

### UTILISING GAMES IN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

From our work, we have discovered that many games can be beneficial in engaging young people within therapy. This is also true in finding tools to bring families together — facilitating conversations about different games of interest to the young person and creating a shared family interest. We have found it aids conversation by putting the young person's needs and interests first. Parents gain increased access to the young person's own world, through their language and understanding.

### INCORPORATING GAMES IN FAMILY WORKER ASSESSMENTS

Games can be a highly effective tool for family worker practitioners conducting assessments. By using interactive, playful elements, practitioners can create a more relaxed environment, encouraging families to engage openly and share their experiences. Games can be tailored to assess communication, problem-solving, and emotional expression, while also identifying family strengths. This approach builds rapport and leads to more accurate evaluations, enabling the development of personalised support strategies and improved outcomes for families.

### GAMES TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

We have compiled a selection of games that can support young people and be played with families to foster engagement and connection. The examples below are a starting point — the most relevant game will always depend on the individual young person's interests and the family's capacity.

**Minecraft** — One of the main games we have found to be particularly useful. This open-world game offers numerous therapeutic benefits, functioning similarly to sand tray or creative therapies: symbolic representation, narrative construction, and co-regulation within a therapeutic frame. Sessions can run on private servers for safe, offline co-play.

### OTHER GAME CONSIDERATIONS

When selecting games, ensure an element of standalone or safe play. In Roblox and Minecraft you can create your own server, allowing offline play together. For iPad and Android devices, check for standalone or invite-only options. Some VR and PC games may be online — monitor to ensure a safe, controlled environment.

When engaging families, find out what games they already play offline. Can these be adapted for technology-based play together? Leverage the power of interactive experiences to support young people and foster meaningful family connections.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK FAMILIES — BRINGING FAMILIES TOGETHER THROUGH GAMES

The following questions can guide family conversations about gaming. They are adapted from Earl, R. M. (2018).

- ▶ Ask the young person: 'What kinds of games do you enjoy? Which is your favourite, and why?' This provides insight into interests, genres, and the types of roles they enjoy — giving parents a meaningful window into their world.
- ▶ Encourage the young person to share more about the roles and characters they play. The characters they gravitate towards may reveal something about the roles they enjoy or aspire to in real life.
- ▶ Suggest the family research together the games the young person plays — exploring common genres, storylines, themes, and roles — as a shared activity.
- ▶ Discuss the time commitment involved in gaming and how it might fit around family life. Explore how to ring-fence time for family gaming while maintaining offline activities and healthy boundaries. Plan transitions between online and offline tasks.
- ▶ Invite the young person to share features of their favourite characters — what drew them to that character, and whether there is deeper meaning behind their choices.
- ▶ Avoid assumptions that gaming is purely for entertainment or that the young person is 'addicted.' Approach with curiosity and an open mind — gaming can play a vital role in a young person's life.
- ▶ Encourage parents to actively engage with the young person's gaming interests. This can foster stronger connection, provide valuable insights, and open up ways to incorporate gaming into family activities and discussions.