At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one game of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about REC ROOM

Age Rating 9+

Rec Room is a social hangout game, where users meet up with friends to explore and create rooms, each containing a different experience. One room might be a game of laser tag or dodgeball, while another could be a parkour course or virtual boxing. Available on iOS devices, PlayStation, Xbox, Oculus and PC/Mac, Rec Room is kidSAFE COPPA Certified and carries an age rating of 9+. Nonetheless, parents and carers should remain mindful that gaming online with strangers always carries a potential risk.



Intimidating Interactions

Rec Room is a huge online environment, with more than 10 million users worldwide. Before heading into the individual rooms, players usually mingle in the Rec Centre. Users can move their avatar around this social space and audio chat using their microphone. While most people just want to have fun and make friends, some may say and do things that others find uncomfortable, threatening or harmful.

Questionable Connections

Adding someone as a friend is a good way to connect with a person you had fun with online. However, not everybody is who they seem, and some might have more sinister ideas once a friendship has been established. When two players (who don't have junior accounts) accept each other as friends in Rec Room, they're able to chat privately, track each other in-game, and plan to go into rooms together on their own.

Online Bullying

As cliques can form naturally during a gaming session, situations could easily arise where some children feel left out or even bullied. Gamers can victimise other players for no reason at all, and many hide behind an online persona which offers a sense of immunity from their actions. Even when players are banned, those determined enough can simply make another account and re-enter the game.

Violent or Scary Themes

Rec Room contains mild violent or scary themes, including weapons like swords and paintball guns. It is quite tame compared with many other games but might still leave an impression on younger children. This applies even more when playing in virtual reality: VR significantly enhances an experience – whether exciting or frightening – and can have a lasting impact on young ones who may be upset by adult themes.

Sexual Content

Some rooms have adult themes and absolutely should **not** be entered by children. The game's code of conduct stipulates that players must be warned about anything of this nature before entering a room, but users who don't have a junior account could still potentially gain access. The major worry is that a young person could be lured into these rooms before realising what goes on inside.

Advice for Parents & Carers

Junior Accounts

Junior users can't send or receive audio and private messages, or create their own room. Anybody under 13 is required to have a junior account, and those accounts are linked to (and moderated by) a parent or guardian account. To create one, start a new game of Rec Room, go to 'Create an Account' and follow the instructions. Be sure to explain the restrictions to your children before letting them play.

Block and Report

To help moderate problem users, select the player (click the right thumb stick on PS4, press 'T' on PC, point in VR, etc). The 'Comfort and Moderation' screen presents options including block, unblock, votekick and report. Players you block will not be allowed in the same room as you. The Rec Room website's code of conduct can help you decide whether a player has violated the terms and should be reported.

Tailor the Experience

In the settings (within the 'Watch Menu'), you can tweak individual parts of the Rec Room experience. Everything from muting other players' audio, muting your mic and tweaking voice pitch, through to selecting how close other players can get to you can be found here. This is ideal for people who prefer to avoid social interactions or simply want to enjoy the game without worrying about other players.

Disable Payment Methods

Rec Room is free to download and play, but there *are* in-game purchases – items like cosmetics and costumes – that users pay for with real money. If you have a card attached to any platform accounts (like a PlayStation or Steam account), be aware that children might therefore incur costs on these without meaning to. It's safest to unlink any payment methods before you download the game.

Get Involved

As it's such a popular game, there are lots of content creators on YouTube and Twitch whose output focuses on Rec Room. Most of this content is tailored to a younger audience. Talking to your child about their favourite creators – and watching their videos together – is good way of opening a dialogue about your child's experiences in Rec Room and understanding which aspects of the game they enjoy.

Meet Our Expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for several years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the 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.



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SOURCES: https://recroom.com/comfortandsafety, https://recroom.com/parents-guide, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/app-reviews/rec-room#:~:text=Some%20game%20rooms%20have%20moderately,posts%20and%20in%20chat%20rooms., https://www.reddit.com/r/oculus/comments/7ercvs/please_please_keep_your_kids_out_of_rec_room/, https://kidsafeseal.com/aboutourseals.html

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