

# Parent's Quick Guide To Video Games - Minecraft



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What you need to know to connect with your gamer through Minecraft

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## Introduction

Video games are everywhere. According to a research study conducted in 2008, “97% of teens ages 12-17 play computer, web, portable, or console games.”<sup>1</sup> If you have a teenager, chances are, she is playing video games. And if she is playing video games, she is probably playing Minecraft.

Minecraft has exploded over the last few years. According to Mojang's Patrick Geuder Saga, it has sold over 54 million copies!<sup>2</sup> That makes it the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest selling video game of all time, behind only Wii Sports (82.54 million copies) and Tetris (143 million copies)<sup>3</sup>.

What makes Minecraft so popular? Why are so many players hooked on it? And what does it mean for you as a parent? How can you engage with your gamer through Minecraft?

Growing up, my siblings and I played sports, specifically soccer and basketball. Sports were something we all enjoyed. My dad, however, never had the chance to play as a kid. He got really sick when he was young, which kept him from participating in sports.

There came a point, though, when he decided he needed to understand these sports better since they were such a big part of our family. And what better way to understand them than to play?

So that is what he did. He signed up for a basketball team and a soccer team. I still remember the one basket he made that season. It was near the end of the game. He got the ball at half-court, turned around, and heaved it towards the basket. Unbelievably, it went in! It was the only 3 points of his short career but, man, was it memorable!

I cannot tell you how much I appreciated his willingness to get outside his comfort zone to better understand something I love. It spoke volumes of his love for me. It also gave him credibility in that area of my life.

My goal through this book is to help you achieve the same thing with your gamer. I do not want to just give you information, although there will be information o-plenty. I want to give you the tools you need to connect with your gamer's heart.

Does this mean you have to play Minecraft? Not at all. I understand not everyone is going to want, or be able, to play. My daughter loves

gymnastics. As a 36 year-old, out-of-shape man, I am not able to actively participate in gymnastics. I have to figure out other ways to connect with her through it, like talking to her about it or watching the Olympics with her.

In this book, I will be walking you through different ways you can use Minecraft to connect with your gamer. I will start out with a brief description of what it is, including what makes it so appealing.

Next I will give you tips on how to use Minecraft to connect with your gamer. This starts with having a conversation with her. From there, you can let her show off her Minecraft creations and then potentially jump in and play with her.

Then I will dig deeper into the specifics of the game. I will go more in depth about how to actually play it. If you do not know much about video games, this section may be intimidating. Do not let it frustrate you. If it is too much, skip it. You can always come back to it later if your conversations with your gamer pique your interest.

Finally, I will talk about any concerns you should have about Minecraft. This includes dealing with the multiplayer component and setting time limits.

One thing you may have noticed is my use of the pronoun “she” when referring to your teenager. Throughout this book I will be shifting between “he” and “she”. I do this for a couple of reasons.

1. It is easier to refer to your gamer in the singular. Using “they” can be unwieldy and confusing.
2. I want to be clear that this book is for you even if your gamer is a girl. The stereotypical gamer is male. In reality, as many girls play video games as do boys.

So let’s jump in with the first, most obvious question. What is Minecraft?

## What Is Minecraft?

If you have seen Minecraft, you might be asking yourself what the big deal is. It is not your typical best-selling, big budget game. It does not have cutting edge graphics, a gripping story, or amazing physics. Its gameplay seems pretty simplistic (gather resources, then build stuff). At first glance, it does not seem like it should be the third highest selling video game of all time.



*Definitely not the most realistic looking pigs*

Why is it so popular? What sets it apart from all the other games out there?

Minecraft, for all intents and purposes, is a huge, virtual LEGO® box. The player collects materials throughout the world, which he then uses to build or craft things. These things can range from simple things like a stick to hugely complex things like an entire city. The only limiting factor is the player's imagination and time.

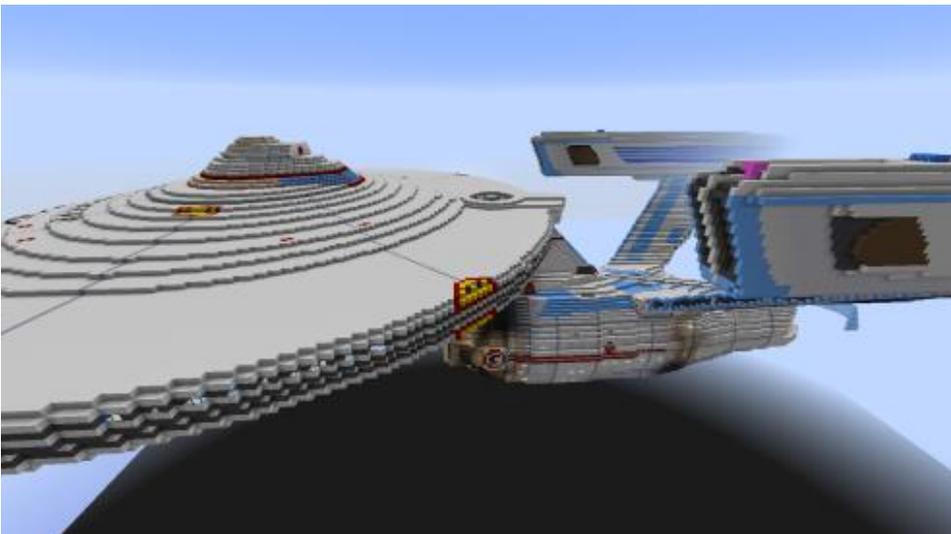
The thing that makes Minecraft so appealing is the freedom it gives the player to express his creativity. If he can dream it up, he can probably build it. And once he has built it, he can show it off to his friends.

## Crazy Creations

Here are some of the crazy creations players have built in Minecraft.



[Game of Thrones](#) – There is a group working to, “recreate the universe imagined by author George RR Martin in his book series A Song of Ice and Fire (ASoIaF) as accurately and precisely as possible within the confines of Minecraft”. They have hundreds of volunteers that have worked for months on this build. It is a truly amazing site to see.



[Starship Enterprise](#) – halnicholas on YouTube posted an amazing video of a 1:1 scale model of the Starship Enterprise from Star Trek in Minecraft. This thing is huge! I could not even fit it all in to take a full screen shot.



[A full scale model of a bedroom](#) – CGMiller created a “1 block = 1 inch” model of his own bedroom. It includes detail down to the vents and the wires from the wall to the computer.

## Fueled By Inspiration

Minecraft’s popularity can be attributed to the inspiration a gamer gets from seeing other people’s creations. He sees what someone built and thinks, “I could do that!” or, “That gives me a great idea!”

I would bet money your gamer’s first exposure to Minecraft was through seeing or hearing about someone’s build. It might have been something amazing like the builds above. Or it might have been something as simple as his friends talking about their builds.

Whatever his first exposure was, he started thinking about what he could build.

Recently, I was talking to a friend about Minecraft with his elementary aged daughter standing close by. I was explaining to him how players can build just about anything they can imagine. She piped up and said, “I’m building the castle from Frozen!”

That is why Minecraft is so huge. Your gamer can see something that inspires him, build it, and then play with it. He has complete freedom and control.

Minecraft is a great tool for connecting with your gamer. It allows you to

tap into his passion. Let's look at how to do this.

# How Can You Connect Through Minecraft?

Now that you know a little bit about Minecraft, let's ask the question. How can you use it to connect with your gamer?

## Starting the conversation

The first, and easiest, way is to ask him questions about what he is doing in it. Gamers love to talk about their experiences. There is just something great about sharing stories. You can use this to your advantage by asking him about his experiences in Minecraft.

Here are some questions to help get the conversation started.

- **What inspired you to play?** As I mentioned earlier, your gamer was probably inspired to start playing Minecraft by a build she saw or heard about. This is a great starting point for the conversation.

**Follow-up questions** – What about it was inspiring? Where did you hear about it?

- **What are you building right now?** If your gamer is playing Minecraft, she probably has something she is building. She might be recreating the castle from Frozen like my friend's daughter or designing a huge piece of art. Whatever it is, she will probably enjoy talking about it.

**Follow-up questions** – How far along are you? How long have you been working on it? What has been the hardest part of building it?

- **What is the coolest thing you have built?** She probably has at least one big build she is really proud of. This question will give her a chance to show off and you the chance to praise her.

**Follow-up questions** – How long did it take you to build? Where did you get the idea? Why are you most proud of it?

- **What is the coolest thing you have seen?** You might start out with, "Hey I saw this amazing recreation of the Starship Enterprise in Minecraft. What do you think about it? What other cool things have you seen?" This will show your gamer that you are paying attention.

**Follow-up questions** – What is so cool about it? Do you think you could duplicate it? Why/why not?

## Letting Your Gamer Show Off

The next step after talking with your gamer about Minecraft is letting him show it to you. You can suggest this as you are having the conversation with him. After he has told you some about what he is building, ask him to see it.

Minecraft players love to show off what they built. This is one of the reasons it is so huge. A player creates something amazing (like the things I showed you earlier) then uploads either pictures or a YouTube video of it. This inspires other players to create something of their own. Your gamer will take pride in his creations and be excited to show and explain them to you.

## How Playing Builds the Connection

As I mentioned earlier, you do not have to actually play Minecraft to use it to connect with your gamer. Having the conversations and letting your gamer show off are great tools to show him that you are interested in what he is doing. That being said, I do want to take a minute to explain how playing Minecraft with your gamer offers such a great opportunity to connect.

Interactivity.

Unlike other types of media, video games are not something you passively experience. They are something you actively do.

I am a San Antonio Spurs fan. In 2014 they became the NBA champions by beating the Miami Heat in the finals. It was fun to watch because they did not just beat the Heat, they took it to them.

As a fan, I feel very good about that series. I enjoyed watching it. I enjoy talking about it. I experienced it with them.

Do you think my experience was different than that of Tim Duncan, Tony Parker, or Manu Ginóbili? Definitely! While I passively experienced it from my couch, they **did** it. They were the ones out there on the court making the shots and playing defense. They have a depth of experience I can never

duplicate.

It is the same with video games. While you can talk about the amazing things you saw in a movie, you get to talk about the amazing things you **did** in a video game.

Playing with your gamer gives you the opportunity to talk about the things you did **together**. The players on the 2013-2014 San Antonio Spurs have a bond like no other because they won that championship together. You can build similar bonds with your gamer by playing with him.

Minecraft is a great game for this. In a lot of games, you are playing through the experience the developer created for you. Minecraft allows you complete freedom to create the experiences yourself. You and your gamer can dream up whatever you want and then make it a reality in the game. You are playing **and** creating together. It doesn't get much better than that.

## Minecon

Before I get into the specifics of how to play Minecraft, I want to mention one more way to connect with your gamer through it. Minecon is an annual convention held by Mojang, the company that developed Minecraft. It includes events like speeches from the developers and costume contests. The 2013 version took place in Orlando, FL from November 2-3.

A convention like this is definitely a unique experience. It gives you an opportunity to purposefully get away with your gamer. You can give him an experience that incorporates something he loves. A trip to Minecon would earn you major brownie points.

The one big downside to Minecon, however, is its location. The 2013 version was held in the U.S., which made it tough for Europeans to attend. Mojang has confirmed the 2014 edition will be in Europe, which turns the tables.

At this point, it looks like Mojang is trying to alternate the location of Minecon to make sure players all over the world get a chance to attend. So, if you cannot make it this year because it is too far, you may be able to next year.

## Playing Minecraft

Now that we've looked at the different ways you can connect with your gamer through Minecraft, let's look more in depth at how to play. This will give you a greater understanding of the game as you are having the conversations with your gamer, and will also help you overcome some insecurities you might have, should you decide to jump in and play with your gamer.

I want to emphasize that this is a **brief** overview. This is just enough so that you will not be going in completely blind. Beyond this overview, my advice is simple. If you have a question about how to do something in the game, **ask your gamer**. He will be able to answer your question.

As I mentioned before, Minecraft is like a big, virtual LEGO® box. It is a great example of the "open-world, sandbox" genre.

### **Definition: Open-World, Sandbox Game**

A game that gives the player freedom to choose where to go and what to do.

There may be a main storyline but the player is free to ignore it. In Minecraft, the player has complete freedom. In survival mode, the only objective is to survive. In creative mode, there are no objectives

The two main gameplay elements are right there in the name, mining and crafting.

The player first "mines" for materials, which includes chopping down trees for wood, killing animals for meat and wool, and mining stone.

Once he has materials, he can begin crafting items. Items are crafted by combining different materials. For example, combining two sticks and three cobblestone blocks will create either a stone pickaxe or a stone axe depending on the configuration. The pickaxe makes mining faster while the axe makes chopping down trees faster.



*An axe for chopping down trees and a pickaxe for mining stone*

The other thing he can do with the materials he mines is place them as blocks in the world. This allows him to build structures, such as houses and castles.

The method for obtaining materials depends on the mode of the game the player is playing. The two modes are Survival and Creative.

## Survival Mode

In survival mode, Minecraft drops the empty-handed player into a randomly generated world.



*Entering the world broke and alone*

The player has complete freedom from here to decide where to go and what to do. The main goal is to survive.

You will notice two distinct meters in the screenshot above. The health bar

is on the left and the hunger bar is on the right.



### *Health and hunger bars*

The player can lose health from things like falling or being struck by hostile mobs. When her health bar is completely depleted, she dies, dropping everything she is carrying. She will have to come back to the same spot to get her stuff back after she comes back to life.

The hunger meter depletes as the player performs actions, such as chopping down trees, mining stone, or sprinting. This meter has a few effects.

1. **90% full or better** – The player’s health will regenerate at a rate of 1 point every 4 seconds.
2. **30% or less** – The player will not be able to sprint. This makes escaping from hostile mobs more difficult.
3. **0%** - The player will begin to starve. This will cause her to lose 1 point of health every 4 seconds. It also makes sleeping impossible. The maximum amount of health the player can lose to starvation depends on the difficulty chosen, from half on easy all the way down to death on hard.

The player regenerates her hunger meter by eating. The food she can eat includes things she collects, like meat from mobs or fruit from trees, as well as things she creates, like a cake or stew.

### **Definition: Mob**

A mob is a computer controlled character in the game. There are 6 types of mobs in Minecraft.

1. **Passive** – Will never attack the player. These include chickens, pigs, cows, and sheep.
2. **Neutral** – Will only attack the player when provoked. These include spiders and wolves
3. **Tameable** – Can be tamed. These include horses and cats.
4. **Hostile** – Will attack the player when in range. These include Creepers, zombies, and Skeletons
5. **Utility** – Mobs created by the player. These mobs will serve the player by attacking hostile mobs.

6. **Boss** – Hardest hostile mobs in the game. They require the most work to kill but also drop loot that cannot be found any other way. The two bosses currently in the game are Wither (PC version) and the Ender Dragon.

Some of the hostile mobs in Minecraft only spawn in dark areas. The player might encounter them if she digs into a cave or finds a hole that burrows into a mountain. However, she also needs to be aware of the time of day.

The world in Minecraft has a distinct day/night cycle. At night, the whole world is covered in darkness. So the mobs that only spawn in dark areas will spawn anywhere at night.

This makes it imperative that the player construct a shelter during her first day. She will be pretty defenseless on that first night. Building a shelter will allow her to survive while also being able to craft items.

### The Creeps Come Out At Night

Here are some of the hostile mobs that spawn at night.

|   |   |
|---|---|
|    | <p><b>Creeper</b> – This is the most famous Minecraft mob. He has a suicide attack that causes damage to anything within a short radius. He is dangerous because he moves almost silently, giving a brief warning sound of about one second before exploding.</p> |
|  | <p><b>Skeleton</b> – The skeleton can be a real pain early in the game. He shoots arrows at you from a distance, which makes it very hard to get close enough to kill him without a bow and arrow yourself.</p>   |
|  | <p><b>Zombie</b> – The zombie is the most basic hostile mob. He is much easier to avoid than creepers or skeletons because he makes noise and only has a melee attack.</p>  |

### Creative Mode

Creative mode differs from Survival in a few ways.

1. **The player does not have to worry about dying.** Creative mode does not include the health and hunger bars. The only way he can die is to issue the “kill” command or dig all the way through the bottom of the

map.

2. **The player has access to all the available building materials without having to mine.** This allows him to jump straight into building without having to hunt down and mine the materials he needs.
3. **The player can fly.** This allows the player to build things much more quickly. It can be difficult to build tall structures in Survival mode because the player must be able to see the top of the structure to place another block on it. This is a non-issue in creative mode because the player can fly.
4. **Hostile monsters still spawn but will not attack the player.**

Creative mode is designed to give the player complete freedom to build anything he wants. This is where Minecraft most resembles a virtual LEGO® box. The only limiting factor is the player's imagination.

If you decide to play, you will probably want to start in creative mode as it will give you the ability to figure out the controls and mechanics of the game without having to worry about a monster killing you.

## Should You Be Concerned?

Now that you have an understanding of what Minecraft is and how to use it to connect with your gamer, I want to answer this question. Is there anything in Minecraft that should concern you?

The ESRB rated the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 versions of Minecraft an E10+ with a descriptor of “Fantasy Violence”<sup>4</sup>. This is the equivalent of a PG movie rating. The other versions (Computer, iOS, Android) are not rated but have similar content.

The “Fantasy Violence” in Minecraft is very tame. The player can walk up to the creatures and hit them with different objects, such as his hands, a shovel, or a sword. Some will hit the player back. There is no blood. The creature will fall over and disappear when it dies.

There is one thing to be aware of if you have small children. As previously mentioned, the monsters in the game show up in dark places. This means at night, they show up everywhere. This can make for some intense moments, especially early in the game before the player has gathered much of the material for his build. It can be scary for a younger player, especially if an [Enderman](#) attacks him.

Beyond the content, you should know about two other features in Minecraft.

1. **Multiplayer** – Minecraft allows many people to play together in the same world, allowing them to collaborate on builds. The player can chat with the other players in that world.
2. **Downloaded Maps** – Minecraft also allows players to share maps. This is a great way for players to share their creations. However, there are some of those creations you might not want your gamer to see.

It is important to set up house rules for both of these situations. For example, if you have a young gamer, you might not want to let him play multiplayer at all. For older gamers, you might want to set up your own server that he can play on with his friends.

## Handling Minecraft’s Multiplayer

The Minecraft multiplayer component allows players to connect to the same world and play together. This is a great way for your gamer to hang

out with his friends and potentially make new ones. However, you need to take the same precautions with Minecraft as you would with any other online system.

There are two issues you need to be aware of with Minecraft's multiplayer.

1. **It includes a chat feature.** Your gamer will be able to chat with anyone in the same world. For the most part, this is a good thing. However, you will not have any control over the people he chats with on a public server. Some of the servers filter swear words but your gamer could still potentially encounter verbal harassment.
2. **Players can build anything they want.** Your gamer could potentially encounter a creation you would rather him not see. Again, for the most part this will not be an issue. But you need to be aware of the possibility.

The method your gamer uses to play multiplayer will depend on the version he is playing.

- **Pocket Edition (phones and tablets)** – There are only 2 official ways to play multiplayer with the Pocket Edition of Minecraft.
  1. **Local server** – There is an option in the settings menu to allow local multiplayer. This allows anyone connected to the same Wi-Fi network to connect to the world. Your gamer and his friends have to be in the same physical place to play this way.
  2. **Realms** – Realms is Mojang's official server system. I will go into a more in-depth explanation of Realms in the following section. As of this writing, Realms for the Pocket edition is still in the testing phase and is available only if you have an invitation.  
There are also some unofficial apps that allow the Pocket edition to connect to multiplayer servers. Among these are [Multiplayer for Minecraft PE](#) and [Server List for Minecraft PE](#).
- **Console Version (Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3)** – The console versions of Minecraft allow two forms of multiplayer.
  1. **Local split-screen** – Up to 4 players can play on the same HD-TV at the same time. Obviously this requires everyone to be in the same room at the same time. This is a great way to allow your gamer to

play with his friends and still keep an eye on him.

**2. Online with friends** – You gamer can connect directly to anyone on his friends list who is running Minecraft. His friend must have Minecraft running at the same time in order to connect. This allows you to keep tabs on his online play, since he cannot connect to someone who is not on his friends list.

- **Computer Version** – The computer version of Minecraft has the most multiplayer options. The player can connect to any publicly available server as long as he knows the address for it.

If your gamer is young and you are not allowing him online in other ways (Facebook, Twitter, online forums, etc.), you will probably need to restrict Minecraft's multiplayer options. If, however, he is older and you are starting to expand his boundaries, you will need to decide where Minecraft fits into that picture.

One way to control and monitor your gamer's online activity in Minecraft is to set up your own server. Below are instructions for how to do this.

### Setting Up Your Own Server

Setting up a private Minecraft server is a highly technical task. It involves downloading, running, and configuring the server software as well as opening up the correct ports on your router. You can find detailed instructions of how to do this on the [Minecraft Gamepedia site](#).

Setting up your own server is a great way to control when your gamer plays and who he plays with. However, the instructions are hugely intimidating if you are not a technical person. I am intimidated and I am a professional computer programmer! Luckily, there is an easier way.

Mojang recently released a service called [Minecraft Realms](#). Realms allows you to rent a Minecraft server for between \$10 and \$13 a month. The technical details of the servers are handled by Mojang so you do not have to worry about them. You can, however, control who connects to it as well as see the activity of each player that connects.

There are a couple of limitations to Realms servers to keep in mind.

- **You can only invite 20 people and only 10 of them can play at the**

**same time.** A server hosted outside of Realms can host as many players as the machine itself can handle. If your gamer has a lot of friends, this 10 player limit might be too restricting.

- **As of this writing, Realms has no “mod” support.** Mods change the game in different ways. They might change the game’s look or add functionality that is not normally there. This could be an issue if there is a specific mod your gamer’s friends are enjoying that he cannot access.

Realms is a new service so these limitations may end up going away as they add features. Even with these limitations, it can be a quick and easy way to get a server up for your gamer and his friends.

## How to Set Time Limits

There is one other concern that I have heard from parents that I want to address. How do you limit the time your gamer spends playing Minecraft?

Setting time limits for Minecraft can be tough. The nature of the game makes it easy to get consumed. To be honest, I even got distracted by it several times as I was writing this book.

The trick with boundaries in video games, whether Minecraft or video games in general, is to help your gamer find balance. Nobody is one dimensional. When I was growing up, I played video games but I also played sports, played trombone, hung out with friends, went to church, got good grades, etc.

Your gamer is the same. She may enjoy different things than I did but she definitely has more than one thing she loves to do. She might not know exactly what those things are yet. She is just starting to figure out who she really is.

One of our jobs as a parent is to help our children figure out who they are. We can give them ideas. We can help them try things out. And then we can talk through the experiences with them to help them process.

Minecraft is a great starting point for these conversations. You can start by asking her what she loves about it. Is it the creativity? The freedom? The feeling of community that comes from building something with her friends? The feeling of accomplishment from seeing a big project through to completion?

The answers to those questions will help you and her begin to get a feel for what makes her tick. From there, you can try out different things that may fit her.

For example, let's say she loves the freedom Minecraft gives her to be creative and express herself. Here are some things that might also interest her.

- Art
- Graphic design
- Music

Or what if she really enjoys the process of imagining something, planning it out, and then making it a reality? Here are some things that might scratch that itch.

- Architecture
- Computer programming
- Engineering

Whatever she says, the key is to listen to her and then help her find things that speak to her heart. You can then encourage her to pursue those things when she is not playing. That way you are couching the discussion as a positive pursuit of something she loves instead of a negative denial of Minecraft.

### Advice on Time Limits

While you are helping your gamer balance his life, you still want to give him time to play. So what is the best way to set time limits so he does not neglect other parts of his life?

In all honesty, this is a question you are going to have to specifically answer with your gamer. Every situation is different. The rules you set in your home may not be the rules I set in mine.

That being said, I do want to offer a suggestion. I have seen a lot of parents set blanket limits like 1 hour a night during the week and 2 on the weekend. If that is what you choose and it works for your family, great! However, there are a couple things you will want to keep in mind.

1. **Minecraft is a heavily creative game.** It takes a lot of thought to build

the really elaborate things most people are building. Games like this are sometimes better played in larger blocks than one hour.

2. **Minecraft can be a multiplayer game.** Whether or not multiplayer is for your gamer will depend on your house rules. Letting him play online with his friends can dictate the limits you set. You will want to keep in mind when his friends are available as you set the limits for your gamer.

You might consider making one night during the week “Minecraft Night”. On that night, you allow your gamer to play until bedtime assuming he has finished his homework and chores. This would give him the time he needs to accomplish something big in the game.

If you are letting him play with his friends, you might have to schedule his Minecraft Night to correspond with when they are available. You wouldn’t want to schedule it for Tuesday if two of his friends have soccer practice and cannot be there.

Another positive way to set limits is to play with him. You could set up a family server that you only play on if you are together. Then you are limiting his time playing while also building your connection with him.

Whatever schedule you choose, one thing is very important. You are expecting him to honor his commitment to only play at the predetermined times. In turn, you must also honor your commitment to allow him to play at those designated times. You will lose credibility if you don’t. He will be more likely to follow the schedule if he knows without a doubt that his time will be there.

Now, this is not to say that you can never reschedule Minecraft Night. There will be times when things come up. The key is to communicate early and often with him. Let him know about the scheduling conflict as soon as possible. Then make the time up to him on another day. He will know you understand how important the time is to him and that you want to honor that in him.

In the end, it is important that your gamer understand that you are for him. Setting limits and boundaries are not about keeping him from doing something he enjoys, but about helping him become a well-rounded, balanced person.

## Conclusion

Video games can be intimidating. As a parent, you may know the names of the games your kids are playing, but not much about the games themselves. This can lead to a feeling of disconnect and uncertainty on how to have healthy conversations and how to set up healthy boundaries and limits.

As the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest selling video game of all time, it is likely that if your child plays video games, he is playing Minecraft.

Minecraft offers a unique opportunity for you to connect with your gamer. It yields an amazing opportunity to express creativity and to interact together. My goal in writing this book has been to equip you to make a connection with your gamer through having conversations, playing with your gamer, and learning how to set healthy boundaries.

Now it's time to reach out and connect. Good luck!

## Footnotes

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