safer if children play the game on mute and not with a headset.

Top Tips to keep children safe in TikTok

- The App should be checked out before letting the children use it, particularly if they are under 13 years old.
- Be aware that other users may be live streaming content that contains inappropriate lyrics.
- Advise children and young people about what behaviour is acceptable to live- stream.
- There are options to buy in-app purchases.

YOLO

YOLO - an acronym for "you only live once" became the most downloaded iPhone app in May 2019 just a week after its release. It's a free add-on feature for Snapchat when users connect YOLO to their accounts, they can add a sticker to their Snapchat Story that invites their followers to give them feedback or ask them questions anonymously.

This is similar to other "Honesty Apps" including **Ask.fm, Curious Cat, Yik Yak, Lipsi Whisper and Secret, Sarahah and TBH** many of which lost popularity after being overwhelmed by instances of inappropriate use.

The app works by letting people post a graphic inviting others to "send me anonymous messages", which is superimposed over a photo.

The post can be sent to a specific set of Snapchat contacts or attached to a Snapchat Story and shared more widely.

Those who see the request can then send **an anonymous** message via Yolo itself. If the original poster decides to respond, their reply is in turn posted back to Snapchat.

Another app called Piksa offers similar features and is also in the top 50 of Apple's app store chart.

When first opened, the app shows a warning that states: "Yolo has no tolerance for objectionable content or abusive users. You'll be banned for any inappropriate usage", but reviewers who've received these types of messages claim this just does not happen. Instead, if a comment is reported for being inappropriate, it simply disappears.

Online safety group Protect Young Eyes believes that YOLO's age rating is too low at 12+, writing in a review, "Do you know many 12-year-olds who consistently make great decisions over the long haul without accountability? Neither do we".

The NSPCC has concerns that it can be easily misused to send abusive messages to others or by those looking to exploit young people.

YUBO (formerly the Yellow social media app)

- Yubo, (is a social media app encouraging teens to find new friends by allowing them to swipe left or right to connect and live stream.
- It has gained popularity among school-age teens who use it to chat with friends one-on-one or in groups and connect with other users through live video streaming.
- It free, easy to use and allows users to connect and form connections with people around the world with shared interest.
- Like other apps, users can live stream in real time through the app. Anyone on Yubo will be able to see their live broadcast and send messages, not just their friends. The user streaming the video can choose whether to add viewers as new friends connecting with friends.
- 13 to 17-year-olds have their own community that is separate from adults who use the app.

What to be Aware of:

- Anyone can sign up and post inappropriate content that breaks Yubo's community guidelines.

- Although the app prompts a user who enters a birthday under 13 that they are not eligible for Yubo, there is still the potential that they could go back in and enter a false date to access the app.

- If locations is enabled for users to find friends nearby the location is then shown to other potential 'friends' along with the users name and age.

- To prevent fake accounts being created, when setting up an account users have to enter their mobile phone number and verify it on their phone (like Whatsapp).

- To make live streaming safer, the app uses an algorithm to recognise when there is nudity and shuts down the live feed immediately and blocks the user out of the app for a period of time.

Concerns About Anonymous Messaging Apps

- Many of these apps do not require users to register to submit comments.

- Most of these platforms require users to be 18 or over, however some allow users as young as 13 and there is no age verification preventing younger people from registering or using the platform.

- Users may behave differently when they are anonymous, and there is a huge risk of bullying and an exposure to inappropriate comments.

- Anonymous chat apps often have a poor moderation and reporting processes, and these platforms will only reveal information about who sent an anonymous message if required to do so by law enforcement.

- Anonymous question and answer apps often trigger conversations among children and young people. Whilst many conversations are friendly and fun some can become negative and lead to persistent bullying.

Doki Doki Literature Club

Doki Doki is a free to play game that initially poses as a dating simulator. The game is colourful and friendly, and the player can choose from four girl characters to befriend and potentially date.

In Doki Doki Literature Club by choosing which one of the girls players wish to spend time with, or how to respond, the characters will like the player more, or like the player less. However, as the game proceeds, it becomes apparent that something sinister is afoot.

A lot of Doki Doki's appeal to players is how it crafts the illusion that they are not in control. The game will often 'take over' the mouse cursor, or replace in-game options, in order to mess with the player. Monika implies she is aware of the world outside the game and, in a horrifying touch, learns the player's name from their computer settings data. She tries to make the player believe she's a real person who should not be walked away from and, by the end, implies that the player should stay with her forever.

What to be Aware of

- After playing the game for around 90 minutes the game leads the player to the emotional suicide of one of the girls not chosen for romance.

- There are depictions of self harm, suicide and violence including stabbing with a large knife and death by hanging.

- Essentially, there is a plot twist in Doki Doki: when one of the characters in the game, Monika, is written as though they are self-aware, trapped in the game, and don't want the player to date anyone but them. If the player does date anybody else then that character will be killed off, until the only remaining option is to date Monika.

- Doki Doki is labelled on the Steam store page as being a psychological horror experience, and as dealing with some of the above mentioned themes. Further to this, when booting up the game players are warned that they should not play if they are susceptible to sensitive themes.

- Characters who are not chosen by the player for romance may kill themselves, and do so via multiple graphic methods, all of which are shown explicitly in still images, and some of which are shown over multiple stills. One involves death by stabbing using a large knife, another example involves death by hanging. All of these scenes of self-harm or suicide are ultimately revealed to have been orchestrated by Monika, but when happening they are presented as a result of poor actions on the part of the player. Players cannot avoid these events, so playing through the game means seeing these descriptions and scenes, and being blamed for them.

- The game suggests a minimum age rating of 13 but there is no verification process **and it is not suitable for children**.