## FACTSHEET

How can gaming contribute to the development of communication skills and empathy?

The most common image of a gamer is that of a lonely make teenager spending hours alone on their console or computer to escape in a virtual world. This generally stems from a lack of experience or perspective on video games.

The COVID-19 related lockdowns and other restricting measures provide a recent example that shows how people of all ages can play video games to connect with others. Youngsters and adults are using video games, or virtual versions of board games, to keep socialising with their friends (Tassi, 2021).

Among the most interesting use cases in education is how MinecraftEdu allowed classes to complete group activities, especially among younger students, and how college students recreated a sense of community in some cases by recreating their campus (Anderson, 2020; Favis, 2020; Webster, 2020). Virtually any collaborative game could allow teachers to conduct group projects and activities with students.
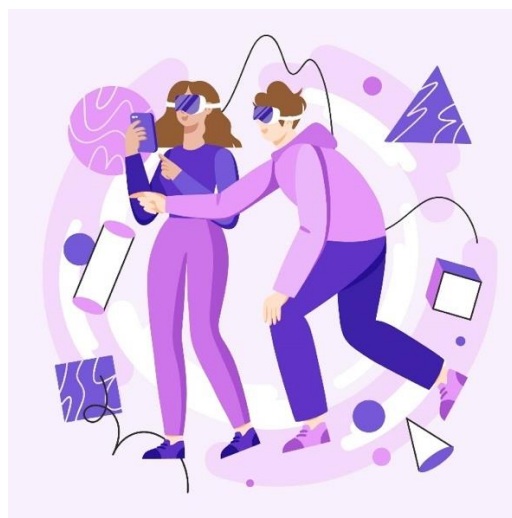
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But in what ways can video games allow people to connect, develop their communication skills and empathy?

First of all, players often communicate when playing. In 2017 in Europe, 36% and 31% of gamers used social networking and online chat services on their consoles (ISFE, 2018). This does not take into account playing multiplayer games with other people in the same room for instance, and these figures would have risen in 2020 without a doubt.

Online multiplayer games require players to organise and coordinate their actions with their teams to accomplish challenges. All players' and their characters' skills should be taken into account. More experienced players can also take newcomers under their wing and explain to them how to play better. In case of victory or defeat, it is always better for teams to debrief and analyse their performance to improve.

Empathy can be developed by communicating with others to an extent, but also by taking the role of a character in-game. Some games are even designed to make the player understand mental health or other personal issues.

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