



Steam is the largest video game digital distribution platform on the planet by quite some distance. Serving as a one-stop-shop for buying and playing video games on your PC, Steam's game library exceeds over 30,000 titles ranging from fun children's games to those with extreme adult content. It's certainly possible to play games on a computer without Steam, but there's no denying it makes the entire process much, much easier with its download and play model. While Steam is by-and-large perfectly safe, parents should still be aware of the potential pitfalls embedded within PC gaming's most well-known digital distribution platform.



What parents need to know about STEAM



INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT



While there are a wide variety of games on Steam, including many that are child-friendly, it does have a 13+ age limit. Because Steam only hosts the majority of games and doesn't make them, they leave it to individual accounts to self-regulate what they download and play. If you wanted to view a game with mature content on an unfiltered account, you would only have to put in your date of birth to verify your age, and the content is freely available. Naturally, this can lead to minors being exposed to a lot of adult content not meant for them if they were to lie about their age.

ABUSE OF GIFTING SYSTEM

Steam has a gifting system where players can gift games to other people on their friend list. On the surface this is a wonderful way for people to buy presents for their friends and loved ones, within the safety of Steam. However, there are people who might prey on the generosity of others and attempt to scam them out of games. Once a game is gifted, it cannot be retracted, meaning somebody could trick a young person into thinking they can share the game, or both get a copy, while simply keeping it for themselves.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

With its own built-in chat function and multitude of games to play, Steam is an easy place for strangers and people you don't know contacting your child. Realistically, the danger is no more or less than any other place online where people might gather but being aware of the games your children are playing and with whom, can make all the difference. Anybody you don't recognise or games you deem to be inappropriate need to be dealt with swiftly and if necessary, the proper authorities notified.

RISK OF PHISHING

Hackers are a persistent threat on Steam, with countless people having their accounts hacked and stolen for their extensive libraries of games. This is a huge problem, because games you buy through Steam, are only available through your Steam account; if the account is gone, the games are gone. As with any online space where children can interact with strangers, be sure they understand the dangers and repercussions of giving out personal information that could be used to infiltrate their account.

HACKING VULNERABILITY

Phishing is when somebody attempts to gain information from you through deceptive means. On Steam, phishers could disguise themselves as a child's friend in order to encourage them to share personal information, or worse. Remind your child to never give their password or account information to another person, and never click on strange links sent to them on Steam. If you suspect your child might be talking to somebody who intends to exploit them in some way, raise your concerns as soon as possible both with your child and Steam, who will be able to advise you on what to do next. The Steam Support page also has a breakdown of how to detect suspicious links.



Safety Tips For Parents

IMPLEMENT FAMILY SETTINGS

Under Account > Preferences, you can choose what kind of content is visible on the Steam account. For example, you can set it so no games featuring mature content like violence or sex references can be viewed on the platform. The Family Library Share also allows up to 10 other computers and 5 Steam accounts use of the same games and settings, giving a parent(s) control over the master account, with the ability to limit what the shared accounts can do.



USE GIFT CARDS

It's always a good idea to limit the use of banking details and credit cards on the internet where possible. Thankfully Steam sells gift cards that can be purchased either online or in many high street shops. Buying and updating Steam accounts with a gift card will give you peace of mind that young ones aren't spending on your card without you knowing.



APPLY STEAM GUARD

Two-Factor Authentication (commonly known as Steam Guard on Steam) requires anybody attempting to access your account from an unrecognised computer having to complete additional security checks, usually connected to a trusted phone number or email account. In short, if somebody tries to hack your account with two-factor enabled, they'll need access to your private phone or email in order to do so.



USE STEAM SUPPORT

The Steam Support page has a comprehensive list of ways to deal with specific problems encountered on Steam like reporting hackers, regaining access to lost accounts, reporting stolen games and so on. If you're struggling with the suggested automated processes, you can also initiate a ticket that will be dealt with directly by a human, but this may take longer than the support page.



DISCUSS CONCERNS WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Steam can certainly be an overwhelming place for younger children, so it always pays to be upfront and frank about some of the things they may see, and where your expectations for them lie. Adjusting your family settings will help curate the experience but arming them with the knowledge of what is and isn't acceptable while playing games will allow them to make their own decisions when you're not around.



Meet our expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.

