

# Fortnite (12-rated): a parents' guide to the most popular video game in schools

If you have children between eight and 18, the chances are you've heard of the multiplayer online shooter Fortnite: Battle Royale. Here's what you need to know:

You know a video game has made it when ITV daytime programme This Morning posts on [its Facebook page](#) asking parents if their kids are addicted. You can be doubly sure when that post attracts almost 60,000 comments. In this case the game is [Fortnite: Battle Royale](#), a bright, brash multiplayer shooter. It was released last year, and is now one of the biggest online games out there.

With more than 40m players worldwide, the chances are either your children or their friends are already passionate fans. For some, that fandom may well be bordering on obsession. Should you be worried? Here's what you need to know about the game.

## What is Fortnite: Battle Royale?

In short, it's a mass online brawl where 100 players leap out of a plane on to a small island and then fight each other until only one is left. Hidden around the island are weapons and items, including crossbows, rifles and grenade launchers, and players must arm themselves while exploring the landscape and buildings. It's also possible to collect resources that allow you to build structures where you can hide or defend yourself. As the match progresses, the playable area of land is continually reduced, so participants are forced closer and closer together. The last survivor is the winner.

## Where did it come from?

Fortnite was originally released in July 2017, but it actually started out as a four-player cooperative survival game set on a postapocalyptic Earth. Players had to build shelters and defend themselves against marauding zombies. Later in the year, however, the game's developer, Epic, noticed the huge success of PC title [PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds](#) (PUBG), which pits 100 players against each other in a last-man-standing battle. PUBG was highly influenced by the Hunger Games novels and by the Japanese movie [Battle Royale](#), and it's sold over 30m copies worldwide. [Duly inspired](#), Epic decided to release a new version of Fortnite featuring very similar gameplay. Hence, Fortnite: Battle Royale.

The new game arrived last September, and the developer made three brilliant decisions. First it was launched as a standalone title separate from the [original Fortnite](#) (now known as Fortnite: Save the World), allowing it to gain a dedicated fanbase; secondly, it was released as a completely free digital download, which made it easily accessible; and thirdly it came out not just on PC, but on Xbox and PlayStation – which meant all the console owners who had heard about PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds but didn't have a PC could now play something very similar, for free. (An Xbox One version of PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds is now available, but Fortnite beat it to the punch.)

## Why is it so popular with kids?

Well, it's free, it's fun and it has a very silly, offbeat sense of humour. While PUBG has a serious, realistic visual style, Fortnite: Battle Royale has very bright, almost cartoon-like graphics as well as loads of ridiculous items and costumes, such as space suits and dinosaur outfits.

You can also pull a variety of dance moves during the game, and some of these have taken on a cult appeal in schoolyards around the globe. The Floss, inspired by the viral video of [the boy dancing with Katy Perry during her Saturday Night Live appearance last spring](#), is basically this year's [dab](#). All of this means the game is really fun to watch as well as play, making it a huge hit with all the famous video game YouTubers and streamers your kids love, such as Ali-A and DanTDM. They're broadcasting many hours of themselves playing the game to their millions of fans, making Fortnite the most watched game on major streaming service Twitch.

It's also possible to team up with a friend, or group of friends, and compete as a duo or a squad. This adds a social element, and participants are able to chat as they play using headsets and microphones. Many children are now forming Fortnite teams, and spending a lot of their free time playing and practising the game together.

Cleverly, the developer is adding new items, features and play modes on a weekly basis so there is always a new reason to come back and play, and fans like to show off that they have the latest gear. My sons were obsessed with unlocking the "Rust Lord" outfit, clearly inspired by Star Lord in [Guardians of the Galaxy](#).

## How much does it cost?

The game is free and players are able to unlock new items as they progress without paying anything. But if you purchase a Premium Battle Pass you gain access to exclusive clothing and items – tiered so that doing well in the game or carrying out weekly challenges to earn more points unlocks access to more items. A Battle Pass costs 950 V-Bucks, which is the game's own currency – you need to pay £7.99 to download 1,000 V-Bucks, which lasts until the end of the season. Fortnite: Battle Royale is divided into seasons, with season three running until 22 April. After that a new pass will need to be purchased.

It's also possible to buy new tiers individually so you can play them immediately. Each tier costs 150 V-Bucks to unlock in this way, and there are 100 tiers. (It's highly unlikely anyone would buy them all, but that's £120 worth.)

None of the items that are earned through the Battle Pass make the player more powerful or provide a gameplay advantage; they're purely cosmetic. However, there is a lot of kudos attached to getting the latest, rarest clothing items and children will want to keep playing to unlock those items. You remember when you were at school and just *had* to have the latest cool Nikes? It's like that, but virtual.

## How do I limit how much they play?

If they're playing on an Xbox or PlayStation you can use the [parental controls](#) to limit the length of gaming sessions (or ban them from the game entirely if you're feeling despotic). It's a good idea to set definite play sessions of, say, an hour or 90 minutes using some kind of timer (a stopwatch, an egg timer, or maybe ask [Alexa](#) for a countdown). You may need to have a Mastermind-style "I've started so I'll finish" rule though: Fortnite matches can last up to 20 minutes and if you demand they finish playing in the middle of a game, they'll leave team-mates in the lurch and lose any points they've earned during that bout. That's going to cause a lot of resentment.

## Should parents be worried about the violence?

Although Fortnite is a multiplayer shooter, it has a very bright, friendly visual style and it does not depict bloody violence. Like the Nintendo game [Splatoon](#), it takes lots of the enjoyable gameplay concepts from more mature shooting games but places them in a non-threatening, non-realistic world. My sons call it "Call of Duty for kids". The good news is, as with any game, the obsession will eventually pass for all but the most committed players – and if your kids are really good? Well, there's a growing professional [eSports](#) scene around the game, complete with cash prizes. You never know which childhood hobby might turn into a living.