

20211007 – Parent24 - Should children as young as 8 be watching Squid Game? Surprisingly, parents and experts disagree

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parent24

Elizabeth Mamacos



"Squid Game."Netflix

Squid Game is South Korean survival drama television series streaming on Netflix that follows hundreds of players who have accepted an invitation to compete in [children's](#) games for a monetary reward. However, the players soon discover that losing in these games means a grisly death.

The show has an age restriction of [16](#), but a quick browse through some local and international parenting sites reveals that many children under that age are watching the series, with some parents admitting their 8-year-olds have watched it.

[Common Sense Media](#), leading source of entertainment and technology recommendations for families and schools, warns that parents need to know that the level of violence is "very intense" in Squid Game.

"Characters are systematically tortured and killed for the sadistic pleasure of a game master. Adults have sex, and there are threats of sexual violence -- women are grabbed by the hair and beaten. Themes concerning the highs one gets from gambling, winning, or conning money are a main focus," the site details.

Why would a parent let their young child watch such a show? One explanation provided by parents who let their children watch Squid Game, and other content aimed at older audiences, is that 'everyone else is watching it'.

Read: [Children own around 3 digital devices on average, and few can spend a day without them](#)

"Everyone is watching it"

Mom Clare shared that her 12-year-old daughter asked to watch it too because "all" her friends have watched it.

She says that she watched the first episode and quickly decided to bar her child from watching it.

"It's the psychological thought process involved. Call it overprotective if you like, but she does not need to see stuff like that yet! Kids aren't kids for long enough as it is anymore," she says, stressing, "I enjoyed it, but it's definitely not a programme for kids."

"Bad mother here" writes Natalie on a large international parenting group, "my child is 10 and watched it with me."

She says she and her child "actually had a good conversation about how humans will do anything for money if they're desperate and betray each other. I completely understand it's not a kids programme but he had seen a lot of clips already on Tik Tok and yes I do try and monitor what he goes on, but I can't check everything!"

She says she would much rather he watched it with her and asked questions than watched bits by himself.

"My 11-year-old son has been asking me a lot, and I'm getting the "almost everyone in my class has watched it," says mom Naomi. "He said people were talking about it in class, and the teacher was horrified and said that he won't even let his 15-year-old watch it."

One parent said that she brought up the series and her 9-year-old daughter admitted she'd "already seen two episodes, it's brilliant". She added that it totally depends on the child, as her 13-year-old is more cautious about anything scary, whereas the other will seek out zombies and gore.

Another mom of three boys shared that her children aged 10, 7 and 4 all knew all about it, as they had been watching clips on YouTube and none of them were bothered by any of it.

Parent Sam wrote that her 13 year old has watched it, adding, "Does it mean he will go round shooting people? I watch it with him so we can talk about it and laugh about it or whatever. Does it do them any good keeping them in a bubble in this shit world either?"

Also read: ['It takes a digital village to raise a digital child': Mom and co-founder of a local digital safety agency shares top tips](#)

"Let the kids be kids!"

Not all parents are on board, though, with several responding to these comments with questions about how appropriate content like this is for young children and imploring families to let kids be kids.

Mom Johanna shared that she thinks it's "scary how the "standards" of what is acceptable for kids to watch is lower than ever." She says children are being exposed to such violence at such a young age and any parent that thinks this show is for kids or anything like it, needs to really think and ask why kids should watch these things.

Mom of two, Sammy, shares that her tween showed a short clip from the series to her 7-year-old without checking with her first, and that now the 7-year-old has had "nightmares every night and is utterly petrified!"

"We have since watched it ourselves, and it is so inappropriate! I have found it way too disturbing and graphic for anyone younger than this to cope with," she says, adding that the show should have an age 18 rating.

Primary school teacher Amy shares that teachers at her school are being extra vigilant with this, making notes on who talks about it, who's watched it, how they've watched it and so on.

"No child under the certificate age should be watching it," she stresses. "There's far too much pointless violence in it, and people don't seem to know or realise how impressionable children actually are."

Parent Chloe agrees that the series is definitely not suitable for children, adding that not only are people being killed brutally, there's suicide, sex and swearing too. She says, "People who are allowing their 8-year-olds to watch this seriously need to rethink their parenting."

What counts as inappropriate or explicit content?

According to the UK based National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), content that isn't suitable for a child's age, or that may upset them or worry them, includes:

- terror attacks, beheadings and bombings
- cruelty to humans and animals
- self-harm sites
- pro-anorexia and eating disorder content
- pro-suicide content
- sexual abuse and rape
- violence and distressing content
- hate sites
- online porn

The implications of inappropriate exposure

It makes sense that children may look for things because they're curious, but what they come across could be damaging and could have long term implications on their mental and emotional health.

Luke Lamprecht, Head of Advocacy: [Women and Men Against Child Abuse in South Africa](#), tells Parent24 that exposure to inappropriate content can have a mental and physical impact on children, including learning implications, and that if children don't have a healthy framework, they may reenact what they have seen, heard or been exposed to.

"PTSD is insufficient to explain the impact this can have on children," he tells us.

Additionally, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, Founder of Center for Youth Wellness in the US, explains that in high doses, childhood trauma affects brain development, the immune system, and hormonal systems.

For children, whose brains are still rapidly developing, she says that exposure to highly stressful experiences can result in long-lasting, negative impacts.

Also read: [So does on-screen violence make children more emotionally distressed after all?](#)

What to do if your child has seen inappropriate content

The NSPCC says that it's important to know how to reassure young people and help them know what to do and where to go for support if they see inappropriate content online.

If your child has seen inappropriate content online, you can talk with them about what they've seen – let them know what is, and isn't, appropriate for their age.

Lamprecht tells Parent24 that if you don't teach children what is normal and healthy, how will they know? "If they don't have a script, or the language for it, they can't talk about it," he says, encouraging parents to be open to ongoing conversations with their children.

Also, you can reassure them they can come to you, or another trusted adult if they're worried about something.

[Childline](#) is also a good resource to share with them. They can be reached via phone: 031-201 2059 or email: olcadmin@childlinesa.org.za.

Read: [Children can be exposed to sexual predators online, so how can parents teach them to be safe?](#)

Protecting your child from age-restricted content

While restricting and limiting access to or time on devices that provide children with an avenue to TV, series, social media and messaging apps is the first and best line of defence, if your child is nagging to see something, it's a good idea to see for yourself if the content is appropriate by viewing the content yourself first.

Following the suggested age restrictions is a good start, but if your child is more sensitive, then you might want to hold off even if the age range is technically appropriate.

It's also advisable to set up parental controls on any and all devices the child might have access to and do the same on social media sites to block any distressing, inappropriate or upsetting content they might come across.

Parents should also avoid sharing explicit or inappropriate content they've seen, thinking they are going to raise awareness with their children.

It's important to know that sharing content that includes physical or sexual abuse, with a child or where a child could access it, *is illegal*. – (This link takes you to: *Films and Publications Act, 1996 (Act no 65 of 1996) Amendments: Child Pornography Offences*)