Child Privacy and Video Games â€" What Parents Need to Know

April 6, 2016 â€" Iâ€™m not a video gamer. In fact, what I know about how video games work would have easily fit on one side of a 3 x 5 card prior to writing this story. But a murder case in the United Kingdom involving the game Minecraft made me realize that video games and privacy donâ€™t necessarily go together. If you are a parent and your child plays video games, you may need to educate yourself in order to protect your children.

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s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
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Minecraft is a hugely popular game, especially among children. Privacy laws state that players are supposed to be at least 13 years of age but these are almost impossible to enforce, and kids know it. The game is popular among children who are often much younger.

As a stand-alone game, children play in a closed environment. They donâ€™t interact with any other people. But the game also has a multi-user mode. In this mode, players have the ability to chat with each other. Thatâ€™s where the privacy concerns come into play. There is no way to verify that the person your child is chatting with is actually another child.

In the murder case, a 14 year old player struck up an online friendship with an 18 year old. That online interaction eventually ended in a face to face meeting between the two. The 14 year old was murdered in what was called a â€œsexually motivated attack.â€•

Police in the UK have begun to warn parents to check the privacy settings on Minecraft. But many other games have similar features. That means that as a parent, you really need to learn about the features associated with any video game your child is playing. And you need to set some rules.

It may also be a good idea to make sure that the computer they use to play their games is located someplace that allows you to observe what they are doing.

The bottom line here is that there are some very bad people lurking on the internet. Itâ€™s easy to see how children can become unwitting victims.
byJim Malmberg
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