

# There are no age restrictions for gambling in video games, despite potential risks to children

16 May 2018, by Joshua Krook



Gambling via mobile devices or mobile games has remained largely unregulated in Australia. Credit: Shutterstock

According to a 2018 [report](#) by Digital Australia, 97% of Australian households with children have at least one device for playing video games. More than 60% of households have [five or more](#) devices.

Since the early 2000s, the boom in mobile technology has seen the spread of video games from desktop PCs to the pockets of young people everywhere. But with that spread has come new hazards, in the form of online social gambling.

## Gambling games are mostly rated 'PG' or 'G'

Gambling via mobile devices or mobile games has remained [largely unregulated](#) in Australia. In a 2012 [study](#) of more than 100 video games featuring gambling simulations, 69 of them were rated PG (8+) and 33 of them were rated G (for a general audience) by the Australian regulator.

In other words, no gambling games received any age restrictions.

The Australian Classification Board, the body charged with rating games, consistently [underrates](#) games that feature gambling, despite the potential risk they pose to children.

Part of the explanation comes down to the way games are classified. In Australia, video games [classifications](#) are based on six criteria: themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

Gambling comes under the first broad category of "themes" and is generally [classified](#) according to the presence of gambling, gambling references or gambling themes.

Game developers use the classification system to their advantage by skirting the edges of what is considered an acceptable "presence of gambling". Gambling video games tend to fall into three broad categories in this regard: actual online casinos, social gambling games (which can use real money, but can also be played for free) and games that use gambling techniques.

The latter type, including games such as Candy Crush, use techniques similar to a slot machine, but do not actually look like a casino. The other types often explicitly look like a casino. Regardless, they still receive a G rating.

## Risks for children

When children and teenagers play simulated gambling games (featuring either real money or fake money), they are more likely to grow up and gamble with real money. One [study](#) found that almost 30% of adolescents who played simulated poker went on to play real poker with real money

later in life.

Some companies claim that games can have gambling techniques, with no risk to children, so long as there is no real money involved. However, even if gambling games are ostensibly "free" to play, they pose a risk to young people by making them [more susceptible](#) to gambling mechanics, psychological tricks and addiction.

To put it simply, when a young person reaches age 18 and finally enters a casino having previously played social gambling games, they will be more susceptible to real gambling and psychological addiction, because they will be [primed for it](#).

### Gaming classifications are out of step

The low classification of gambling games in Australia is out of line with the broader laws on gambling.

In all states, there are [strict laws](#) on who can enter a casino and who can gamble, with every state imposing age restrictions roughly correlating with adulthood. If these general laws were imposed on gambling games, they [would receive](#) a classification of R (18+) – the highest possible rating – rather than G (for a general audience).

Since 2013, Australia has had an R (18+) category for games. At the time of its introduction, it was [argued](#) that the adult rating would empower the classification agency, and stop kids from having access to games that could potentially harm them. It would appear that that has not occurred with regards to gambling games.

Despite recent statements by the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation that some [video game](#) mechanics can "[constitute gambling](#)", not much has changed regarding the law in Victoria or any other state. Victorian officials state that they can do [very little](#) when a gaming company or product is based overseas.

However, it is unclear why the regulator, the Australian Classification Board, cannot put higher ratings on gambling games sold in Australia, in Australian stores or on Australian websites.

### The benefits of gaming

Video games do not have to be addictive or feature gambling mechanics to be fun or to make money. Many of the most successful video games today feature no gambling mechanics at all. Some are actually [good for you](#) because they help develop creativity, keep an active brain or teach new skills.

The rise of [gamification](#), or the use of games for serious purposes, has led to a variety of games that assist educators, the government and private companies in creating interactive learning experiences.

It is unfortunate that some video gaming companies continue to develop gambling and anti-social video games, when the power of video games as a positive medium for change is just starting to develop.

Without further action by the regulator, it is up to the states to determine whether online gambling [video](#) games should remain out of line with the general laws concerning [gambling](#) and age restrictions in Australia.

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