



ONLINE GAMING SAFETY FOR MINORS

For comments or questions, contact the West Virginia Intelligence / Fusion Center by phone at 304.558.4831 or e-mail at wvfusion@wv.gov.

The purpose of this snapshot is to highlight vulnerabilities associated with online games, which can be utilized to prey on minors. Online games, specifically those with location based services, have the ability to disclose user locations and IP addresses. Child predators and groomers have utilized platforms to lure minors into trafficking and solicit information. At this time, the West Virginia Intelligence/Fusion Center has no specific information indicating that youth in the State of West Virginia are being targeted for nefarious purposes; however, parents and/or legal guardians should exercise caution when their child participates in online gaming and be aware of the vulnerabilities associated with interactions within online communities.



Overview

Players who connect to online games through third-party servers or participate in games with location based services are at risk of exposing their location to other users. Exposed locations could be used to target minors in online communities.

- Users connecting to third-party servers can have their IP address accessible and viewable to other users.
- Location based games, such as mobile applications with location services enabled, can have their location disclosed.
- In-game chat functionality can be utilized to gather personal information and build a rapport with minors. Once a trust is formed, users often move conversations to other social networking platforms.
- Bonds formed with minors can result in inappropriate messages, webcam chats, and other communication outside of the typically moderated in-game chat.

Potential Target Vectors

Predators utilize different methods to obtain information from minors. Below are some methods; however, the list should not be considered exhaustive:

- Users can attempt to obtain location information from server connection history or direct from select games and applications if location services are shared with other users.
- Users can extort personal information from minors through in-game communication.
- Users can befriend minors in-game and move conversations to other platforms such as Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, and text messaging to obtain additional information.

Types of Victimization

- Human Trafficking
- Sexual Exploitation
- Harassment & Cyberbullying

Remediation Methods

Parents and legal guardians play an imperative role in averting predatory activity and in educating minors of warning signs. Parents are encouraged to consider the following remediation methods to fight against predatory behavior:

- Get involved with the activity by asking who they are playing and communicating with.
- For younger minors, enable parental controls to restrict access to specific in-game functionality.
- Advise minors not to give out personal information, photos, or videos to anyone online.
- Advise minors to not take conversations off the game to other social networks.

Common Games Using Location Services

- Ingress
- Pokémon GO
- Turf Wars

