

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
GUIDE
Minecraft

Remember Playing with Legos?

Yes, think back to a time when you actually liked Legos because you got to enjoy them, not spend all your time trying *not* to step on them unexpectedly . . . Anyway, when you and your friends would play with them, the possibilities seemed endless, right? You could create the coolest things, either from your own imagination or by buying a special kit for a specific shape (Millennium Falcon, anyone?). Nowadays, kids don't just have Legos; they have digital Legos in an unending world where the possibilities are truly endless. They have *Minecraft*.

Maybe your kid isn't playing with Legos (or never did), but if they have even a fledgling interest in the practice of combining and recombining little blocks to make progressively more interesting structures, it's a good bet they could enjoy *Minecraft*, the computer game that expands way past Legos (and will never stab you in the foot).

What exactly is *Minecraft*?

It's a video game that lets users explore, create, and share unique digital worlds filled with resources to gather and monsters to evade or destroy. Unlike the linear, goal-oriented games most people are familiar with, *Minecraft* is a “sandbox” game, encouraging users to wander across a nearly infinite digital landscape filled with objects they can turn into resources—trees can be chopped down to become wood, stone can be mined to produce iron, and so on—which can then be crafted into items (from weapons to houses). (And yes, the increasingly popular game *Fortnite: Battle Royale* is also a sandbox game; see our [“Parent's Guide to Fortnite”](#) for more info.)

The game offers five modes: **Survival**, **Adventure**, **Creative**, **Spectator**, and **Multiplayer**.

Survival: After selecting a difficulty setting (ranging from “peaceful” to “hardcore”), the player spawns inside an unexplored world. Unlike many video games, the player isn't tasked with specific missions in order to proceed; the only goal is to stay alive, a task that involves seeking out food and shelter and crafting weapons to guard against a wide variety of monsters that roam the virtual world when night falls. (*Minecraft* cycles from day to night every 20 minutes or so.) Depending on the difficulty level, the player might be free to roam around with very few concerns—or they might be desperately trying to find food so their character doesn't die of starvation.



Adventure: Adventure mode allows players to experience shared game-worlds created by other players, often with unique resources, challenges, and missions to differentiate it from Survival mode. Players have less freedom in this mode than in Survival mode, since they're playing in someone else's pre-designed landscape.

Creative: A player receives unlimited freedom to customize their virtual world; they can summon resources like brick, flint, and iron at will, then use them to [construct whatever they desire](#)—from scale models of the Winter Palace or a space shuttle to a rendering of *Lord of the Rings*' Minas Tirith to a fully functional [cell phone inside the game](#).



Spectator: In this mode, the player acts like a ghost, able to pass through solid objects and view gameplay in real time but without directly interacting. If this sounds silly, try to think of it in the same terms you would a sporting event or a concert: The appeal is seeing artistry on display and maybe picking up something you can try for yourself.

Multiplayer: Exactly what it says on the tin: Multiple players gather in a single landscape to show off their skills against one another. However, unlike many multiplayer games, there's no set goal; players interact, collaborate, and build in a shared world, with optional settings allowing them to engage in player-versus-player combat.

In multiplayer mode, players are incentivized to develop a culture about how to respect one another's space—an important norm when everyone on the server has the power to kick down the virtual sand castle others have poured hours of work into.



What is it rated? Is it free?

[All versions of Minecraft](#) are rated [Everyone 10+](#) by the ESRB, which means that it's generally suitable for people 10 years old and older. The content descriptor given for why it's suggested for gamers 10 and older is "fantasy violence."

Though the most recent versions do have [a price tag](#) (\$27 for desktop, \$20 for consoles, \$7 for mobile), it's possible to access *Minecraft: Classic*, the original game, for free. However, *Minecraft: Classic* is no longer updated, so in order to access all of the features, one has to pay. There's also a newer feature called [Minecraft Marketplace](#) in which players can create, sell, and buy things like skins, worlds, and mini-games. So it could be a place where a player unleashes his/her creativity and earns a bit of money for it . . . or where a player spends a lot of money on others' creations.

On what platforms is it available?

It's available on [virtually every platform](#):

- **Computer operating systems:** Windows, Mac, and Linux.



- **Consoles:** Xbox One & Xbox 360, Playstation 3 & 4, Nintendo Wii.



- **Devices:** Nintendo Switch, Raspberry Pi, Wii U, Nintendo 3DS, Playstation Vita, Samsung Gear VR.



- **Other:** iOS, Android, Windows Phone, FireOS, AppleTV.



What about content issues?

Parents' top concerns about *Minecraft* echo their concerns about the internet at large: content issues, negative experiences with other users, and time lost to absentminded surfing.

Your concern regarding content issues will vary depending on how old your child is and how much they're able to handle. While *Minecraft* is not even in the same zip code as games like *God of War* and *HALO*, it does have certain thematic elements. Kids exploring their high-limitless playground might stumble upon some pretty spooky terrain, and part of Survival mode is learning to deal with monsters. It won't bother older kids—even at their most ghoulish, *Minecraft*'s monsters are still pixelated (see images)—but it might be more than your young children can handle.



The online communities are more concerning. Because *Minecraft* has an online multiplayer option, kids have opportunities to wander into internet neighborhoods you wouldn't consider particularly appropriate, and may encounter other users that their parents wouldn't approve of.

Though this sounds alarming, it's actually quite easy to avoid (yay!). One solution is to **stick to single-player mode** or to **play in local multiplayer**, which is open only to players on the same WiFi network—allowing kids to share their *Minecraft* experience with one another at home or the local library. If you're a little more tech-savvy, you can even [set up your own private server](#) through [Realms](#), *Minecraft*'s official server network.

The easiest option, though, is to help your child research and join existing **public servers** with interesting themes and good moderators. Fortunately, servers that meet both criteria are abundant: *Minecraft* features a vast array of themed servers (from Middle Earth to space to pirates to Pokémon), and because it's popular with young kids,

moderators typically have extremely strict policies regarding abuse of other players. If you're still worried, though, do a Google search for whitelist *Minecraft* servers. These servers require users to submit applications before being admitted in, helping to foster a family-friendly environment.

—— What other concerns should I have?

One problem that can take parents by surprise is the threat of malware (malicious software designed to make your computer malfunction—or even send your private information, like passwords and credit card information, to bad actors) entering your computer through *Minecraft*. The game itself is perfectly safe, but it does allow users to download and run modifications (“mods”) they find elsewhere. Kids with undeveloped “digital literacy”—i.e. the ability to recognize suspect links before clicking on them—are particularly vulnerable, and their quest to make their *Minecraft* landscape look like Middle Earth could end in your computer becoming a functionless plastic husk. The most airtight solution is simply to make sure your child's computer account is [non-administrative](#), so that anything they download can't do significant damage. Don't forget, though, that it's important for your child to learn about the risks involved in traversing the internet; after that conversation, help them vet sites where they can download legitimate files to spruce up their gameplay.

Finally, as Christian parents, we do need to be cognizant of the ways in which *Minecraft* invites users to an escapist fantasy where they can exercise control over everything from the shape of the horizon to the weather coming over it. This isn't a new worry—parents have been worried about their children getting lost in escapist fantasies since before the printing press—but it's something to keep in mind. We are not to become slaves to anything ([1 Cor. 6:14](#)), and abandoning our physical world for a virtual one is startlingly easy. Remember that we're children of an *incarnate* God—a God who walks in gardens, a God who ate figs, a God who sweat and bled and danced and laughed. This same God made a vast physical world in which we can delight, and He wants us to be fully present in this wonderful world He's created. Our bodies are sacred spaces ([1 Cor. 6:19](#)) to be valued and cherished and *lived in*—and we would do well to remind our children (and ourselves) of that, as well as to place limits on how much time and energy we invest into an alternate reality.

—— So does it have any redemptive features?

Absolutely!

Most obviously, *Minecraft* serves as a creative outlet for kids who feel driven to *imagine things*. We must never forget that our creativity is a direct connection with our original Creator: Imagining new things and working to bring those ideas to fruition is an act of worship. And learning to convert creative ideas into visible work is valuable practice. Your child might be learning how to push their big idea out into the world, even if it just looks like they're ignoring their chores (although that might be happening, too _(ツ)_/).

The game also encourages them to share their work and develop social bonds with other

creative kids. A vast multitude of games are designed to appeal to the human desire for individual achievement, so they tacitly encourage kids to approach their problems alone and only share details when the ordeal is done. And while *Minecraft* on single-player mode can certainly encourage an atomist approach, there's a huge social component to how the game is designed. There's a thriving *Minecraft* community where users can gather to compare notes, learn from one another's techniques and accomplishments, download mods and maps designed by other players—and most importantly, find other people with the same creative drive.

This encouragement of community isn't found solely through the internet, though. With local multiplayer servers, kids can exercise their creativity with their real-world friends. This kind of experience can give them the opportunity to hone long-term teamwork skills like communication, labor division, and cooperation.

Most importantly, the game can be an opportunity to connect with your child and meet them in a hobby they care about. *Minecraft* won't penalize you for having slower fingers than your kid; you're able to go through the game at your own pace and make whatever you're interested in. You don't have to be a master—just take an interest. Remind your child that you care about them by taking an interest in what their interests.

— Are there parental controls?

Not really; the only formal parental control in *Minecraft* is that kids under 13 need a parent's permission to set up an account. However, you can encourage your child to stick to single-player or local modes. Or, if your kid is dead-set on playing multiplayer, you can [turn off the chat](#) as a precaution. However, since there are no real parental controls, as long as the child has access to the account, he/she has access to the settings and can the chat back on at anytime.

— Should I let my kids play it? At what age?

The game is appropriate for most age groups—remember, it's basically computerized Legos. But as mentioned above, the ESRB recommends it for ages 10 and up because of “fantasy violence,” which mostly refers to the pixelated skeletons and monsters. So you know your children best; if you feel they are mature enough to handle the pixelated monsters even though they're younger than 10, then they can have a great time playing and learning problem-solving skills while doing so. If your child is particularly young or sensitive, we recommend either waiting a bit or staying in single-player mode and keeping difficulty settings low.

— How can I set good limits on playing time?

The possibility of your kids burning hours upon hours in front of their *Minecraft* server is perhaps the most worrying aspect of the game. Like many computer games, *Minecraft* is designed to tacitly encourage addictive, time-wasting behaviors: It presents relatively simple puzzles solved through the repetition of simple tasks, offers a world vast and varied enough that players can explore indefinitely without getting bored,

and allows players to customize, tweak, and revise their creations endlessly. In a sandbox game like this one, “satisfaction” is the pot of gold at the end of the proverbial rainbow.

As with any of the internet’s innumerable time-sinks, our responsibility is to guide our kids in enjoying their hobbies responsibly. Our world is replete with time-wasters (with more coming out every day!), so disciplined time-management might well be the most important skill our kids can learn before they leave home. Don’t forget, though, that it’ll be much harder to get their cooperation if they see you or your spouse spending hours at a time on an activity (like Netflix/TV, on your phones, etc.). The more we can model the correct behavior, the more likely they are to buy in!

Start by first conversing with them about why it’ll be tempting to play for hours at a time and how that means it’s even more important that they resist that temptation. Having these conversations enables them to view any boundaries you enact as for their own flourishing and protection, rather than simply just another rule to follow. Then make the parameters for playing very clear. Maybe they can only play for one hour per day and only after their homework and chores are done. Maybe they earn playing time by doing more chores or by getting good grades in school (with a cap, since otherwise they might try to save up their hours and defeat the purpose). And make it clear that you want them to enjoy the game, but, as the final authority, you can and will revoke privileges if they’re being abused or if other areas of their lives begin to suffer.

Discussion Questions

- What is interesting about the game to you? Why do you want to play it?
- Is it any different than playing with your blocks/Legos? How?
- What do you think it is that makes Minecraft so easy to spend time on?
- What do you think you would build, if you had unlimited time? Can we build something like that together?
- What’s your favorite thing to do/favorite thing about Minecraft? Why?
- How does Minecraft affect you emotionally? What do you feel when you play? After you play? Before you play?
- How do you think you could tell if you or someone else has played too much? What should we do if that’s the case?
- Do you know what to do if you stumble across something that makes you feel uncomfortable?
- What kind of behavior is appropriate via the chat? What will you do if you notice someone else behaving inappropriately?
- What do you think a fair punishment would be if you behave inappropriately or spend too much time on the game?
- What are some things that you think you should care about or accomplish before playing the game? Why do you think it’s hard to want to do those things sometimes? How can I help you get better at doing those things?

Conclusion

As parents, we’re comfortable evaluating things based on their content: We steer our

kids clear of movies with R ratings; we read reviews of television shows; we research musicians to make sure our kids won't be exposed to things that would harm them.

But *Minecraft* isn't content; like Facebook and Twitter, it's a medium—a platform—and so content issues will vary widely. Though it's worthwhile to protect our kids from inappropriate content, with *Minecraft* the more important issue is to teach our kids how to be aware of what the medium does to us. Facebook trains us to share our accomplishments while hiding our failures; Twitter primes us to reduce everything to a finite character limit. In the same way, *Minecraft* encourages us to unleash our creativity and spend time in a world of our own making. Though it's valuable to stretch our artistic muscles (albeit with a blocky, simplistic style), there's an attendant danger that we'll withdraw to these lonely islands in our imagination rather than face our real problems head on.

We are not given a spirit of fear but of power, love, and a sound mind ([2 Tim. 1:7](#)), so we don't need to fear *Minecraft* or any of the creative platforms like it. Even as we stay wary of the temptation to withdraw, it's possible to delight in opportunities to create and recreate—in imitation of our Father in heaven.

— Related Axis Resources

To read before talking to your kids (all found at axis.org/guides):

- A Parent's Guide to Video Games
- A Parent's Guide to Discord
- A Parent's Guide to Twitch
- A Parent's Guide to Fortnite
- A Parent's Guide to Dungeons & Dragons

— Additional Resources

- "[Ten Problems That Parents Can Have with Minecraft](#)," MineMum
- "[The Parents' Guide to Minecraft](#)," How to Geek
- "[Getting Started with Minecraft](#)," How to Geek
- "[Everything You Need to Know About Minecraft](#)," Common Sense Media

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