

Christmas video games without the surprises

If you're a parent, chances are your children will have at least one video game on their Christmas wish list this year. But unless you're a gamer yourself, how do you know which titles are appropriate for their age group and personality?

Below, Andy Robertson, editor of family gamer TV explains the PEGI ratings system and looks at the content of some of the games your children will ask for, to help you make an informed decision...

Video-games bring a lot of benefits with them. Alongside entertainment and enjoyment, they enable players to visit other worlds, create ambitious constructions, discover new sports and hobbies and interact with people all over the planet.

However, distinguishing what different games present in terms of benefits or dangers in the family can be a challenge. Unlike films and books, you can't quickly skim through to assess what your children will be experiencing.

The [PEGI ratings](#) are the mandatory way all UK video-games helpfully disclose this information for consumers. Each publisher completes a questionnaire and submits game footage to the Games Rating Authority about its game then determines the age rating it gets.

The PEGI ratings offer a traffic light system of age ratings. Games suitable for over 3s and over 7s are flagged with a green age icon on the box. Games only suitable for those over 12 or 16 are flagged with an orange age icon, and games only suitable for the over 18s have a red age badge.

On the back of the box are another set of icons that depict why the game got a certain age rating. This may be for 'Language', 'Violence', 'Drugs', 'Fear' or other reasons. Further information is then available on the PEGI [website \(link is external\)](#) and Games Rating Authority [website \(link is external\)](#).

Websites like [Ask About Games \(link is external\)](#) make things easier by presenting this information in Quick Guide [videos \(link is external\)](#) that describe what benefits and dangers the game has, along with footage of game-play depicting the experience. This is a really useful resource for parents who want to investigate game content.

Understanding the PEGI ratings enables you to make informed choices about the games you purchase. This not only avoids unexpected negative aspects of unsuitable games, but helps connect you with games that your family will get the most from.

Parent Info note:

Games are available in multiple formats unless stated.

We haven't included write-ups of the latest versions of popular football games FIFA 16 or Football Manager 2016, but both are rated PEGI 3.

We have included some games rated PEGI 18 as we know many children and teenagers younger than this will ask for them. Parents are advised these games are only suitable for the age stated in the rating. If you don't want your child to play adult games, the PEGI ratings are a good way in to explain to them why.

For the games rated for children (under 18), we have mentioned where players can make contact with other gamers online, either to play or exchange content (stats, images etc). If you would rather disable this feature, please see the link below for information on setting up parental controls on games consoles.

Games for younger children

Games with a PEGI 3 or PEGI 7 rating contain content suitable for those over 3 and 7 respectively. It's worth noting that this is a measure of suitability rather than playability. For example, F1 2015 is rated PEGI 3 because it contains no unsuitable content, but it would require considerable skill to play and enjoy.

Animal Crossing Happy Home Designer (Nintendo 3DS)

PEGI 3

This is a home design adventure on the Nintendo 3DS based on the more expansive Animal Crossing series. Rather than a whole island to explore, Happy Home Designer focuses on creating different home designs for the varied animal inhabitants of the town. It encourages creativity and a safe community of other players that offers design inspiration.

The game supports a range of collectable amiibo cards that are used to unlock more characters to create homes for. These are sold separately in foil packs and can make a good gift for grandparents.

Find out more [here \(link is external\)](#).

This game allows the player to interact with other players online.

Super Mario Maker (Wii U)

PEGI 3

This takes the classic Mario running and jumping games and enables players to make their own levels. Through a process of learning each design element, players slowly learn the mechanics of making a video-game. Levels can be shared online for feedback and millions of player-created levels can be downloaded to play.

While other game-creators can be complex and daunting to get into, Super Mario Maker is always understandable and, most importantly, a lot of fun.

Find out more [here \(link is external\)](#).

This game allows the player to interact with other players online.

Tearaway Unfolded (Playstation 4)

PEGI 7

Enter a game world made entirely of paper, with usual interactions and paper craft woven into the rubbing, jumping and fighting action.

Tearaway Unfolded follows up the portable game on the PlayStation Vita and offers a similarly endearing cast of characters and story.

Players use the PlayStation camera to capture images and put them into the game. They also use the PlayStation 4 controller and companion Android app to cut, stick and fold all manner of objects that then appear in the game.

You can even win paper craft sheets to print out, colour in, and make the game's characters from paper.

Find out more [here](#) (link is external).

Games for Over 12s

Minecraft Story Mode (Multiple formats)

PEGI 12

Minecraft is a game where you collect materials to build an ever more complex world of blocks. Minecraft Story Mode is quite different, in that it offers a proper narrative about Minecraft characters where players make choices about interactions and determine the path of the story.

This is rated for over 12s because of language, so some families may find this acceptable for younger players, others not. The Minecraft theme and the intriguing story or heroism means it will have wide appeal and is a good game for parents and children to play together.

Find out more [here](#) (link is external).

Plants Vs Zombies: Garden Warfare (Multiple formats)

PEGI 7

A shooting game where players control a team of plants. A variety of different multiplayer modes can be played cooperatively or competitively, with players working on the same team, or against each other. Beyond the general melee of a plant vs zombies battle, there are unique challenges for each type of character in the game. Completing these challenges will enable the character to access unique upgrades, new characters, weapons and clothing.

It offers a less violent alternative to other shooting games, while retaining the exuberant competitive play style: ‘Battles are sometimes frenetic and accompanied by cries of pain, realistic gunfire, and large explosions.’

Find out more [here](#) (link is external).

This game allows the player to interact with other players online.

Games for Over 16s

Bloodborne (PlayStation 4)

PEGI 16

Bloodborne is an action role-playing game. The player makes their way through an ancient city, using various weapons and firearms to deal with hordes of monstrous enemies.

It's rated for those aged 16 and older for 'frequent scenes of moderate violence' that the GRA describes as 'fairly mild with characters hacking, slashing and shooting at each other with little physical response to these attacks'.

Its impressive art style, fictional city and fantastical monsters will impress players, but the biggest draw is its unforgiving combat and high difficulty level, which will appeal to those who want a substantial challenge.

Find out more [here \(link is external\)](#).

This game allows the player to interact with other players online.

Halo 5 Guardians (Xbox One)

PEGI 16

Halo 5: Guardians is a first-person shooter exclusive to the Xbox One, the latest in the popular Halo series that began on the original Xbox in 2001. Players control Master Chief and a new protagonist called Locke, accompanied by up to three human players or AI-controlled companions, travelling to different alien locations and defeating hordes of alien enemies.

The theme of individual heroism runs throughout the series. Players enjoy the Halo games for the feel of the combat, whether that's the guns or the melee attack, fighting against alien enemies that require different tactics to defeat.

Find out more [here \(link is external\)](#).

This game allows the player to interact with other players online.

18+

Rise of the Tomb Raider (Xbox One)

PEGI 18

This is the sequel to the 2013 reboot of the classic series. Again, it's an action-adventure game in which Lara Croft explores environments, kills enemies, and along the way collects items and learns new skills.

It's rated as only appropriate for those aged 18 and older for extreme violence and strong language. The GRA expands on its PEGI rating by explaining that 'there are various death scenes in which Lara comes to gruesome ends. In one example, she falls into a pit of spikes.'

These physical aspects are accompanied by psychological battles as players follow Lara's efforts to deal emotionally with people not believing what she's gone through, grief around her father, and guilt for her past actions. It tells a coming-of-age story as Lara becomes an adult and determines her future.

It will appeal to those who like the kind of spectacle found in big-budget action movies, with beautiful environments and dramatic set pieces. People also love the main character, who's had a starring role in video games for nearly two decades now.

Find out more [here \(link is external\)](#). (Warning: graphic content. Trailer is suitable for over 18s only)

Assassin's Creed Syndicate (Xbox One & PlayStation 4)

PEGI 18

A pseudo-historical open-world game in which you play as two assassins fighting against a group called the Templars in Victorian London.

Alternating between twins Evie and Jacob Frye, players explore a populated open-world London, travelling in a variety of ways, including parkour free-running over the rooftops, and carry out quests that often involve choosing whether to sneak past enemies or kill them.

It's rated as only appropriate for those aged 18 and older for strong violence and infrequent strong language. The GRA expands on its PEGI rating by explaining that the game 'features motiveless violence against multiple innocents and violence against defenceless persons.'

With a considerable attention to historical authenticity, *Syndicate* addresses organised crime and class divides in Victorian London. However, these educational aspects are in tension with the game's narrative that is driven by assassinations.

Find out more [here \(link is external\)](#). (Warning: graphic content. Trailer is suitable for over 18s only)

Parental controls

There is help available for setting parental controls on Xbox One, Xbox 360, PS4, PS3, PS Vita, PSP, Nintendo 3DS and Nintendo Wii U. Parental controls can be set up to specify which PEGI ratings can be played on each console.