



Pokémon GO

age 13+ ★★★★★

Exciting, active game marred by privacy and safety issues.

Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android | Price: Free | Category: Adventure Games

What is Pokémon Go?

Pokémon Go is an app enabling users to create and name a character and partake in an augmented (blending holograms with the real world) mobile version of the Pokémon game made popular through Nintendo.

Once created the app uses Geo Location enabled through the phone to identify the users location. A map is then provided which shows nearby Pokémon (there are 151 different types which can evolve and some are rarer than others).

The basic premise of the game is to walk or ride towards the Pokémon in order to capture it and increase your game status. Capture is achieved by throwing a virtual ball on screen at the Pokémon, some of which are harder to catch than others. The distance from the Pokémon is shown in footsteps (1,2 or 3) and the footsteps will decrease as you walk towards the character, once in the right area the character pops up and an attempt can be made to catch it.



Pokémon are widespread and their location is an automated process so they could be found anywhere although popular spots do appear to have more. If you live in a small village or town you may need to travel to find a variety of Pokémon or Gyms.

Gyms

This is where players congregate to use their Pokémon's to fight the Gym leaders Pokémon's in order to improve fighting skills, status and to become the new leader. They will come across Gyms during their travels and a popular location for a Gym is around a church. If they have the necessary skill level and experience they can enter this virtual gym and take part in fights.

What parents and carers need to be aware of

- To play the game you need access to the internet and the game uses on average 6Mb of data for each hour of play. Depending on your child's data plan you may end up with quite a bill at the end of the month.
- Although the game is free to download, there are in-app purchases and other incentives which can cost up to £79.99 (14,500 Pokécoins). Make sure the app is set up without payment options.
- The game requires a large amount of power so drains the battery quickly
- Pokémon GO tracks you as you go: where and when you go, your route there, how long you stayed, and who else was playing in the same location. This data is also revealed to nearby players, including both children and adults.
- Its privacy policy indicates that user information -- including name, email, age, and location -- is collected; parents of children under 13 must confirm their child's account or contact the Pokémon Company International to refuse the company access to this information

There are 'real world' dangers and hazards associated with playing Pokémon Go

- The game is designed to bring people together, often strangers, so you never know who they might meet.
- Crossing roads becomes a real danger when looking for Pokémon, concentrating on your device rather than the approaching traffic.
- Colliding with other people and stationary objects like lamp posts is also a potential problem.
- The location of Pokémons could be on private property, businesses, government buildings where access is denied or unsafe areas and sites.
- In America where this game was first launched there have been stories of distracted players getting hurt and lost.
- Other players can create 'lures' to tempt children towards particular locations. This has led to children and young people being robbed in secluded areas. Also business owners have created lures to bring children and young people to their establishments, including adult Private Shops.

With any online interaction parents and carers need to be involved

- Talk to your child about the privacy and safety implications of a game like Pokémon GO. Discuss the best practices to play securely together: Keep the app updated, set up a separate email account just for gaming to avoid giving away all your personal information, don't use your real name, use a made-up display name, turn off location tracking when you're not playing, and avoid signing in through social media accounts.
- Talk about physical safety. It's great to get out in the world and be active, but it's not safe to walk, ride, or drive while looking at your phone. Also, your family rules about neighbourhood boundaries and keeping safe outside should apply. If the game directs you onto private property, don't go, and if a situation with other players feels uncomfortable or unsafe, leave immediately. Children should play with an adult or with friends so they're not wandering around alone.
- Talk about finding balance between using a screen and other activities. Though Pokémon GO is more active than some games and encourages interaction, it's still an on-screen experience and counts towards daily online activity.

Conclusion

As with any video game, young players will enjoy Pokémon GO more if parents play it with them. Being involved also does away with many of the concerns outlined above.

While the game can extend real-world dangers because of its public play scheme and lure features, parents and carers should take this opportunity to talk through the dangers with children before they play.

To find out more information about Pokémon Go or any other digital media and applications go to www.common sense media.org or the NSPCC's <https://www.net-aware.org.uk/>

The NSPCC also offer a free guide to keeping your child safe online by being Share Aware <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/advice-and-info/share-aware.pdf>

If we assess the risk we can reduce the harm

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