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Pokemon Go: From Accidents to Stranger Danger, Tips to Keeping Kids Safe

Concerned about your kids playing Pokemon Go? We asked a police officer, security expert, and a family therapist for their tips on how to keep your kids safe.



By **AUTUMN YATES**, Contributor

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We'd been searching for ten minutes when the screen showed a rustle in the grass to our right. My guide became instantly excited—would it be a Charmander? A Jigglypuff? We were about to find out.

Then, just as we were about to close in on the spot, the Pokémon disappeared. These creatures were proving to be elusive. Ungluing my eyes from the screen, I realized that Pokémon might be hard to spot, but players were everywhere.

If you weren't swept up in a **Pokémon craze** during the franchise's first run, chances are that you're wondering what all the fuss is about—and why so many people of all ages have recently taken to the streets to hunt for characters.

And, if you're a parent, you might have additional concerns about the safety of this particular app. To help bring you up to speed, **here's everything you need to know about Pokémon Go**.

What Is Pokemon Go?

Pokémon Go is an augmented reality gaming application for use on smartphones. The game, made by **Nintendo**, is based on its predecessor that came out in 1996—allowing the previous generation of Pokémon trainers to indulge in a sweeping rush of nostalgia.

Pokémon are fictional creatures of all shapes and sizes who live in the wild, and the goal is to catch as many as you can. But Pokémon Go isn't a direct copy of the first generation game—there's a twist. In the original Pokémon video game, you caught all your Pokémon in a virtual world. But, in Pokémon Go, players have to venture out into the real world.

To catch your Pokémon, players have to actually go out and wander around town. The game has an integrated GPS mapping system to find Pokémon—which is why you’re seeing droves of smartphone users wandering around with devices held in front of their faces.

Unless, of course, one’s been spotted! In which case, the game also integrates with a smartphone’s camera to show a digital Pokémon displayed against whatever background the player is facing. Just aim and swipe, and you’ll make a catch.

What About Pokestops & Lures?

Besides exploring areas to catch Pokémon, there’s also something called Pokestops. These are basically real-world locations, such as a sign, bike rack, storefront, or other recognizable location, that are marked on the in-game map. Players can go to these to nab Pokeballs and eggs—which hatch into full-grown Pokémon later in the game.

If you spot a PokeStop, but your screen shows it to be surrounded by a confetti-like design, that means it’s a lure. Now, for parents, the word “lure” has some negative connotations. We’ll get into risks of playing shortly, but know that lures are something players set to lure Pokémon—not other players.

There’s a lot more to the game, but if you’re interested in playing, I found learning on the go to be fairly simple. To help parents who don’t intend to play, we asked experts for their opinion on some of the **risks and concerns associated with Pokémon Go**:

Is Your Child Under 13? Here Are Pokemon Go Guidelines to Play Safely

For parents who’ve complained that their kids sit inside all summer long, there are some obvious benefits to playing Pokémon Go—players are outside being active and social. Here’s how to ensure that your Pokémon Go trainer has a fun and safe summer:

1. Know Pokemon Go’s age restriction and data collection policy.

Right off the bat, the most frequent piece of advice we received is that parents should be aware of Pokémon Go’s age restriction. The minimum age to open a Pokémon Go account is 13 years old. If your child is under 13, a parent must go to the Pokémon Training Club (after signing in) and agree to their terms of use upon signing up.

It's important that parents read the terms and conditions carefully because the application is set to collect personal data—something parents might want to avoid. That information includes a player's birthday and email address. Note that, by notifying Pokémon Go that your player is under 13, parents have the right to refuse further collection of data.

If an underage player does attempt to sidestep parental approval, Pokémon will delete the account.

Tip: The Pokémon Go app is free, but parents should beware of in-app purchases that are available—including buying PokeCoins ranging from 99 cents into the hundreds of dollars. Be sure to review permissions for these in the Family Sharing settings on iOS and Family Groups on Android.

2. Caution your children to keep an eye on where they're going—not just the screen.

The most obvious risk of playing Pokémon Go is getting hurt by stumbling or tripping over an object because a player wasn't paying attention. Even worse is the risk of stepping into traffic and getting hit by a car. Remind your child that it's hard to play Pokémon if they're holed up indoors with a bruised ankle and that keeping an eye on where they're walking means they'll be able to keep playing for days to come.

Cynthia Lieberman, co-founder of Cyberwise.org, offered some additional suggestions to help keep your young Pokémon Go players safe:

“Watching their screens during gameplay instead of watching where they are going can be a safety hazard for kids. You can help kids avoid Pokémon Go FOMO (fear of missing out)—and be safer—by activating the Battery Saver on their smartphone to dim the screen. Then, set the phone to vibrate and have them keep it in their pocket. The vibration will alert them of Pokémon encounters and make them less likely to roam off into the street or run into otherwise unseen obstacles.”

Because Pokémon Go invites players to explore real-world environments, you'll most likely find bug-like Pokémon near shrubs in the park, or water-like Pokémon near, you guessed it, water! When reminding your child about the importance of being aware of their surroundings, also mention any particular environments that call for extra caution, including spots that might be home to actual, non-Pokémon wildlife and bugs.

3. Know that PokeStops are supposed to be safe, but the people they attract might not be.

PokeStops are a great place to stock up on all sorts of Pokémon Go goodies, so players are naturally attracted to them. However, they're also public places where someone with not-so-great intentions could lurk, waiting for kids to come by.

How to talk about [stranger danger](#) before playing Pokémon Go?

According to Cynthia, "With mobile devices in the hands of so many kids today, parents should already be communicating with their kids regularly about stranger dangers. Given the physical socialization of its gameplay, kids need to be reminded of the potential risks of talking with people they don't know."

"Even though strangers can't see your kids in the game, they can put out "beacons" that will attract Pokémon hunters to a Pokestop and potentially put a child in harm's way." For this reason and more, **Cynthia urges parents to supervise children playing Pokémon Go, particularly those under the age of 13.**

Additionally, Pokémon can pop up in unexpected places. This can include a stranger's front yard or near the side of their home.

If your child is exploring for Pokémon and PokeStops outside the normal safe-play boundary around your home, again it's best to have an adult accompany them. Even then, remember to warn your child that it's never, ever appropriate to approach a stranger or a stranger's home.

4. Enforce a strict schedule, no matter how tempting nighttime Pokemon can be.

There are certain Pokémon that only come out once the sun goes down, which could entice your child or teen to sneak out and explore past bedtime. Remind the Pokémon players in your family that the dangers above, from wildlife to strangers, are more likely to be a problem at night and under no circumstances should they explore without supervision.



Vaporeon stampede Central Park, NYC

from **Woodzys**

00:42



Vaporeon stampede Central Park, NYC. Video: Woodzys on Vimeo.

A Special Safety Notice for Parents of Teens Playing Pokemon Go

While visions of children playing the new app mostly include exploring on foot, Attorney Marc Lamber warns that if your teen is playing Pokémon Go while driving, it can quickly result in deadly consequences.

He adds that this season is already called “[The 100 Deadliest Days](#).” Not the title of a horror flick, the gruesome phrase references an annual spike in teen drivers on the road (the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day), which is directly associated with an increase in traffic fatalities increase.

To help prevent accidents due to distracted driving, the Lamber Goodnow legal team offered us the following tips for taking a proactive approach:

- One high-tech solution is to have your teenagers download a “Driving Mode” app to their cellphones, which automatically sends “I’m driving now” replies to texts and calls and holds all messages until you arrive. There’s an app for [Android devices](#), as well as [Apple phones](#) and a host of other [high-tech solutions for both teens and parents](#).
- There are also low-tech ways to solve this problem, including having your kids take a pledge to never text and drive, which can be found by [here](#).

They also urge parents to set an example for their children and teenagers by keeping your attention on the road and away from blinking and ringing devices, much less Pokémon Go. To learn more about strategies to model attentive driving practices, visit their online initiative to [stop distracted driving](#).

How to Lay the Ground Rules for Playing Pokemon Go?

Parents know that you can sometimes caution your child until you're blue in the face—without much effect. So, how can you ensure that your child is playing Pokémon Go safely?

Carrie Krawiec, a licensed marriage and family therapist and executive director of Michigan Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, cautions parents that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, rules should be set out depending on each child's capacity to be responsible and follow directions.

“The best case scenario is to predict as many problems and create as many ground rules before play starts, instead of after.” Carrie encourages parents to consider the following:

- How long and how often your child is allowed to play Pokémon Go.
- What behaviors are off limits and what the consequences for misbehavior will be.
- How parents will check (will it be random, scheduled, both).
- What criteria will need to be met to continue having the privilege (bed made, homework complete, chores done, going to sleep on time).
- What criteria are automatic grounds for removal of the privilege (mood changes, not sleeping, dangerous behavior, noncompliance, overusing the family's data allotment).

She suggests that parents rough out a contract and write it down and have each member sign it, but also leave room for flexibility by including something like “We will review in two weeks and troubleshoot as necessary.”

Carrie also reminds parents that monitoring shouldn't just be about the negatives of your child's use of Pokémon Go (or any smartphone app), but the things they are doing right with it. Ask yourself, “What are the good things that I should be proud of?”

Remember, it's not just about catching them (your teen, not the Pokémon!); it's about having trust and seeing the positive.

 How to Lay the Ground Rules for Playing Pokemon Go

Bottom Line: Pokemon Go Has Some Great Potential Benefits

When researching the risks of playing, we reached out to a local police officer for the above advice. While the tips we've just shared are important for keeping any player safe, the officer

stated that he'd yet to encounter any cautionary tales so far, and wanted to note the positives: Namely that Pokémon Go is a great motivator for exercise—the longer a player walks, the more Pokémon he or she can catch!

The game also gives a great chance for parents to play with kids instead of following along to supervise—providing a fun and low-cost activity all summer long.

James Howard PhD is a data scientist and adjunct mathematics instructor at the University of Maryland University College. He's also level 8 Poké Trainer on Team Mystic and wrote to share how his family is using Pokémon Go to spend time together:

“My children are 6 and 4 and one of the things we have done is play Pokémon GO together. They are too young to have cell phones, but we have gone out and walked around together a few nights this week collecting Pokémon and often I let the kids try to catch the Pokémon using my phone. It's been an interesting experience as we talk about the day's events in the AR world at the end of the day. Of course, my wife is completely baffled by all of this.”

Cynthia Lieberman also wrapped up with a positive perspective, saying, “It's to get family members out of the house and working together to catch Pokémon creatures in the great outdoors. Pokémon trading cards were all the rage 20 years ago with young kids, and now those kids are becoming parents.”

Not only does playing together make the most sense for safety, but it also gives you a chance to bond with your tiny trainers while doing what every Pokémon player dreams of—catching them all.

About Our Experts:

Marc Lamber

Mr. Lamber, a Martindale Hubbell AV Preeminent rated trial attorney (highest peer-review rating), specializes in plaintiffs' catastrophic injury and wrongful death litigation. He formed the Plaintiff Personal Injury (PI) Practice at Fennemore Craig, P.C., and has spent the past 20 years developing it. He is the Chairperson of the PI Practice. To learn more about the Lamber Goodnow legal team go to www.lambergoodnow.com.

Cynthia Lieberman

Cynthia Lieberman is co-Founder, CyberWise.org and runs Lieberman Communications, a content marketing and PR consultancy firm for Fortune 500 companies. Equipped with a graduate degree in the pioneering field of Media Psychology and Social Change, Lieberman

serves on the Board of Directors for the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE). She currently teaches Social Media Marketing at UCLA Extension and served as an Adjunct Professor at California State University, Northridge.

Carrie Krawiec

Carrie Krawiec is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist at [Birmingham Maple Clinic](#) in Troy, MI and Executive Director of Michigan Association For Marriage and Family Therapy. Carrie specializes in helping couples and families improve communication, problem solve, reduce conflict and set reasonable expectations.

Autumn Yates

Autumn draws from a reporting background and years of experience working remotely, while living abroad, to focus on topics in travel, beauty, and online safety.

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