

# Online gaming is bringing RAF families closer

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Modern methods of internet-based communication such as online gaming and video calls are helping RAF servicepeople stay connected to their families when serving away from home—but challenges still

remain, according to new research by Anglia Ruskin University (ARU).

The [report](#), titled "Navigating Modern Communication," discusses the benefits and pitfalls of internet-based communication such as the ability to play online games together, and speak in real time through internet video calls.

Researchers interviewed and held focus groups with partners and children of RAF personnel, who were asked to relate their experiences with communication with their family member during periods of separation.

Young people spoke about communicating with parents while playing games online, such as Fortnite, Roblox, and app games, often using the integrated chat and call functions built into the game or console, or through a separate voice call. This in turn raised questions about security and the potential sharing of sensitive information across an insecure format.

More generally, families described how internet-based methods made it easier to communicate due to their immediacy and allowed parents to be more flexible with timings and communicate on the go. However, families still shared difficulties finding time to communicate. Partners also described how the immediacy made it easier to involve their serving partner in day-to-day decision-making and parenting.

However, availability of a stable internet connection as well as negotiating different time zones occasionally proved barriers. Families reported challenges such as feeling pressurized by the expectation of regular communication, dilemmas around choosing how much to share about difficult situations at home, and heightened concerns for the safety of their serving loved one when communication was unexpectedly unavailable.

The report makes several recommendations to the Ministry of Defense (MoD), military charities and local education authorities including ensuring families and serving personnel are aware of the benefits and pitfalls of online communication, managing expectations around availability of communication, and how schools can best support service children.

Lead author Abigail Wood, of ARU's Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research (VFI), said, "This report adds insights into how to best support RAF families to maintain quality [family communication](#).

"Online methods of communication were practically useful, enabling the serving partner to still be part of day-to-day decision-making despite being far away. The online gaming element allowed youngsters to share a hobby with their serving parent while spending time communicating with them. However, it does raise important questions as to whether current policies and advice for families fully consider the use of in-game chat functions and the potential risk they may pose to security.

"The nature of [video calls](#) did sometimes remind people of the distances between them, and could be upsetting as a result. Increased availability of their family member meant some felt pressurized to talk to them even when they had little to say, and despite their busy day-to-day lives at home.

"We have called on decision makers to provide more information to families about the ways they can communicate, the benefits and drawbacks of those methods, and importantly when those methods can be accessed by the serving family member. There also needs to be more information about how to stay safe and secure online, particularly when [online gaming](#)."

Air Commodore Kevin Pellatt, Armed Forces Commissioner for

Norfolk, said, "The Norfolk Armed Forces Covenant Board was pleased to co-fund this important research into how best families can stay in touch with their loved ones when deployed on operations or exercises. Long periods of separation are difficult to navigate and this report makes helpful recommendations on ways to improve contact."

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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