

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

Twitch.tv

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It is now possible to get paid to play video games. Yes, really.

Welcome to Twitch.tv, one of the largest communities on the Internet and the most popular eSports streaming service in the world. As the Internet's de facto home for the phenomenon of video game streaming, Twitch.tv has fulfilled the dream of millions of middle schoolers: "professional video gamer" is now a legitimate career choice. All they need is a webcam, some software, and a reasonably entertaining personality.

But though this emerging medium offers new opportunities, it's also plagued by all the familiar problems of the social Internet: toxic comment sections, lax content moderation, sexually themed content, and the risk of [screen addiction](#). It's up to us as parents to teach our children how to navigate this new landscape in a healthy, God-honoring way.

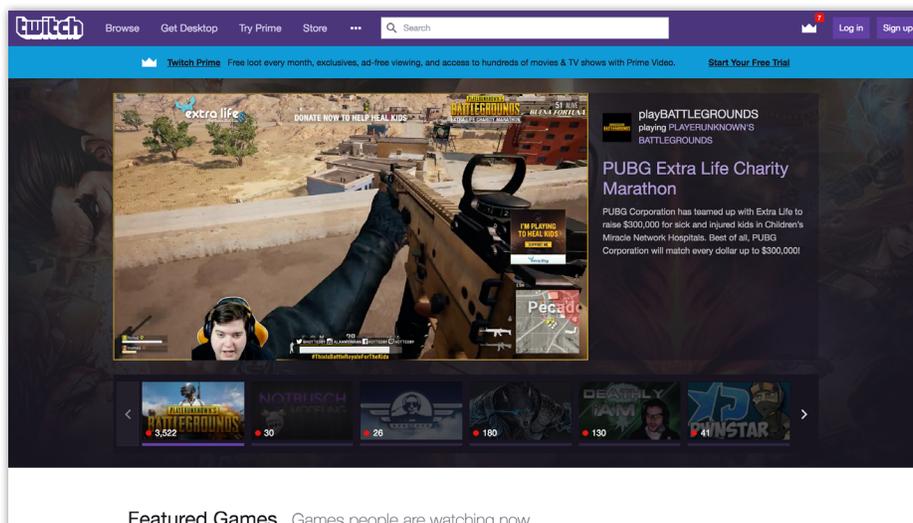
—— What is Twitch.tv?

You can think of Twitch as a cousin of Youtube, with a specific focus on video games. The site hosts streamers, who film themselves playing games (though the site has expanded to include music shows and painting). Viewers can watch the stream in real time or on-demand on their desktops, laptops, smartphones, gaming consoles, or media players like Roku and Amazon Fire. They can also pay subscriptions to channels they particularly like.

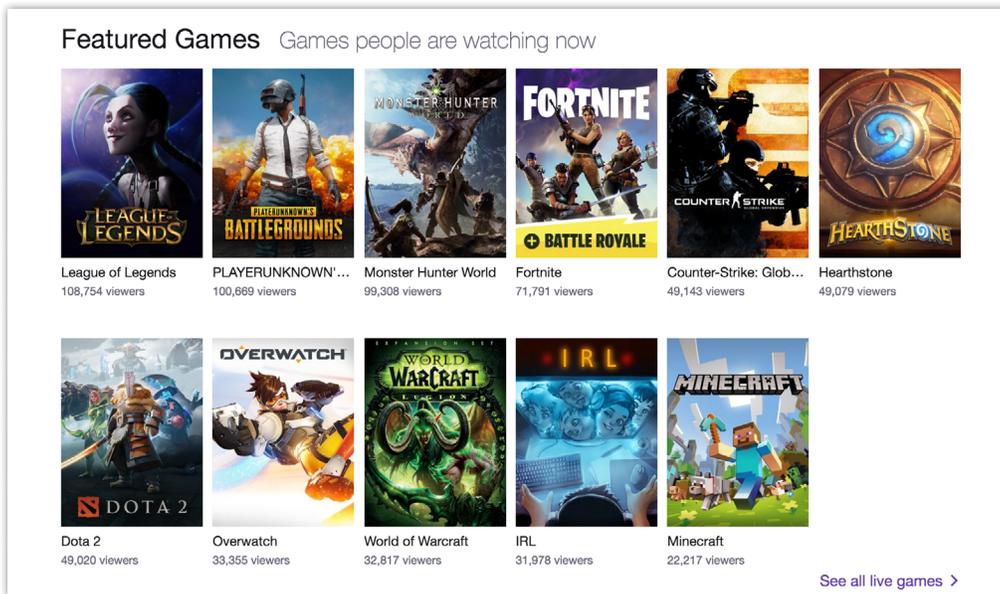
Born out of the [now-defunct Justin.tv](#) in 2011, Twitch rose to viral prominence in 2014 with [Twitch Plays Pokémon](#), a stream in which viewers collaboratively played [Pokémon Red](#) using chat commands. Since then, Twitch.tv has grown steadily to become the [fourth largest source of Internet traffic during peak periods](#).

—— How does it work?

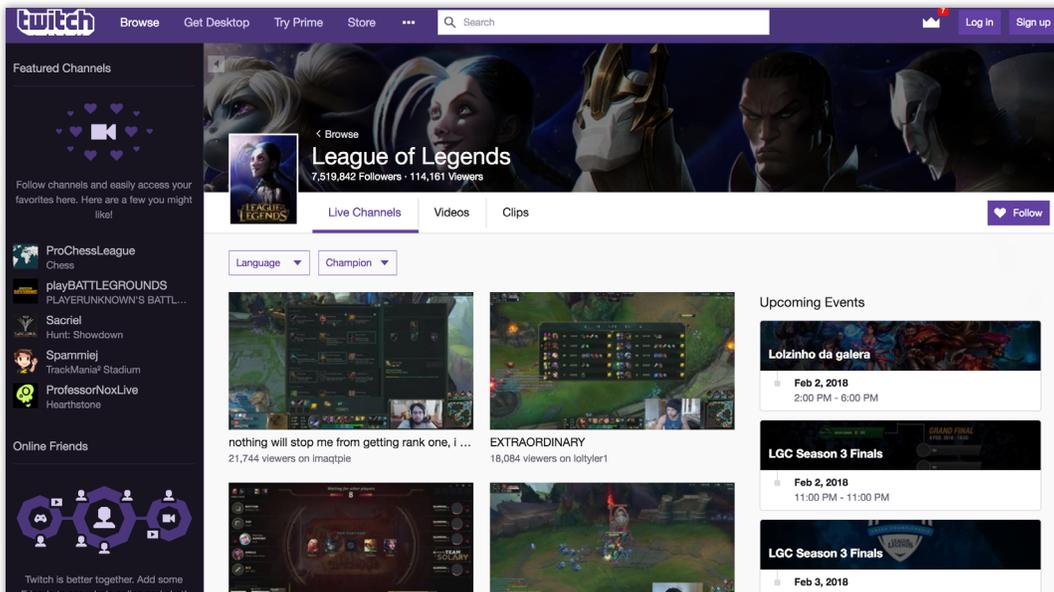
New viewers will often land either on the [Twitch home page](#) or on the page of a particular streamer (see image). The home page showcases previews of the live streams that are currently most popular. (Some of the most popular streams will have mature content, but don't worry—those won't be previewed without the user's permission.)



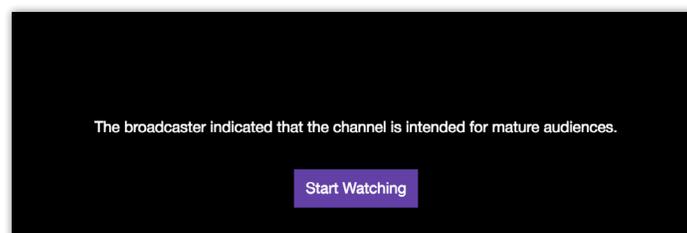
In the Featured Games section, users can search through the most-viewed games to find one they're interested in.



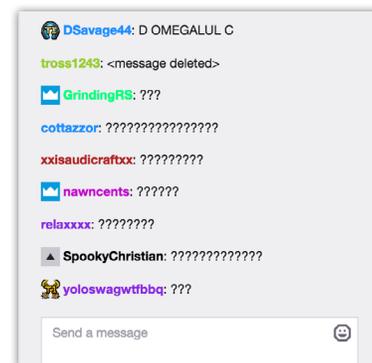
From there, they select a live stream of their game, where they will find different live channels of the game and upcoming events.



This is where things can get tricky; it's hard to know just from a preview whether a stream will be family-friendly or not. Twitch has [specific content guidelines](#) about what kinds of games can be streamed (sexually explicit content is high on the banned list), but salty language is fairly common among streamers. In addition, a broadcaster can indicate if a channel is intended for mature audiences, at which point a viewer will have to click on "Start Watching" before viewing the stream.



Finally, when viewing a stream, there will always be a chat window, which can be overwhelmingly quick and contain inappropriate language. This window starts populating as soon as one joins a stream, regardless of whether one has clicked “Start Watching” on a mature stream or not.



—— So they're just watching other people play video games?

Yes and no. In one sense, Twitch is Monday Night Football for the new millennium, with competitors wearing headsets instead of helmets. But, though viewers and subscribers are technically only watching someone else play video games, it's not all they come for; that's like saying that all you get at Starbucks is coffee. What they're really there for is the experience.

As with Youtube and the now-defunct Vine, Twitch streamers attract (and depend on) viewers for their channels to thrive, but Twitch's monetized subscription model and the intimacy of live-streaming has taken the phenomenon to new levels. Subscriptions ostensibly pay for customizable emoticons and other small upgrades to the viewers' experience, but [the real draw is a sense of community](#). Viewers share in the thoughts, inside jokes, victories, and disappointments of their streamers; subscribing to support them is a way to make the relationship more real.

This sense of community is most acute with streamers, but Twitch also makes big events, like Comic-Con and PAX, accessible to viewers thousands of miles away.

—— My kid is using slang from Twitch—what do all these terms mean?

Here's a sampling of the words you may encounter if your child is watching Twitch streams regularly:

- **Kappa:** Denotes facetiousness, sarcasm, or trolling. This is probably the most prevalent Twitch slang term, and the one most likely to be used in real-life conversations.
- **PJSalt:** Used when someone is “salty”—that is, when they're upset.
- **ResidentSleeper:** Boredom.
- **FailFish:** Similar to “facepalm”; denotes that someone has messed up enormously.
- **KreyGasm:** Excitement, awe, or satisfaction.
- **PogChamp:** Shock and disbelief.
- **BibleThump:** Sadness. The Twitch command generates an image of a crying baby from The Binding of Isaac, an indie game.
- **SwiftRage:** Either fury or uncontrollable excitement, depending on context.

- **Potato:** Someone or something that performs very poorly.
- **Pleb:** Commoner, underling; very loosely derived from the word “plebeian.”

Different Twitch sub-genres often develop their own slang words that may or may not transfer over into other sub-genres.

—— Is Twitch content kid-friendly?

Twitch has some broad [content guidelines](#) for their communities, but by and large, the content will depend on the stream. Kid-friendly streamers like [CohhCarnage](#), [iateyourpie](#), [stampylonghead](#), and [Bacon_Donut](#) are the exception more than the rule. Many streamers are comfortable swearing on stream, and even those who generally avoid it must go to great lengths to keep the chat clean.

If you're not comfortable letting your kids see or hear explicit language, it may be wise to watch a stream yourself for 15 minutes or so to get an idea of just what kind of content you should expect. If the streamer is appropriate but the chat is not, there is an option to turn on [“hide chat” in the Twitch settings](#).

—— Does it have sexually explicit content?

Nudity, sex, and sexual violence (whether in-game or by the streamers themselves) are expressly prohibited by Twitch's [terms of service](#). Even so, sexually suggestive content has increasingly become an issue for the site.

As recently as December 2017, [Twitch has come under fire](#) for lax rules enforcement regarding so-called “bikini streamers,” women who dress provocatively on their streams to boost viewership and subscriptions. The issue is prevalent in, but certainly not limited to, Twitch's IRL (“in real life”) category, in which streamers film themselves doing mundane activities like eating and going to the gas station—or, in the case of the bikini streamers, doing yoga or other activities while scantily clad. (In [one extreme case](#), a streamer pleased herself for subscriptions, but was promptly banned.)

Twitch users are able to [report sexually explicit content](#); however, the enforcement policies for such infractions are [opaque and somewhat erratic](#).

The good news is that, while it's easy to stumble upon suggestive content on Twitch, it's just as easy to avoid: just don't roam around. If you can help your children find streams that they like and you approve of, there's less to worry about. Unlike the algorithmic structure of Youtube, which [can lead kids to disturbing videos](#), Twitch is constructed to encourage long stints watching one streamer. If you want to be extra-safe, you can install a [Chrome extension](#) to block specific channels from appearing.

The opportunities to wander astray on Twitch can also be viewed as an opportunity—is now the time to talk with your child about being discerning when they wander the Internet? If so, ask questions like: “What would you do if you stumbled on something you knew was wrong?” “What if you knew no one would find out that you had seen it?” “Why do you think God doesn't want us to see pornography/sexually explicit materials?” “How do you think it would impact you if you started looking at it?” Questions along these lines will teach them to be discerning and that their actions have consequences beyond simply making mom or dad mad. Showing our children how to set wise boundaries around their Internet usage and why

those boundaries are truly *good* will serve them long after they've outgrown our homes and authority.

—— How old is old enough?

Twitch's terms and conditions specify that users must be at least 13 years old. Beyond that, it's your call as the person who knows your children best. Generally speaking, if your child is mature enough for a PG-13 movie, they'll likely be mature enough for most popular Twitch content. Even so, it's wise to check out their favorite streamers to get an idea of just what kind of content they're consuming—and always be wary of the chat.

—— What about other dangers?

Since Twitch is only a medium, it's tempting to think of it as value-neutral—only as good or bad as its users make it. But, as Neil Postman pointed out, [technology is never neutral](#); it encourages us to use it in specific ways, and to change ourselves to accommodate our new tool.

Twitch reinforces the idea that all things are on-demand—a privileged, impatient notion that we would do well to help our children think about critically. What does it do to our worldview to have everything available immediately, at any hour of the day? How does that posture affect the way we relate to God? Can we connect with God if we cannot wait for Him?

Twitch also encourages us to fill every quiet moment with content, much like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and podcasts. The effects of this habit have been well-documented; consuming endless content [makes us anxious, nervous, and depressed](#). It's not hard to lose track of time on Twitch; [nearly half of their viewers](#) spend 20+ hours a week watching streams. This abundance of distraction makes it tempting to disengage from real life, missing the beauty God has given us in the present moment—and the people to whom we minister. We are called to make good use of our time (Colossians 4:5-6) and to rejoice in the days our God has given us (Psalm 118:24). Do we model that for our children?

Last of all, the structure of Twitch encourages a particularly virulent breed of criticism and harassment. Internet comment sections have been always been toxic, and Twitch is no exception. Even those channels that prohibit swear words in their chat can't completely prevent words meant to tear down and destroy.

The problem of destructive talk is especially pronounced for female streamers, who are [overwhelmingly targeted with harassment and abuse](#). This is another important topic to discuss with our children. The Internet allows us to bully people anonymously: What does that tell us about the nature of sin? What can we do to protect people from harassment, both online and in real life?

—— My child wants to stream. Should I let him/her?

Though Twitch has gone to great lengths to make their platform safe for users, there are still risks to letting your child stream games or other content on Twitch. As mentioned earlier, the platform is [rife with bullying, harassment, and abuse](#). This isn't limited to the chat; [some streamers have been banned for bullying behavior](#).

Even so, Twitch can be an excellent outlet for teens who love gaming and can help them

develop useful social skills, as well. If your teen is asking to stream, start by having a loving conversation. Ask why he/she wants to stream: What does he/she want to accomplish or get out of the experience? Ask what is missing from the current experience of simply playing the game by him/herself or online with friends. Then make sure to have them think through plausible scenarios that could happen when streaming and how they would respond. Setting boundaries and expectations ahead of time will work so much better than waiting until a concerning situation or behavior arises.

Remember, Twitch requires that [users 13–18 be supervised by a parent](#) while using the service. Plan to be available to your child in case they need help—whether with a technical issue or with spammers brigading their channel. Most importantly, get familiar with how to [block and report harassers](#), [moderate the chat](#), and [ban certain words](#) (not just swear words—it’s important to ban the words of your home address and other sensitive personal information to prevent [doxxing](#)). Consider being a moderator for your child’s channel if you can find the time for it. And always check in. Even if you were there supervising a streaming session, they may still need a time and place to process what happened or to assess whether streaming is still a healthy activity for them.

If you decide to let your child stream, make sure to support and show interest in their new hobby! Reading this guide is a good first step, but making time to understand what games they’re playing and what streamers they’re following will tell your child you care about them. This is an opportunity to develop a shared interest with your child. Your child may even be interested in letting you stream with them; [FatherSonGaming](#), for instance, features a father and son bantering and playing video games together three times a week.

— The bottom line

In most cases, there’s very little to fear from Twitch, if we are discerning. It can even offer opportunities to grow and learn.

First, it can provide an opportunity to connect with our children on their terms, in a space where they feel comfortable. If they enjoy watching or streaming [PLAYERUNKNOWN’S BATTLEGROUNDS](#) or [League of Legends](#) now and then, it’s a chance to get to know them better and to show them we care by taking an interest in the things that interest them.

Second, Twitch can teach our teens important things about the human condition. The platform promotes an intimate relationship between streamers and viewers. Streamers on Twitch have [spoken frankly about what’s going on in their lives](#), ranging from painful divorces to fallout from affairs to recovery after long bouts of depression. Twitch channels are virtual communities, true—but they’re still communities. They offer an opportunity for transparency, vulnerability, and authenticity. They are spaces for confession, for acceptance, for safe places where we are free from judgment.

In the long term, however, the communities found on Twitch are simulated, anesthetized, and digital. They cannot replace real human relationships. While there’s very little danger in watching games online, using them as a substitute for true community—true *life*—will leave our teens wanting.

Though it can encourage unhealthy bingeing habits and serves as a staging ground for all kinds of negative behaviors, there is still much to be gained from using Twitch in a productive, Christ-centered way. We encourage you to seize these opportunities in ways that honor God and serve your children.

Resources

[A Twitch Guide for Parents](#) from TomsGuide.com

[The Ultimate Guide to Twitch Streaming](#) from TomsGuide.com

[What Should Parents Know about Twitch?](#) from CommonSenseMedia.com

[Twitch Stats and Facts](#) (November 2017)

[“Twitch-Speak”: A Guide to the Secret Emoji Language of Gamers](#) from Mashable (2014)

[A Beginner’s Guide to the Most-Used Twitch Emotes](#) from The Daily Dot (2017)

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