

# FTC warns of explicit content in virtual worlds

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The [Federal Trade Commission](#) (FTC), in a consumer alert, noted that many virtual worlds are for adults only and attempt to confirm that visitors are over 18 years old before they can enter.

"But a posted age requirement may not stop kids -- especially curious teens -- from finding their way in, either accidentally or otherwise," the

FTC said.

It said they risked being exposed to disturbing behavior.

"The anonymity that avatars provide can encourage people to 'act out' behaviors that may be considered inappropriate, particularly for tweens and teens," the FTC said.

"Indeed, visitors may find the online equivalent of a red-light district, with simulated sexual activity or [violence](#)," it added.

Virtual worlds allow users to create avatars of themselves and place them in 3-D environments where they can interact with other users in real time.

The FTC suggested that parents check out the virtual worlds their [children](#) are visiting and "watch for changes in their patterns of behavior that could indicate an unhealthy obsession."

In a report on virtual worlds and minors submitted to Congress, the FTC urged the companies behind the sites to do more to prevent children from accessing them.

"It is far too easy for children and young teens to access explicit content in some of these virtual worlds," said FTC chairman Jon Leibowitz. "The time is ripe for these companies to grow up and implement better practices to protect kids."

The FTC said it surveyed 27 online virtual worlds aimed at young children, [teens](#) and adults.

It said at least one instance of either sexually or violently explicit content was found in 19 of the 27 worlds and a "heavy amount" of explicit

content in five of the worlds.

The FTC recommended that [virtual world](#) operators use more effective age-screening mechanisms to prevent children from registering, strengthen language filters and employ more moderators.

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