

Microtransactions Parent Guide

A quick guide to what you need to know



What are microtransactions?

Microtransactions are **real payments for virtual items**, usually occurring in free-to-play games. These can either be purely **aesthetic** or help **improve in-game performance**.

Loot boxes – virtual treasure chests you **pay to open** in-game – are one of the most popular forms of microtransactions. Players don't know what is in the chest they purchase until after they open it.

What are the risks?

Microtransactions have been criticised for **promoting gambling behaviour in children**. Often the contents are aesthetic improvements, with **no real value for the game**, which encourages players to buy another box to try and get a particular item they want.

Many have **questioned the ethics** of this, as games relying on microtransactions are often **advertised to children** who are more susceptible to this kind of marketing.

Young children may **keep buying in order to keep up with friends** also playing, and may not be fully aware that they are paying **real money for items**.

Microtransactions pose a particular problem for games where it is very **hard to succeed without making additional payments**. For example, success in EA's Sports Fifa Ultimate Team (FUT) largely relies on spending in-game.

What else should I do?

Making the occasional in-game purchase is no bad thing. However, make sure that **your card details aren't saved** on the device your child is using to stop bills from racking up.

The recently released **Age Appropriate Design Code** goes some way to **protecting children from overspending on microtransactions**. The new code requires all games to no longer use '**nudging techniques**' – such as putting the 'purchase' button in overtly positive language or visuals.

Some **gaming companies** – for example Nintendo – have also started to **disclose the likelihood** of getting a high-value item from a loot box. Knowing the chance is very small should **stop children from spending too much**.

Make sure you continue to **talk to your child** about the concerns around in-game microtransactions. Encourage them to **think carefully** about what they spend money on, and help them identify when a game might be **manipulating them** into making a purchase.