

Part of our Gaming & Gambling Series



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What you need to know about... LOOT BOXES & SKIN BETTING



What is it?

'Loot Boxes'

Some video games offer "loot boxes" as a way to purchase items. Similar to purchasing a pack of football stickers, players don't know exactly what they will get. They may get a common item that has a low value in the game. Equally, they may get a rare item that has a high value.

'Skin Betting'

"Skin betting" is when players use virtual items they have earned or purchased in games (often titled 'skins' because they are cosmetic features) as gambling currency. Players can use websites or apps outside of the game itself, which are mostly unregulated, to bet with "skins" on eSports competition outcomes. This becomes a legal issue when the "skins" you win can be converted to cash.

Know the Risks

Beware of Overspending

It's important for parents to be aware if children are buying loot boxes and skins for trading or betting purposes, as it can consume considerable amounts of money. It can be much easier to make repeat purchases online compared to buying toys or stickers over the counter.

May Lead to Addiction

Because players can trade and swap items in games, the relative rarity of these items creates a thriving market where they can be exchanged. Like any form of gambling, this can become addictive as children seek to get the best or most valuable 'skins', often dedicating large amounts of time trying to get what they want.

Illegal Behaviour

It's important for parents to understand that "skin" trades and "skin" gambling are often arranged on websites or apps outside the game itself. These are unregulated and beyond the control of the game creator. Sites that offer the ability to gamble "skins" for cash are often illegal and require a gambling licence. They also shouldn't be advertised to children.

Safety Tips

Discuss What 'Value' Means

It's important that parents work alongside their children as they venture into the world of gaming. Together they can build an understanding of how purchases work and discuss which are really good value, and which are over-priced. Like pocket money, it can be a good way to teach children about virtual currency and online purchases.

Set Spending Limits

Together with your child, you can set-up spending limits to stop accidental purchases. A good approach is to use the pocket money feature on consoles to allow them to spend a small amount each month.

Use Pre-paid Cards

You can also avoid putting your credit card details in by using pre-paid cards that work like book tokens. If you do add credit cards, ensure you set up a password on the account so that children cannot keep spending freely.

Further Support

Report Illegal Gambling Sites

If you discover your child has been gambling on skins websites, you should report the site to the relevant authority immediately. You may be able to do this anonymously and it may help to crack down on any wider criminal activity and the targeting of underage gambling.

Seek Support

If you think that your child has developed a gambling addiction or may be showing signs of developing a habit, you can seek support from external organisations who may be able to help and can provide further education around the dangers of excessive gambling.

Our Expert Andy Robertson



Andy Robertson is a freelance family technology expert for the BBC. He runs the Family Gamer TV YouTube channel and contributes to a range of national media on the topic of video-games and family.