

POPPY PLAYTIME

We 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.

What is a “horror game”?

A horror game is a type of video game that puts the player in the middle of scenarios designed to frighten them. These games typically revolve around the player trying to solve mysteries while being chased or hunted by monstrous characters. Popular examples are Slender Man and Five Nights at Freddy’s.

Why are these games appealing?

- **The thrill of danger** – Similar to watching horror films, children and young people can say they were brave enough to play (or watch someone else play) the game and survive to the end. This can inspire a game of “chicken” in which others can feel a compulsive need to show they are not a coward.
- **A sense of community** – Groups of friends may play collectively to see who can survive the longest or solve the mystery first. There is also a high-level of community involvement around games, which can make someone feel like they are a part of something if they are isolated or lonely.
- **Sense of urgency** – The heightened anxiety that comes with playing horror games, like the feeling of being chased, makes players want to solve the mystery of the game that much faster. The scarier the character or threat, the more satisfying it is to complete.
- **Breaking the rules** – If young children or teenagers feel they shouldn’t play or watch something, chances are they will want to do it even more. They may also feel peer pressured to take part in something they would never seek out on their own time if all their friends are doing it.

What is Poppy Playtime?

The game involves an unnamed protagonist investigating a mystery in an abandoned toy factory. As the player, you roam around the factory and collect VHS tapes to solve the mystery of what happened. You must solve puzzles while trying to survive the “vengeful toys” left behind. The factory’s most popular toy “Huggy Wuggy” – a giant, horrifying blue creature with bulging eyes, wide red lips, and long limbs – actively follows you around as you try to complete the game. He appears in the dark unexpectedly to try and catch you. If you get caught, Huggy Wuggy bears his wide and sinister grin and eats you. Players complete Chapter 1 by finding Poppy the doll.

Where can children access it?

Poppy Playtime is available on PC through Steam for £3.99. Only Chapter 1 is available currently, but Chapter 2 has been announced for 2022.

Despite this game only being available on PC, there are multiple copycat versions of it for children to download and play on **Roblox**, **Minecraft**, and all app stores. It's important to note that none of these games are age-restricted. Poppy Playtime is also a part of the streaming phenomenon on **YouTube**, with popular YouTubers recording themselves playing the game and reacting to it. While the playthrough videos are not available on YouTube Kids, there are lots of videos with associated content specifically for children that would encourage them to seek out the source. It's important to note that while children may not have played Poppy Playtime themselves, they may have watched a video of someone else playing it.

What are the risks?

- Added anxiety and stress – Children and young people are still growing and learning. They may not be at a level of emotional maturity that would be able to process frightening content, even if it is intentional. Horror games could hamper that growth by creating unnecessary anxiety and stress.
- Intrusive thoughts – Everyone has the 'thing that goes bump in the night.' If children play this game or watch it, the Boogeyman could easily be replaced with characters like Huggy Wuggy. This could cause children to lose focus or sleep and could interrupt family rest cycles.
- New fears – The manipulation of child-friendly items into threatening characters exploits the sense of security a child would feel around these things. They may suddenly be terrified of something that had never been a worry before.

What to look out for

Every child is different. Some may genuinely enjoy the horror genre and not struggle with any lasting feelings of fear or panic because of playing a game. However, if it causes a child to be stressed or anxious, they may:

- Find it hard to focus or concentrate
- Appear withdrawn
- Have a change in appetite
- Experience sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Appear suddenly angry, irritable, or teary
- Be worried or anxious, which can physically manifest in fidgeting
- Have new fears

If the child in your care comes across something scary or disturbing online, they should:

Stop what they are doing and turn off their screen/switch off device

Pause to take a breath and try to stay calm

Think about something else that makes them happy

Talk to a trusted adult about what they saw and how it made them feel



Top Tips for helping the child or young person in your care

- Reassure your child that they are safe. It's important your child knows they can come and speak to you without fear of judgement. If necessary, ask them to show you the video or game, and follow appropriate reporting procedures if you are concerned.
- Ask them about the content they are watching online, and if anything they've seen has ever made them or their friends upset or scared.
- If your child is having nightmares or is anxious about something they've watched, it's important to have a conversation about expressing their feelings.
- Set up Parental Controls. Our IT Technician can help with this should you need it.
- Supervise "Internet Time" to make sure they are not accessing anything inappropriate.
- If you are especially worried please contact the school and we can help.