

Don't Let Hate Ruin the Fun: Youth and Online Games

Compelling Question: What can we do about hate and harassment taking place in online games?

Grade Level		Time	Standards/Competencies	
K-2	3-5	45–60 Minutes	Common Core Anchor: Reading: R2, R4 Writing: W4, W5 Speaking & Listening: SL2 Language: L5	SEL: Self-Awareness Social Awareness Relationship Skills Responsible Decision-Making
MS	HS			



Web Related Connections

Lessons

- [Addressing Hate Online: Countering Cyberhate with Counterspeech \(en Español\)](#)
- [Is Gaming a Boy's Club?: Women, Video Games and Sexism \(en Español\)](#)
- [Teens, Tech, Connect: How Technology Impacts Teenagers' Friendships](#)
- [What is Algorithmic Bias?](#)

Other Resources

- [6 Ways to Be an Ally \(en Español\)](#)
- [Cyber-Safety Action Guide](#)
- [Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021](#)
- [Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#)
- [Navigating a Digital World: Tips for Youth \(en Español\)](#)

Key Words

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| accountability | multiplayer |
| advocacy | offensive |
| alarmingly | stalking |
| disrupted | targeted |
| excluded | transparency |
| extremism | |
| gamer | |
| harassment | |
| Holocaust denial | |
| ideology | |
| marginalized | |

LESSON OVERVIEW

Video games are widely used and enjoyed by adults and young people alike. In fact, of all American adults, 67% play video games and among young people under age 18, 76% play video games. In ADL's [2021 survey and report](#) on experiences with online games, all gamers reported appreciating the social connectivity of gaming, but an alarmingly large majority encounter regular and ongoing hate and harassment while playing. Five out of six adults (83%) ages 18–45 experienced harassment in online multiplayer games and three out of five young people (60%) ages 13–17 experienced harassment in online multiplayer games. Particularly concerning is that 10% of young people reported being exposed to discussions in online multiplayer games around white supremacist extremist ideology.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about people's experiences with multiplayer online games, reflect on their own experiences and opinions and then consider actions that can be taken to reduce and prevent hate and harassment in the gaming world.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about people's experiences with online gaming.
- Students will reflect on their own experiences, thoughts and opinions about online gaming.
- Students will consider possible actions that different constituencies can take to reduce and prevent hate and harassment in online gaming.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Five signs prepared in advance: STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, DISAGREE, STRONGLY DISAGREE
- "[Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021](#)" excerpt (one copy for each student)
- [Action Ideas Worksheet](#) (one copy for each student)

PROCEDURES



Information Sharing: Online Games

1. Begin the lesson by asking, “How many of you play online games?” and ask for a show of hands. Ask a few to share the games they play and then invite a few students to share their response to the following two questions:
 - What do you love about playing online games with others?
 - What do you dislike about playing online games with others?
2. Explain to students that based on survey data, among all American adults, 67% play video games and 76% (more than three out of four) of young people under age 18 are gamers. Explain that a 2021 ADL survey revealed that of those people who engage in multiplayer online games, many experience both positive social experiences as well as hate and harassment. This is true for adults and young people under the age of 18. Explain that in this lesson, we will learn more about and discuss the survey data.

Here I Stand Activity: My Experiences with Online Gaming

1. Explain to students that we will do an activity to explore their experiences and opinions about online games. To do that, they will listen to different statements about online gaming and decide to what extent they agree or disagree with each statement. They will indicate their opinion by positioning themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement.
2. Select a large open space and indicate the position of an imaginary line with the farthest right point representing a STRONGLY AGREE response and the farthest left point a STRONGLY DISAGREE response. In between, place AGREE, IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, and DISAGREE along the continuum.

Note: If you are teaching this lesson online, use [Mentimeter](#) (“Scales”) to create the continuum and provide the same selection of words—agree, disagree, etc., inviting students to select a response based on each statement.

3. Read some or all the statements below—one at a time—requesting students to take some time to decide where they stand along the continuum, move silently to that place and observe where others choose to stand. Following each statement, after everyone has chosen their spot, have students take a few minutes to talk among themselves about why they chose to position themselves there. Then, have one or two students from each group share aloud their reasons for placing themselves in that spot.
 - Playing games online is fun and is mostly a positive experience.
 - You can make friends and learn new things while playing online games.
 - There is a lot of negativity and hate when you play online games with others.
 - While playing online games with others, I’ve seen or experienced bias or hate that targets an aspect of my or others’ identity.
 - Young people usually don’t talk with their parents or family members about online gaming.
 - If you see hate and harassment in online gaming, you should say or do something about it.

Alternative: If you think students would be more comfortable and likely to share their thoughts on these questions privately or if you don’t have the necessary space, create a written survey with these questions and have students complete it on their own.

4. Reconvene the class and engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What was it like to decide where to stand?
 - How did it feel when most people had the same response as you? How about when most people were standing somewhere else?
 - Did engaging in this activity either clarify or change your opinion about anything? If so, how?

- Did you ever feel you needed to explain where you chose to stand but you didn't feel you had the opportunity to do so? If so, why did you feel this way?
- What did you learn from this activity?

Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of "[Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021](#)" [excerpt](#) to all students. Provide 15–20 minutes to read it silently or read aloud together with students taking turns reading.
2. After reading, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all the following questions:
 - What are some of the big ideas discussed in this report?
 - What thoughts and feelings came to mind as you were reading it?
 - What information surprised you? What information did not surprise you?
 - What challenged your previous thinking?
 - Did any of the data resonate with your own experiences with online games? Please explain.
 - Why do you think there's so much hate in digital spaces, including online games?
 - What would you do, or have you done, if you experience or witness hate/harassment in an online game?
 - What do you think can be done to reduce or prevent hate and harassment in online games?
 - What additional questions do you have—what more do you want to know?

Action Ideas

1. Explain to students that knowing what they do now about online gaming and the pervasiveness of hate and harassment, they are going to take on different roles, think together in groups about addressing the problem and come up with ideas for taking action. You can explain that one effect of identity-based hate and harassment in online games is to keep marginalized people out of online spaces and to claim gaming as a space that's mainly white and male.
2. Divide students into five small groups based on these constituency groups: (1) Individual Game Players, (2) Schools, (3) Game Companies, (4) Elected Officials and (5) Advocacy and Non-profit Organizations.
3. Distribute a copy of the [Action Ideas Worksheet](#) to each student. Explain to students that they are going to consider what their constituent group can do to address hate and harassment in online gaming, especially among young people. They will develop ideas based on the role and perspective of that constituent group. Provide an example such as "gaming companies can have better strategies for monitoring hate and harassment."

Have each group use the [Action Ideas Worksheet](#) to identify tools and resources their group has, propose 4–5 specific action ideas, and share how their group will get the word out about what they propose. Provide 10–15 minutes to have the groups work on their action ideas and assign for homework if more time is needed.
4. Have each small group share their ideas with the whole class.

Closing

Have students share something they feel can and should be done about hate and harassment in online gaming.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- "[5 facts about Americans and video games](#)" (Pew Research Center, September 17, 2018)
- [2021 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry](#) (Entertainment Software Association)

- AnyKey
- “Combating Targeted Attacks” (Twitch)
- “Toxicity in Gaming Is Dangerous. Here's How to Stand Up to It” (Wired, December 9, 2020)
- “Two-thirds of Americans, 227 million, play video games. For many games were an escape, stress relief in pandemic” (*USA Today*, July 13, 2021)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R2:
Speaking and Listening
SL1:
SL2:
SL5:
Language
L4:
L6:

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021

EXCERPT

Executive Summary

Ninety-seven million Americans play online multiplayer games. While virtually all players surveyed in ADL's third annual report on experiences¹ in online games appreciated the social connectivity of gaming, an alarmingly large majority continue to encounter a firehose of hate and harassment. ADL's survey explores the social interactions, experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of online multiplayer gamers nationwide. This year's survey again asked about the experiences of a nationally representative sample of the nearly 100 million adult online multiplayer gamers in the United States. For the first time, it also included the experience of young gamers, ages 13-17².

For the third consecutive year, ADL's survey found that harassment experienced by adult gamers increased and remains at alarmingly high levels, while the new research on the experience of teens also raises significant concerns.

In the past six months:

- Five out of six adults (83%) ages 18-45 experienced harassment in online multiplayer games—representing over 80 million adult gamers.
- Three out of five young people (60%) ages 13-17 experienced harassment in online multiplayer games—representing nearly 14 million young gamers.
- 8% of adults ages 18-45 and 10% of young people ages 13-17 reported being exposed to discussions in online multiplayer games around white supremacist ideology, the belief that “white people are superior to people of other races and that white people should be in charge.”
- 7% of adult online multiplayer gamers were exposed to Holocaust denial while playing.
- 71% of adult online multiplayer gamers experienced severe abuse, including physical threats, stalking, and sustained harassment,³ representing no significant change from our 2020 survey (68%) and six points higher than in 2019 (65%).
- The largest increases in identity-based harassment occurred among adult respondents who identified as women (49% in 2021, compared to 41% in 2020), Black or African American (42% in 2021, compared to 31% in 2020), and Asian American (38% in 2021, compared to 26% in 2020). It is worth noting that although there was no statistically significant change in identity-based harassment of adult LGBTQ+ players (38% in 2021 versus 37% in 2020), the number is still of concern.
- 59% of adult gamers believe that laws need to be created to increase transparency around how game companies address hate, harassment, and extremism.
- 99% of online multiplayer gamers experienced some form of the positive social behaviors asked about in our survey.

Results: Young People (13-17)

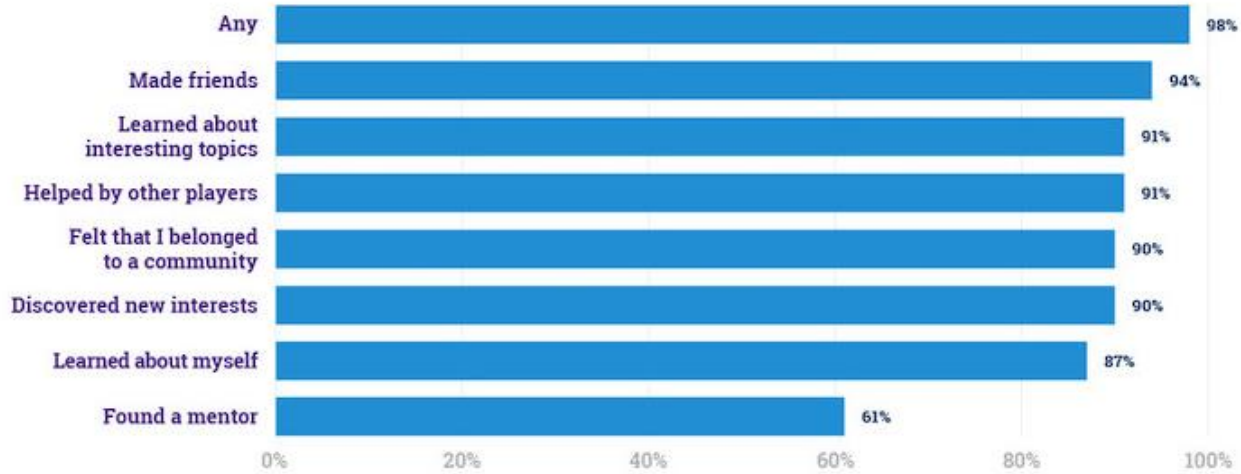
Social Experiences in Online Gaming

Twenty-three million out of the 26 million gamers ages 13-17 in the U.S. play online multiplayer games.

The vast majority of young gamers—more than nine out of ten—reported some form of positive social experience in online multiplayer games. World of Warcraft and Rocket League had the most young gamers reporting positive experiences.

Positive Experiences in Games – Young People (13-17)

Q: How often, if ever, have you had the following positive experiences when playing online multiplayer games in the last six months?



Q: How frequently did you have positive experiences in the following games or franchises?

Game	Percent
World of Warcraft	100%
Rocket League	100%
Roblox	97%
Fortnite	97%
DOTA 2	96%
Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	96%
Apex Legends	96%
Among Us	95%
Minecraft	95%
League of Legends	95%
Madden NFL	94%
Clash Royale	94%
Overwatch	94%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	93%
Valorant	93%
Call of Duty	93%
PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds	92%
Other	90%

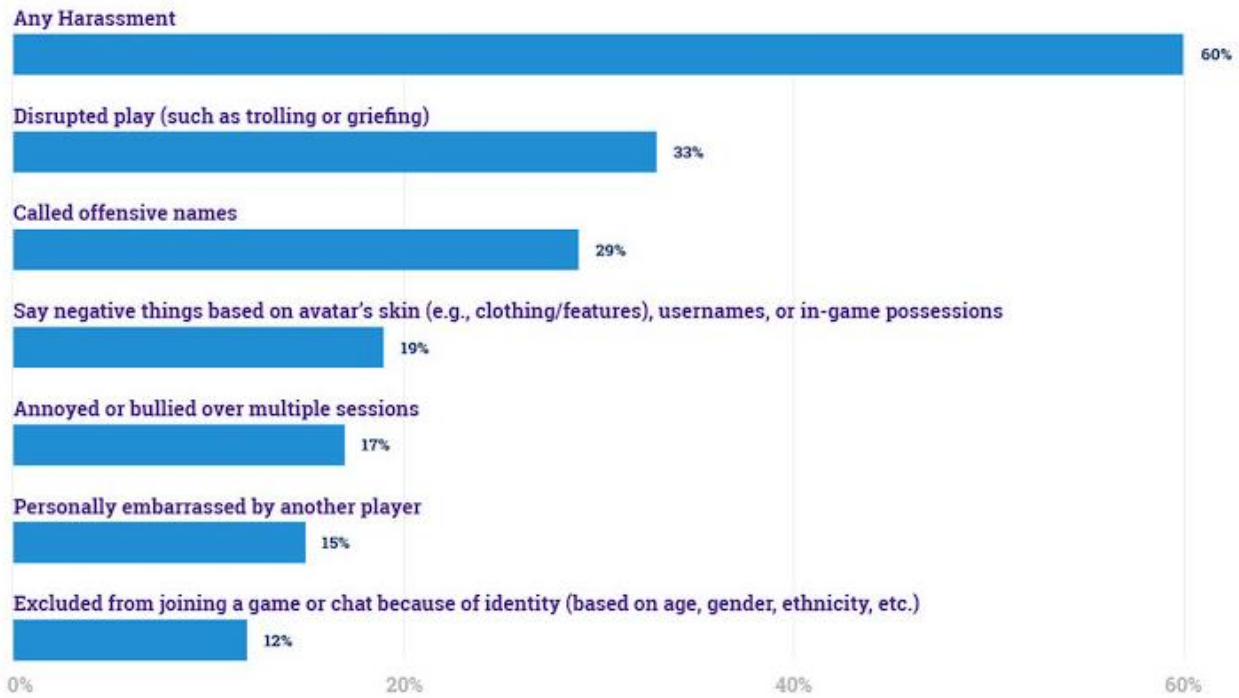
Source: *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021*



Harassment affects the majority of young people. Three in five young people experienced harassment in online multiplayer games—nearly 14 million young gamers.

Hate and Harassment in Games – Young People (13-17)

Q: How often, if ever, have you experienced the following forms of disruptive behavior in online multiplayer games in the last six months?



Source: *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021*



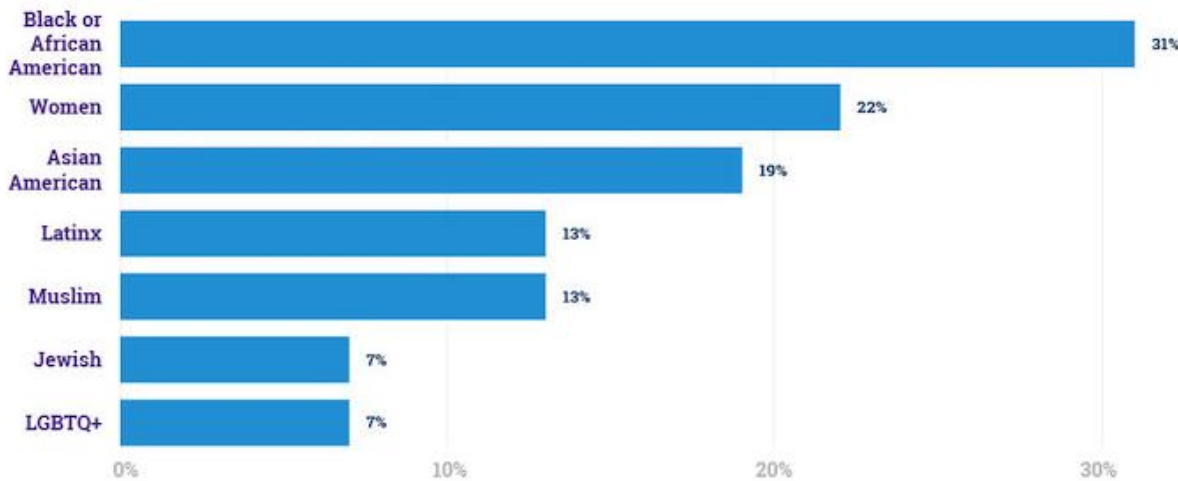
Hate and Harassment in Online Games

Identity-based harassment was a problem for young gamers who identified as Black or African American, women, and Asian American.

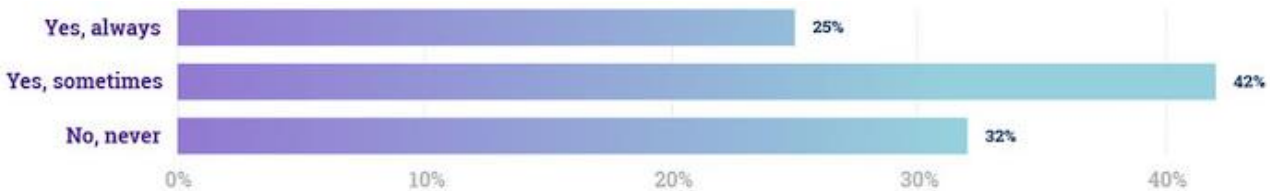
As a result of being targeted by hate in online games, 25% of young players said they always hide their identity when playing online while 42% said they sometimes hide their identity.

Harassment by Identity – Young People (13-17). Gamers who identify as Black or African American, women, or Asian American experienced significant identity-based harassment.

Percent of protected group who were harassed and indicate being harassed on the basis of that identity.



Do you hide your identity as a result of being targeted by hate in online games?



Source: *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021*



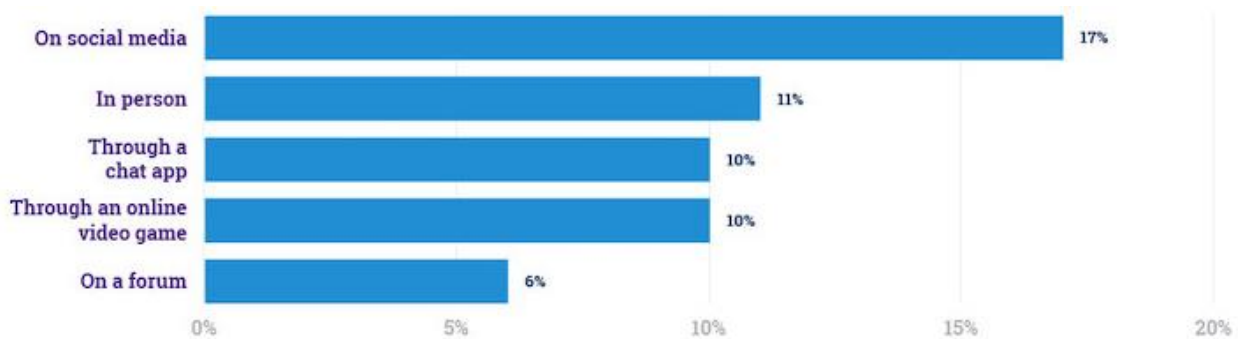
Exposure to Extremist White Supremacy

We asked young gamers about their exposure to extremist white supremacist ideologies in various contexts, including online multiplayer games. Specifically, we asked if they were exposed to people who “believe that white people are superior to people of other races and that white people should be in charge” after explaining to respondents the hateful, racist, and antisemitic nature of this ideology.

We found that one in ten young gamers were exposed to white supremacist ideologies in the context of online multiplayer games. The other results presented here pertain to young people 13-17 who play online games but encountered white supremacist ideologies in other contexts.

Exposure to Extremist White Supremacy in the Past Year – Young People (13-17)

Q: You mentioned that you have been exposed to white supremacist views in the past year. How were these views shared with you? Please select all that apply.



Source: *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021*

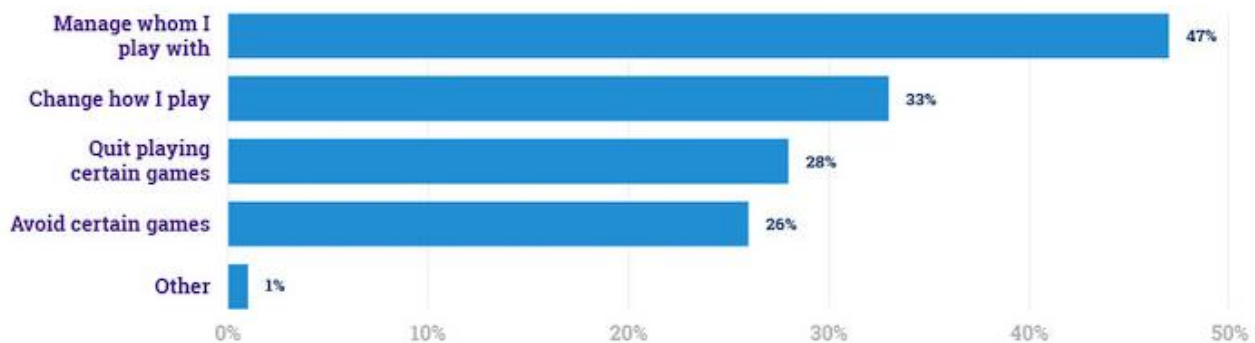


The Impact of Hate and Harassment

The harassment that young people experience in online multiplayer games affects their online and offline lives. Over a quarter of young gamers who experienced harassment in online multiplayer games quit specific games. A third of young gamers changed how they play, including not speaking in voice chat and altering their usernames. Voice chat is notorious for being a [significant locus of in-game abuse](#). A username that refers to a player's gender, race, or other identity characteristic also can serve as a target for harassment.

Disruptive Behavior and In-Game Experiences – Young People (13-17)

Q: Have your experiences of disruptive behavior influenced your online gaming experience in any of the following ways?



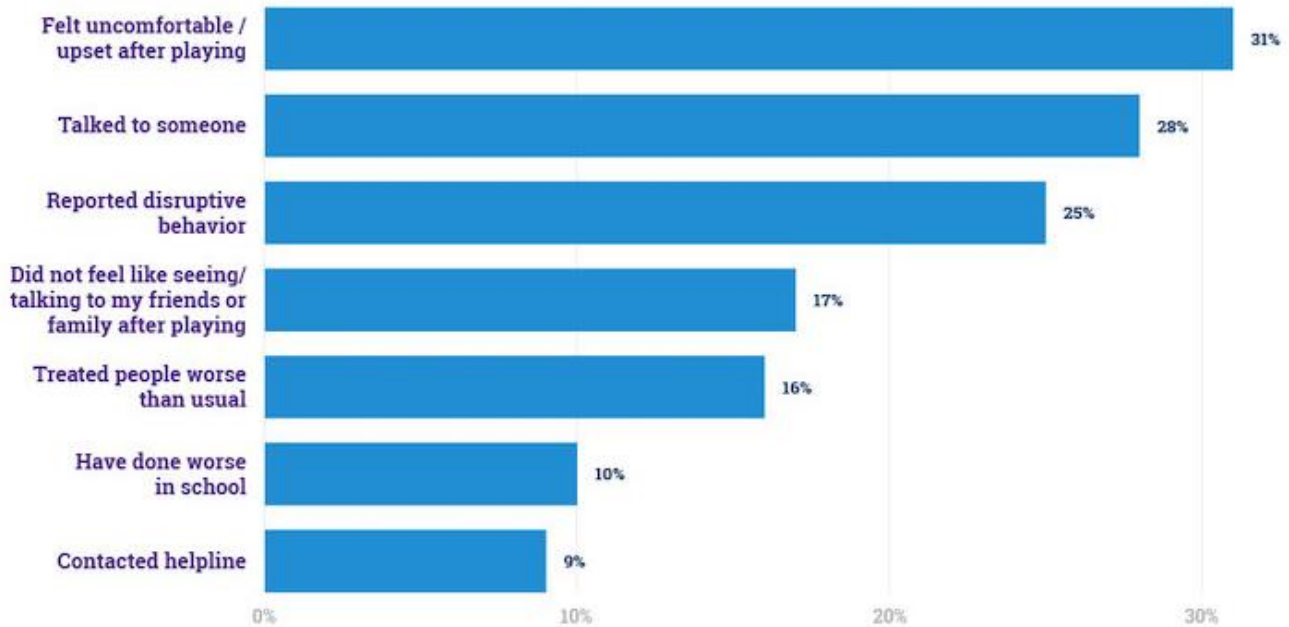
Source: *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021*



In-game harassment has offline consequences for young people. Sixteen percent of young gamers in the U.S. reported that they treated people worse than usual and 10 percent reported their school performance declined.

Impact on Offline Life – Young People (13-17).

Q: Have your experiences of disruptive behavior influenced your day-to-day life in any way?



Source: *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021*



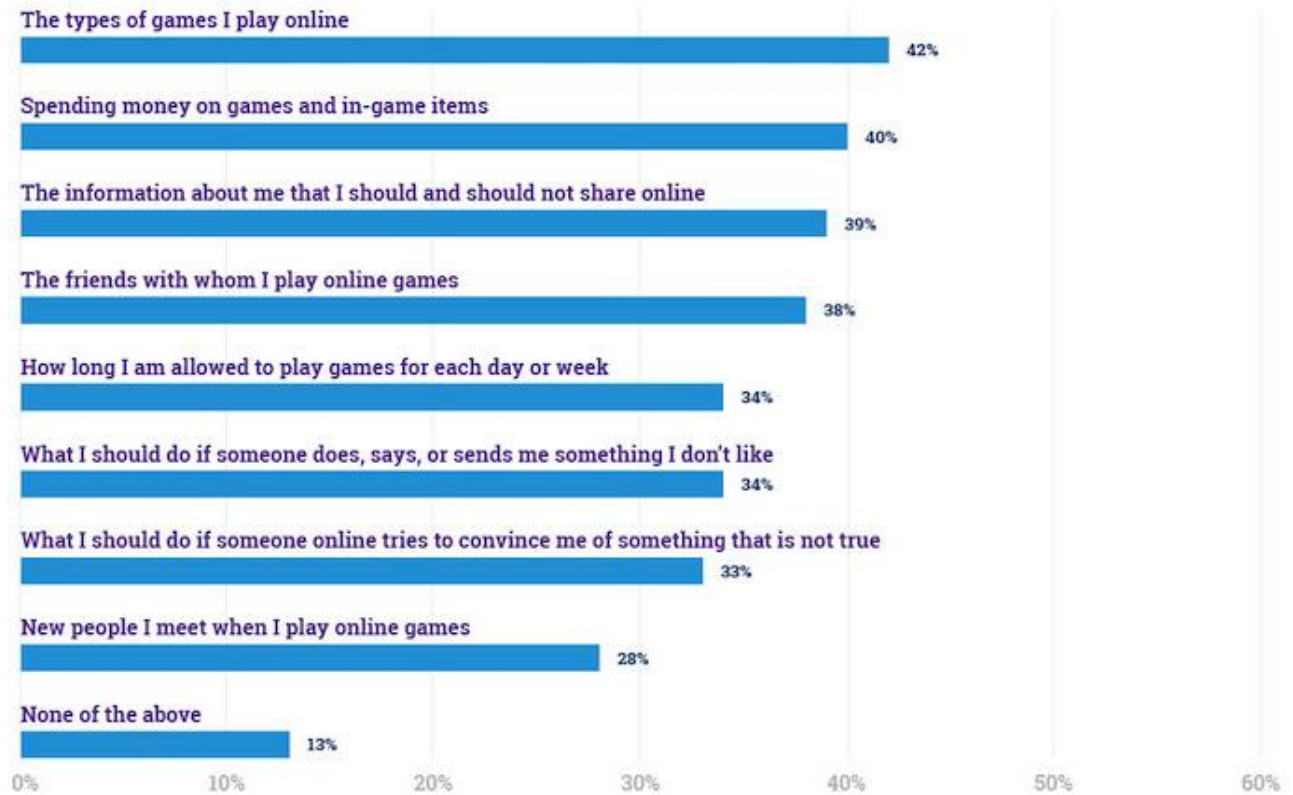
The Role of Adults in Young People’s Online Gaming Lives

We asked both young gamers and the adults (parents or guardians) in their lives about the kinds of conversations they have with each other regarding online multiplayer games. The most frequent topic teenage gamers reported discussing with adults was which games they play (42% of all teen gamers surveyed). Only 32% of the parents or guardians of the teenagers surveyed reported discussing how often the young people in their lives play with new people. The same percentage of these parents (32%) discussed whether the young people in their lives know how to report abuse.

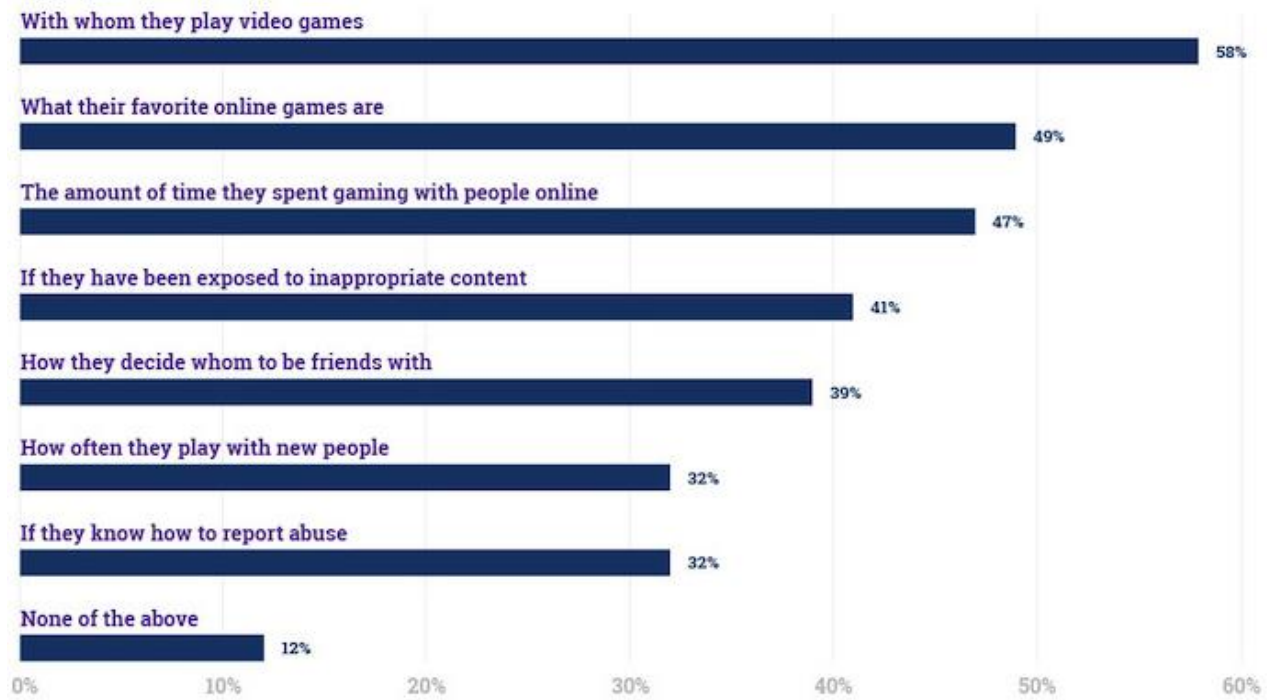
Topics Discussed Between Young Gamers and Adults

Q: Do you discuss the following topics regarding playing online games with the adults in your life (e.g., parents, coach, teacher, etc.)?

According to young people (13-17):



According to adults:



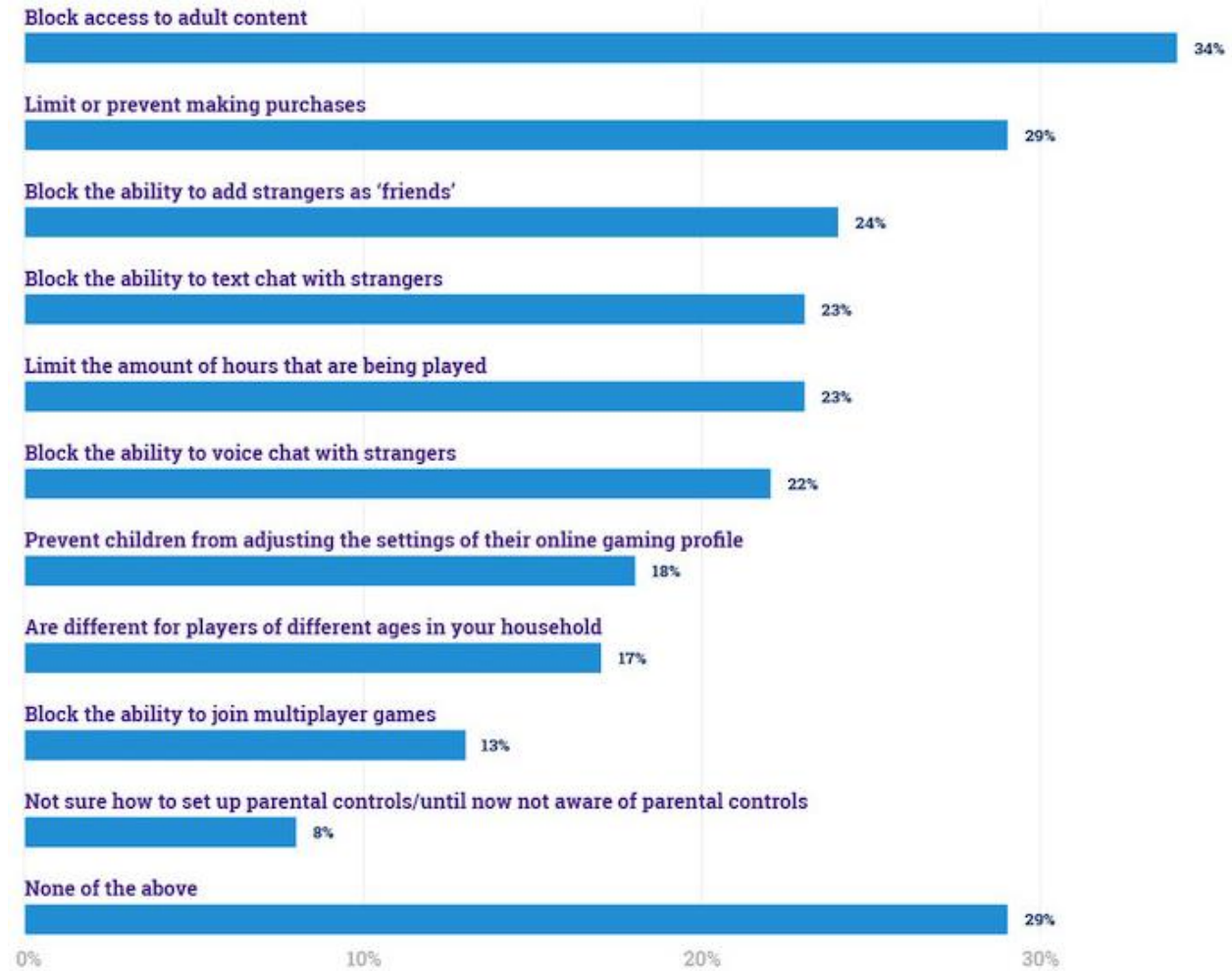
Source: *Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021*



We also asked about the safety controls parents or guardians put in place for young people in online games. Less than half of parents or guardians surveyed reported having implemented the safety controls in online multiplayer games that were analyzed in this survey.

How Adults Set Up Safety Controls for Young People

Q: Which of the following controls have you set up for your child/children? Please select all that apply.



Source: Hate is No Game: Harassment and Positive Social Experiences in Online Games 2021



ENDNOTES

¹ When we say players “experienced” hate, harassment, or positive social interactions, the time period at issue is within the past six months directly preceding the date on which they took our survey. Surveys were conducted from June 7 to June 25, 2021. Nor does our use of the past tense—“experienced”—mean these players are no longer targets. In fact, our findings show the opposite is likely true.

² Responses from young gamers first incorporate some answers from the adults in their lives. Then the adult allowed the minor respondent to answer the rest of the questions. The questions posed solely to adult respondents do not include questions about topics they discussed with gamers under age 18.

³ Defined as harassment that occurs over multiple game sessions or a longer period of time.

Action Ideas Worksheet

Constituency Group:

Group Members:

What tools, resources and/or power does this group have?

What action ideas does this group have to address online gaming hate and harassment?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

How will this group share the information and get the word out?