

What parents & carers need to know about... OVERWATCH

12+

Overwatch is a team-based multiplayer first-person shooter developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment, the same company behind the likes of World of Warcraft and StarCraft. The online-only game, which is available to play on the Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC, sees players face off in six-versus-six matches that emphasize both teamwork and individual skill. Players have a wide choice of characters to play as, each of which comes under one of four main classes or roles - Offence, Defence, Tank and Support - with each class having its own unique strengths and weaknesses. In the UK and Europe, PEGI rates Overwatch as PEGI 12, suitable for ages 12 and up, for non-realistic-looking violence towards human characters.

Talking to Strangers

Given the multi-player format of Overwatch, it only works if gamers are matched onto teams with other real people which means that your child could be exposed to strangers. Each player, identifiable only by pseudonyms, are a direct channel to another player's headset via the game's voice chat, which means your child could potentially be exposed to bad language, bullying and inappropriate language.

Mature Content

Overwatch is a first-person shooter game, which means players will be exposed to violence, weapons and death; players shoot and smash their way through enemies, and attacks are met with small spurts of blood and cries of pain. However, there is no "realistic" graphic violence or gore. It's also worth noting that compared to other first-person shooters, such as Call of Duty or Battlefield, Overwatch is relatively tame in terms of mature content; there's no innuendo, sexual content or bad language.

Loot Boxes & In-app Purchases

Although Overwatch is a buy-to-play game, which means you pay for access to the game and all of its main features, it does contain microtransactions, which means you can pay for in-game "loot boxes" that contain random cosmetic items such as emotes, costumes and callouts. Nothing in these loot boxes is required to play, and they can also be earned free of charge simply by progressing in the game.

Addictive Nature

Overwatch, like many modern online multiplayer games, is addictive by nature. Progression in the game is linked to the amount of time played and the skills you picked up along the way, and some Overwatch matches will penalise all players on a team when a player leaves before the timer has run out, and can even result in a temporary ban - which means it can be difficult to put down the controller. Signs of addiction can include irritability when not playing, lying about the amount of time playing, and preoccupation with thoughts about the next gaming session.

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Safety Tips

Monitor their Gameplay

While it would be impossible to constantly keep an eye on your child, it's important you check in and monitor their time playing Overwatch. It might be a good idea to keep gaming consoles in the living room, for example, so you can supervise how long they're playing and whether they're in contact with others via voice chat.

Avoid headsets

If you're worried about exposing your child to others playing Overwatch, and have particular concerns about the use of potentially toxic and violent language, it would be advisable to warn against the use of a headset while playing the game. Your child will still be able to play as normal - but won't be exposed to strangers online.

Limit their Spending

With loot boxes available in Overwatch, it's important you limit your child's ability to make in-game purchases - as they could end up racking up massive bills. There's functionality available in Blizzard's parental controls that allow you to disable this feature completely.

Enable Parental Controls

Overwatch comes with built-in parental controls, providing easy-to-use tools that allow parents and guardians to set up rules for play time and manage access to the game. The tool allows you to set daily or weekly limits on the hours your child can play Overwatch, limit access to the game's built-in voice chat service, and to receive play time reports on a weekly basis that contain details of your child's play time including login and logout times.

Spot the Signs

If you're concerned that your child may be spending too much time on Overwatch, and think it could be having a detrimental effect on their mental health, keep an eye out for the warning signs. They may be giving an increasing priority to gaming over more important everyday tasks - such as homework, or eating meals, or could be showing signs of irritability and a lack of concentration if they've spent too long gaming.

Discuss the Risks

Before you allow your child to play Overwatch, it's important you have a conversation about it first. Make sure your child is aware of the violent nature of the game, how to maintain a healthy screen time balance and knows about the potential dangers of talking to anonymous strangers online.

Meet our expert

Carly Page is an experienced and highly respected freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant. Previously the editor of tech tabloid The INQUIRER, Carly now works as the news editor for Computer Shopper and IT Pro and writes for a number of publications including Forbes, TechRadar, Tes, The Metro, uSwitch and WIRED.

