



Intell

brought to you by **eSafe**

-  The growing problem of gambling
-  The low down on Apex Legends
-  eSafe now partners with CPOMS
-  A closer look at the Doki Doki Literature Club
-  Taking a stand against knife crime



In this edition of **Intell** we consider the blurred lines between social gaming and gambling, give you the low down on Apex Legends, share exciting news about our collaboration with CPOMS, take a closer look at the Doki Doki Literature Club and touch on how we're supporting national efforts to tackle knife crime.



eSafe is the only monitoring system to feature TripleLock protection which promotes welfare and wellbeing by combining advanced intelligent detection technology, specialist human behaviour analysis and dynamic threat libraries to identify threats that others can't.



Are video games teaching young people how to gamble?

Gambling is big business in the UK and it's not just 2 million adults who suffer from addiction: children as young as 11 have problems with gambling, and almost half a million children and young people have admitted to betting regularly, according to the Gambling Commission.

Scratchcards are commonplace, gambling advertisements are prolific on social media and on TV; especially around sports and football matches and across stadiums, even on players' kits. Perhaps lesser-known and understood by parents is the interweaving of social gaming and commercial gambling, and the increasing concern that the games young people are regularly playing online are encouraging unhealthy gambling habits:

- **"Loot boxes"** and **"mystery chests"** are designed to enhance the playing experience in games like Overwatch, Call of Duty and Black Ops. They can be opened by playing the game for a long time or paying money.
- **"Skin betting"** involves gamers (via a network of unaffiliated websites that serve to create a 'virtual casino environment') exchanging virtual goods, that they've won or bought in multi-player games, for virtual gambling chips that can be converted into cash.

What's the deal with loot boxes?



- As loot boxes are random, in the same way as slot machines work, gamers could spend £10 and get something they want, or spend £100 and not get what they want.
- Players can spend a lot of money to get the item they want.
- The UK Gambling Commission (2017) ruled that loot boxes don't qualify as gambling but warns about the increasingly blurred lines between gambling and gaming.
- Australia, the Netherlands and Belgium have regulated loot boxes under gambling laws.

Skins and skin betting



- Skins are in-game items such as weapons and accessories that change the appearance of characters in video games. They don't increase the character's abilities or impact the outcome of the game; they are purely cosmetic.
- Skins have become currency that gamers can collect, trade, buy and sell. Market forces dictate the value of skins – from a few pence to over £20,000.
- Players can log into their Steam accounts from third party gambling websites and access their skins. These sites are neither regulated nor have a robust age-verification process – meaning anyone with a Steam account can gamble.
- Battles between players in games like CS:GO and Dota 2 are streamed on YouTube or alternative streaming sites such as Twitch. Third party sites, such as Dota2wage.com, allow players to use the skins in their Steam library to bet on the outcome.

The Young Gamblers Education Trust (YGAM) is a charity taking practical action to support young people and tackle the associated risks to health and wellbeing of gambling and social gaming. In their words:

Statistics don't really tell the story of the harm that could face those experiencing problems, their friends and their families. Given the vulnerability of young people and evidence that early exposure to gambling can be a predictor of future harm, this is an important – but poorly understood - public health issue. Estimates vary in relation to the societal costs of youth problem gambling but to those experiencing harm (and families, friends and other affected parties), the impact can be significant.

- Players can bet with as many skins as they want: winners get back all their own skins, plus the skins that their opponent gambled, back into their Steam library.
- Unaffiliated sites, like Skins.Cash, allow players to withdraw their credit balance and have it paid back onto their credit/debit card or via PayPal. In this way, skins have become a true virtual currency, with a cash exchange value.
- On roulette sites, like CS:GO Bux and CS:GO Wild, players deposit their skins and these are converted into coins or jewels of different value. They're then used just like chips at a casino to place bets on games of chance.
- Whilst the issue is predominantly with young men aged between 16-25, there is now an increase in younger children from the primary sector buying virtual currency and gambling with it to gain or make a profit.

It is a world that people who aren't in it know little about, but gamers - including young gamers - navigate with ease.

Skin gambling: teenage Britain's secret habit, Parent Zone, June 2018

Useful tips for parents

- Take an interest in their children's online lives - know what they are doing and playing, know where they are spending their money online.
- Talk about the difference between gaming and gambling, educate them about the risks of gambling in an unregulated environment, especially without the knowledge of an adult.
- Explain that loot boxes are designed to encourage excessive game play and additional spending. Most games can still be played without using loot boxes.
- Turn off in-app purchases on games and ensure a payment card isn't attached to their child's console.



The low down on Apex Legends

You may have noticed your learners are talking less about Fortnite these days, and more about Apex Legends: the new, slightly edgier battle royale game that has taken the gaming scene by storm.

This free-to-play game captured a whopping 25 million players within the first week of its launch in February this year – beating the record set by Fortnite, which took two weeks to hit 10 million players. Influential live-streamers, YouTubers and esports competitors are playing and promoting the game, which means if young people aren't playing it yet, they're likely to be soon.

Apex Legends is a multiplayer video game that's similar in many ways to Fortnite and PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG):

- It's a first-person shooter game based on the futuristic universe of the Titanfall series.
- It drops 20 squads of three players onto a map to compete to be the last squad standing.
- Each player on the squad gets to choose one of eight characters ("Legends") to play, each with different abilities and skills.

How does this game compare with Fortnite?

While Apex Legends isn't much more violent than Fortnite, its less colourful, less cartoon-like graphics, and grittier, more realistic look make it seem more violent, so less appropriate for younger players. This is highlighted by PEGI's older age guidelines: it is rated as suitable for players aged 16 and above (while Fortnite has a PEGI rating of age 12+).

How safe is this game for young people?

Every player is on a team of three, so unless a player has two other friends with the same gaming platform, they'll be playing the game with people they don't know. This carries obvious risks. However, as the ping system allows players to communicate game tactics with their squad buddies (e.g. where enemies or supplies are) without chatting, players can buddy up with strangers in squads without talking to them.

It is possible to play the game safely with the right chat settings and parental guidance. The safest way is for players to be on a squad only with people they know, or to mute voice and text chat.

Played safely, being a member of a squad can help players learn some positive skills, like communicating, collaborating, problem solving and negotiating.



Good to know

- To play Apex Legends, gamers have to have an active Electronic Arts (EA) account, which restricts to users aged 13 and older. The game is free to download for PC, Xbox and Playstation.
- It doesn't currently support cross-platform play like Fortnite does, so gamers must have the same console to play together with their friends.
- While it is not yet available for iOS, Android or Nintendo Switch, EA is planning to make it available for mobile devices and to allow cross play between devices.
- Where Fortnite allows for solo play, Apex Legends requires players to join a squad of three.
- Apex Legends pioneered the ping system which allows players to communicate game tactics with their squad buddies (e.g. where enemies or supplies are) without chatting.
- Currency is in the form of Apex Coins, which can be traded for upgrades to skins, banners and weapons. These are all cosmetic upgrades that don't give any player advantage.

Useful tips for parents

As with any new game, especially those that rapidly gain popularity overnight, parents should consider how their child is affected: for example, behaviour changes during or after game play.

This first-person shooter game features plenty of realistic war-like violence, with frenetic gun battles being a critical part of the game. There are conflicting perspectives on how game violence might impact children and young people but there is no solid evidence that playing violent video games leads to aggressive behaviour: understanding individual needs and setting out appropriate rules for screen time activities seems to be sensible advice for parents.

Parents should be aware that enthusiastic players will likely head to YouTube or Twitch to watch Apex Legends game play videos, just like they do for Fortnite. This could lead them to videos that contain highly inappropriate and potentially upsetting content. Parents should be vigilant here and encourage their child to be open about anything they've seen or heard that's upset them.

eSafe & CPOMS together gives you centralised visibility of the issues affecting your young people.

We are delighted to announce that eSafe can now be integrated with CPOMS. This means that eSafe intelligence can now be aggregated with all your other sources of safeguarding intelligence to give an accurate picture of student wellbeing.

Powerful reporting

With this integrated solution, eSafe's highly skilled behaviour analysts review all safeguarding incidents in the digital environment, ensuring only the genuine incidents are fed through to the CPOMS application. The CPOMS dashboard integrates eSafe intelligence with all other sources to give you the holistic view of what's really happening with your students:

- Easily review and analyse data
- Produce powerful reports in a few clicks
- Maintain centralised records, in line with the best practice advice from the DfE about data management and compliance with GDPR

It has significantly increased the effectiveness of our safeguarding and pastoral care team, delivering real-time visibility of learners at risk. It has streamlined our process and provides valuable insight into behaviour so that we can proactively inform the pastoral agenda.

Darren Currie
CP Lead & Vice Principal of Woodkirk Academy, a beta-test site

The eSafe TripleLock monitoring system complements the filtering that schools and colleges already have in place – and is proven to protect your students 24/7, year-round.



Image source: Dan Salvato

A closer look at the Doki Doki Literature Club

The Doki Doki Literature Club is a “visual novel” that, from the outside, looks like any other anime-style computer game. In the first 3 months following its release (September 2017), it was downloaded over one million times - and has since gained a cult-like status with gamers.

The game starts as a “dating simulation” and follows a male high-school student who joins a school’s literature club, interacting with its four female members. The player is encouraged to choose a girl to write a poem for and, depending on their choices, may be drawn closer to the club’s seemingly charming members. The majority of the gameplay consists of the player reading the game’s story with little impact on what direction the plot takes although, at certain points, the player (who is addressed by name throughout) can choose what happens to different characters. About 90 minutes in, the game leads the player to the shocking and emotional suicide of one of the girls, and the plot turns into a mystery around this.

At the point of her suicide, the player is sent back to the main menu and the game seems to glitch, with all previously saved files erased, then restarts. However, when the game is started again the story is different and packed with more graphic, dark scenes. This leaves the player questioning whether the game’s shift is due to a technical fault with their computer, or if it was planned all along.

From this point the gamer is often addressed directly by the characters, who make it known that they are aware of how they exist within the game. Unsettling events begin occurring, such as depictions of self-harm, suicide and violence, with apparitions of the dead girl appearing at points in pixilated form.

The low down

- This free-to-play play interactive psychological horror game is easy to access and can be played on both Mac and PC.
- The game suggests a minimum age of 13 and comes with a warning that it contains “highly disturbing content” and is not suitable for children or those who are easily disturbed. At no point is the age of the gamer verified.
- There is no PEGI rating because it isn’t sold on Xbox, Playstation or Nintendo; or in Apple or Android stores.
- With adult language and shocking scenes, it would get a minimum of a PEGI 16 rating if it was released on any of these platforms or sold in physical form.
- This is a very mature game: essentially like a very long horror film that will upset and disturb many gamers.
- It starts out as a “dating simulator” but reveals itself to be a darker, scarier mystery revolving around suicide.



Why it's on our radar

- Doki Doki has been singled out as being particularly disturbing to children and young people because of the way it blurs the lines between the game's fictitious story and real life - known as "breaking the fourth wall".
- Due to the dark psychological nature of the game it can often be some of the most vulnerable people who are attracted to playing it - those who might already be struggling with their mental health.

Why children and young people like it

Many are intrigued to try the game due to comments from others on social media, and there can be peer pressure to get involved.

Seemingly light-hearted and fun at the outset, it's only when players have been drawn in that they begin to encounter the darker aspects of the game.

The culture around the game on social media is rich enough to gain an insight into the darker aspects of it; there's even a soundtrack that's available on many platforms including Youtube, Spotify and Apple Music. Songs are themed around the different emotions within the game, meaning that players can always be exposed to its ideologies, even when they are not actively playing.

For children specifically, this may result in them becoming even more invested in the game's content and further blurring the lines between their character in the virtual game and their real-life self.

This game takes hours to play and potentially appeals to quieter and more conscientious personality types that can often go 'under the radar'.



Basic markers for this trend

Words such as 'DDLC', 'Doki' and 'ddlclub' are used to describe the game. There are a number of characters, including 'Yuri', 'Sayori', 'Nasuki' and 'Monika', the latter being the president of the club. Players are encouraged to choose a 'Team' which represents who they have loyalty to e.g. they may refer to themselves as 'TeamMonika' or 'TeamSayori'. There are also a number of key words based around poems that the user is told to construct during the game, as well as lyrics within the soundtracks.

Taking a stand against knife crime

You'll have seen in the media a focus on the growing problem of knife crime, and our own monitoring statistics corroborate this bleak picture. While explanations for this are being debated - from police budget cuts, to gang violence and disputes between drug dealers – educating young people of the tragic consequences of knife crime feels like a big step in the right direction. Last month, the Home Office launched an anti-knife crime campaign, targeting 10 - 21 year olds, predominantly on social media and digital channels, to challenge perceptions that carrying a knife is normal.

There are valuable resources for young people at knifefree.co.uk – and there's also a knife crime lesson plan to download for KS3 and KS4.


The Ben Kinsella Trust (benkinsella.org.uk) also has a number of resources for education professionals, including access to workshops educating young people about the dangers of carrying a knife.



Helping communities become knife free

In close partnership with selected Local Authorities, UK Police forces & FE colleges, eSafe is pioneering a collaborative approach to combating the steady rise in knife and gang-related crime.

Pooled data will help ensure the early warning signs of individuals at risk of becoming involved in such criminal activities are identified early, to facilitate fast interventions that promote positive change.

 For more safeguarding insights please follow us on LinkedIn ([LinkedIn.com/company/esafe-global](https://www.linkedin.com/company/esafe-global)).

esafeglobal.com

eSafe Global Ltd, New Court, Regents Place, Regent Road, Salford M5 4HB. Registered number: 06169753


REAL INTELLIGENCE
REAL PROTECTION