



The Oculus Quest is the latest virtual reality experience on the market. Taking advantage of ever-evolving technology in the industry, the Quest can offer unparalleled levels of realism that really need to be experienced to be believed. From colourful cartoon worlds to photorealistic monsters, it can be the perfect tool to experience everything this, and countless other, worlds have to offer. As with any other gaming hardware, it's important to know how to use it safely and ensure children are aware of any potential risks. That's why we've created this guide to help parents and carers understand exactly what the Oculus Quest is all about.



What parents need to know about OCULUS QUEST



ONLINE VIRTUAL CHAT

Much like on other gaming platforms, chat rooms and multiplayer games can be a lot of fun, but also a place where others may look to approach and groom young people, often masquerading as somebody younger to appear more trustworthy. There are a whole host of chat rooms available in VR and each will have their own safety features and rules, so be aware of which your child might be using, and never leave them unsupervised while talking to strangers.

PHYSICAL INJURIES

Wearing a virtual blindfold can inhibit your knowledge of the real world around you. Young children playing could easily forget where trip hazards or pieces of furniture are and stumble into them causing some quite nasty injuries. It's recommended that you have at least 6 square feet of clear space before playing a VR game. Oculus devices come with an option to program a virtual barrier in line with your real-life play area.

MOTION SICKNESS & SEIZURES

The health and safety warning that comes with the Oculus Quest estimates that roughly 1 in 4,000 people are susceptible to having a seizure while playing VR. This is the same number as those playing video games, watching TV or any activity that involves a screen and bright lights. If a child has photosensitive epilepsy it might be best to avoid VR altogether, or at the very least consult a doctor before playing.

INTENSITY RISK

Aside from the age rating of the Oculus Quest headset, VR is a super-heightened realism and can be an intense experience. Frightening, violent or anxiety provoking content may cause your body to react as if it were real and it's important to choose content appropriately. Whilst there are no medical studies linking VR specifically to increased rates of depression and anxiety, if you're noticing changes in your child's behaviour, it could be time to think about limiting exposure.

OVERUSE CONCERNS

Given that virtual reality is a relatively new concept, there has been little research into its long-term effects on children. For the most part, headsets will be completely safe however manufacturers themselves advise against prolonged use as it could negatively impact hand-eye coordination, balance, and multi-tasking ability. With this in mind, it's important to note that most VR headsets carry a recommended age of 13+, regardless of the games you plan on playing.



Safety tips for parents

TAKE REGULAR BREAKS

It's estimated that somewhere between 40-70 percent of people who use VR will feel motion sickness during their experience. In simple terms, this happens when the eyes and the brain disagree with what is happening to the body. The resulting feeling of nausea can last all day, and be particularly distressing for younger children. If at any point motion sickness starts to set in, turn off the headset, get some fresh air, a drink of water and sit down away from any screens!

TRY IT YOURSELF

As with anything, the best way to understand VR is to try it yourself. There are various experiences to undertake that range from entertaining to educational. If you're confident guiding your young ones through the amazing possibilities virtual reality has to offer, it can be an amazing activity to do together.

ENSURE CORRECT SETUP

A poor-fitting VR headset can lead to an uncomfortable experience and lead to an impaired sense of motion and balance. Taking a few extra minutes to make sure the Quest's mounting is secure and comfortable can make a huge difference and ensure children play safely. Adjusting the image focus to be sharp and clear is also very important to reduce eye strain while playing.

USE GAME COMFORT RATINGS

VR experiences can be incredibly realistic. With that in mind, Oculus has a comfort guide which appears next to games on the online store. The guide ranges from comfortable to intense (and unrated) to help give an idea of what kind of situations might be present in any given title. As always though, use your own judgement about what is suitable for your children.

LIMIT EXPOSURE TIME

It is recommended that players take a 10-15 minute break from VR every 30 minutes or so to keep eyes from becoming strained or minds disoriented. This is the case with any video game, but especially important in VR because it's a whole-body experience. Children will always be able to pause a game or finish the round before putting the headset to one side and enjoying life in the real world once again.

Meet our expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.



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