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Poppy Playtime Online Safety Review

Online Safety Briefing

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Ineqe Safeguarding Group, 13 Edgewater Road, Belfast, BT3 9JQ, N. Ireland. I **Telephone** +44 (0) 2890 232 060 I **E-mail** enquiries@ineqe.com I www.ineqe.com

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WARNING: This contains images and details some people may find disturbing. This should not be shared with young children.

Our online safety experts have been alerted to a video game, being described by some users as an “introduction to horror.” Videos, versions of the game, and associated material are becoming increasingly popular on YouTube, Roblox, and other platforms used by young children.

Poppy Playtime features frightening images and themes that are paired with child-friendly items. This may be especially upsetting to children who have not yet developed the resilience to deal with disturbing content.

To help parents, carers, and safeguarding professionals better understand these issues, we’ve taken a deeper look at Poppy Playtime and the wider genre it belongs to.

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What is Poppy Playtime?

Poppy Playtime is a horror game made by a small independent team (MOB Games). It has similar themes to popular titles like Five Nights at Freddy's. The game is *scary by design* and plays on the feeling of being chased and the adrenaline caused by jump scares and feelings of intensity and uncertainty.

The game involves an unnamed protagonist investigating a mystery in an abandoned toy factory. The player must roam around the factory and collect VHS tapes around the factory to construct the story around that happened and find the 'flower entrance'.

The player must complete puzzles around the factory all while being followed by the factory's mascot "Huggy Wuggy" - a giant, furry creature with bulging eyes and wide red lips.

Huggy Wuggy appears in the dark unexpectedly and aims to catch the player. The player can't get caught or Huggy Wuggy bears his wide and sinister grin to grab and "eat" the player.

Image Source: © 2021 ENCHANTEDMOB, INC.

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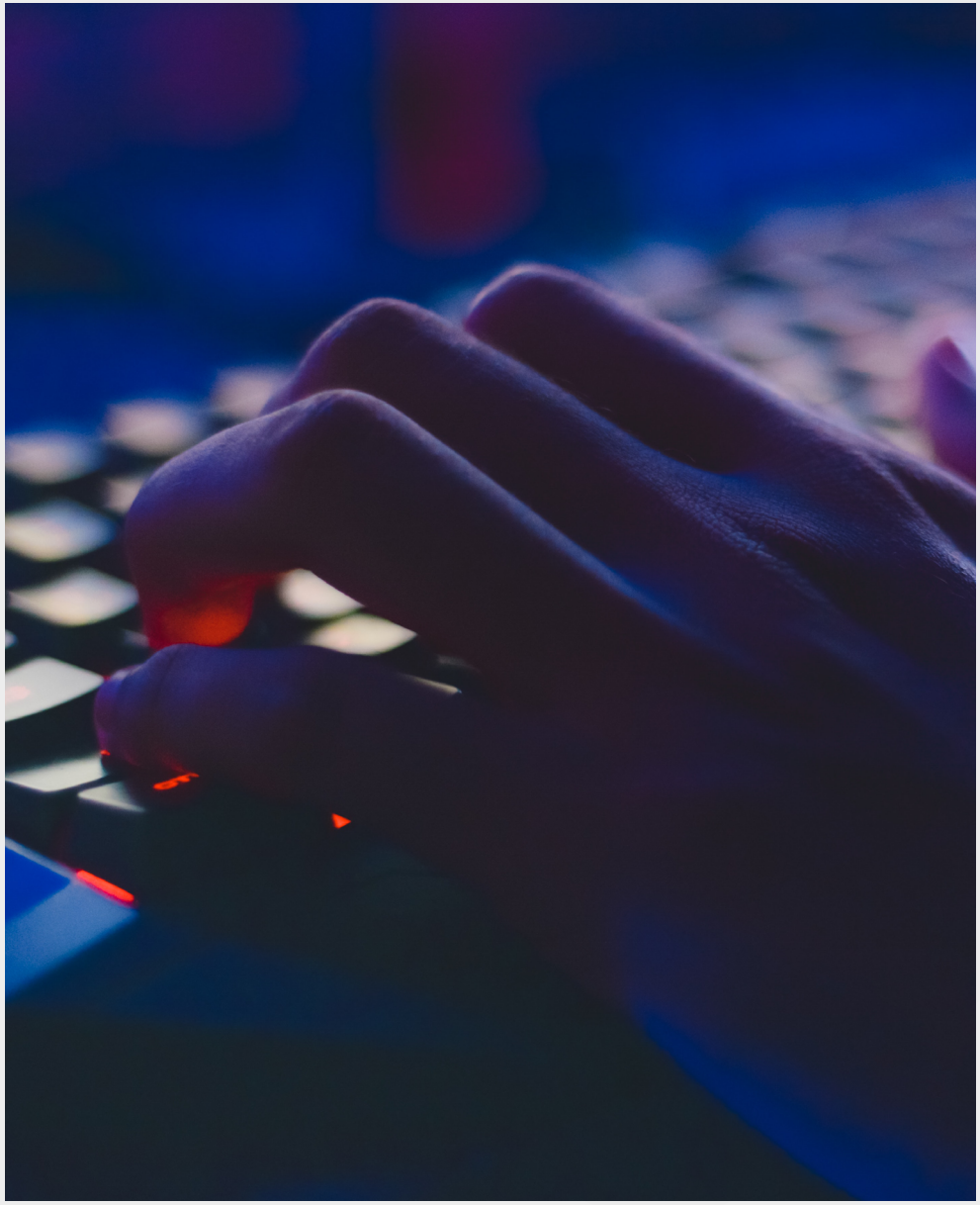
Why are these Games Appealing?

Games in this genre are vast in quantity and their appeal comes from the feeling of being chased and the constant uncertainty. The in-game puzzles and mysteries give the player a purpose to try and reach their end goal.

Poppy Playtime isn't gory by nature. Our online safety experts have been alerted to the game, which has been described by players as an introduction to the horror genre. The appeal for children comes from watching others play and the collective sense of anxiety and expectation.

The characters have scary features, and the games toy-centred setting can give the game a *"false sense of innocence"* before introducing a threat.



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Where can Children access this Content?

- The game is available on PC through **Steam** for £3.99. Only 'Chapter 1' is available currently, but Chapter 2 has been announced for 2022. There is an added buzz around the game since it's released in an episodic manner which makes the game reach further with the build up of anticipation.

- Children can access endless amounts of spin-offs of Poppy Playtime on phones, tablets, PC,and through fan creations on Minecraft and Roblox.

- The game is being promoted by the developers on Twitter and YouTube. Many content creators (like DanTDM who generally stream Minecraft) are streaming playthroughs of the game on Twitch and YouTube. Various videos of gameplay have been uploaded to YouTube.

When our online safety experts searched for "Poppy Playtime" with **Google SafeSearch and YouTube Restricted Mode turned on**, the exact same top results came up **when turned off**.

Posts relating to Poppy Playtime can be found across Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok.

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Risks

- The game uses child friendly items like toys and turns them into a threat. Words like “toy factory” and the character names (e.g “Huggy Wuggy”) can give children a false sense of security which is then exploited.

- Children might experience changes in sleeping patterns such as disturbances and nightmares due to the feelings the game produces.

- The constant adrenaline produced can create lasting feelings of anxiety.

- Children may display new fears, such as fear of the dark or fear of being alone.

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Red Flags to look out for in your Children

Content like this can scare children and affect their behaviour, especially if they're younger or have never been introduced to horror before. Being introduced to content with gory or scary themes before they have built resilience can result in a negative reaction.

Below are some red flags to be aware of:

- Finding it hard to focus or concentrate
- Appearing withdrawn
- Changes in appetite
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Appearing suddenly angry, irritable, or teary
- Constant worry or anxiety, appearing fidgety or unable to relax
- Sudden appearance of new fears that weren't present before

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Tell the children in your care that if they come across something scary or disturbing online that they should:

1. Stop

Immediately stop what they're doing and turn off their screen or shut down their device.

2. Breathe

Pause and try and stay calm.

3. Think

Try not to focus on what they saw in detail.

4. Talk

Find a **trusted adult** to talk to about what they've seen and how they feel.

5. Reassure

Reassure your child that they are not in trouble.

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Advice

- Enable features like '**Family View**' on Steam – this allows you to establish rules on the content your child has access to, blacklist games, and place a pin on features like the Store or purchasing. Access our **safety centre** for tips on enabling features like Family Sharing on iOS and Parental Controls and on disabling in-app purchases on Android or iOS.

- Encourage open, honest, and non-judgmental conversations into your everyday routine. Explain to the children in your care that they can ask you questions about anything they come across or are unsure of online.

- Ask the children in your care about the content they are watching online and if they have ever felt upset or scared about content they've seen.

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Advice

- Use our **Trusted Adult Resources** to teach young people about the importance of seeking help if something worries or upsets them.

- If your child is having nightmares or anxiety about something they've watched, it's important to have a conversation about their feelings. You can use our **emotions journal** to help your child express complex emotions.

Another technique involves a '**let it go box**' where children write down what's worrying them or frightening them and place it in a box. This helps create distance between them and their worry/fear.

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Useful Links

Childline Toolbox

Go to Website

Handling Harmful Content

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Ineqe Safeguarding Group
+44 (0) 2890 232 060
enquiries@ineqe.com
ineqe.com
@ineqegroup

Safer Schools
+44 (0) 2896 005 777
saferschools@ineqe.com
oursaferschools.co.uk
@oursaferschools

Safer Schools NI
+44 (0) 2896 005 777
saferschoolsni@ineqe.com
saferschoolsni.co.uk
@saferschoolsni

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