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The Minecraft™ Project: Facilitators and Families edition

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make history.

The Minecraft™ Project: Facilitators edition

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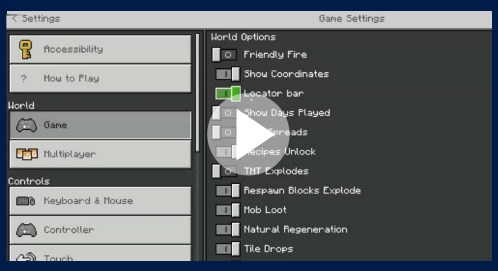
What is this?

This coaching guide is designed to help families to continue practising the skills the players have developed through the Minecraft™ project, and to continue maintaining the friendships developed in the Minecraft™ intervention sessions.

Disclaimer

The Minecraft™ Project coaching package has been developed as part of a research project aimed at facilitating social collaborative skill development for autistic children. It is not officially endorsed or affiliated with Minecraft™, Mojang Studios™, Microsoft™, or any related entities. Minecraft™ is a trademark of Mojang Studios and Microsoft. This coaching package is intended solely for research and educational purposes and should not be considered an official product or representation of the Minecraft™ franchise.

Watch step-by-step video for facilitating collaborative play:



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Overview of Minecraft™ and why we choose this to unlock the magic of friendships

Minecraft™ is a sandbox video game*. There are no set rules for playing Minecraft™. Minecraft™ can be played **solo** or **with others**. Minecraft™ players can either use building blocks to build a creative work of art and many things from your imagination, or if they would like to try something more adventurous and daring, they can explore different terrains, face daring challenges, and survive by fighting different creatures or mobs. There is **no wrong or right way to play Minecraft**™. There are no set rules for Minecraft™. This means the players can choose to play however they would like.

There are two modes that the players can play on: **Creative** and **Survival**.

In **Creative** mode:

- Players can **access to all the resources** they wish to build in the game.
- Players can choose to be creative and build things from their imaginations.
- Nothing can "hurt" the players, even if they fall from a height.

** A sandbox videogame is a type of game that provides players with high levels of flexibility and freedom to exercise their creativity.*

In **Survival** mode:

- Players play to face daring challenges and fight creatures to survive.
- Players must engage their problem-solving skills, and work collaboratively to survive.
- Players will not have limitless access to all resources.
- They must search and find resources, build structures, interact with local villagers, and defend against mobs who attack at nighttime.
  - *For example, if they want to build a wooden house, they will need to find and chop down trees to source the wood to build the house.*

There are various difficulty modes in Survival: **Peaceful**, **Easy**, **Normal**, and **Hard**. The levels relate to the amount of damage the player can endure. As the levels go up, the amount of damage the player may encounter is higher.

However, the mode can be adjusted at any time, by changing the **difficulty setting** under the **Options** menu.

Players can choose to be in different modes while playing with others at the same time and in the same world. This means one player may be in Creative while another in Survival while playing in the same world/realm at the same time.

Peaceful Mode

- No monsters (like zombies or skeletons) appear.
- You don't get hungry.
- You heal quickly if you get hurt.
- Great for beginners or relaxing play.

Easy Mode

- Monsters appear, but they don't do much damage.
- You can get hungry, but you won't die from it.
- Good for learning the game with a little challenge.

Normal Mode

- Monsters do normal damage.
- You can die from hunger if your health gets too low.
- A balanced challenge for most players.

Hard Mode

- Monsters are stronger and more dangerous.
- You can die from hunger.
- Villagers can turn into zombie villagers.
- Best for experienced players who want a tough challenge.

Why use Minecraft™?

- Minecraft™ is a flexible and affordable video game that allows players to build and create their own worlds.
- It is popular, which mean we will be using a **person-centred** and **strength-based** approach to facilitate new skills development.
- It has flexibility in offering some combat and storylines to follow, such as fighting monsters at night and hunting down a dragon. At the same time, it has the flexibility to remove these elements, so that players can enjoy building and finding resources in their world without the potential stress of fighting mobs.
- Allows the **opportunity for multiplayer modes**, so players can join forces to co-create the worlds they wish to build. This allows for a **great platform to develop teamwork skills, social collaborative practices, make friends and generally have fun!**

Setting up Minecraft™

What is needed to play Minecraft™?

To play Minecraft™ alone or with others, there are a few things that are needed:

- The **Minecraft™** application. This can be installed on computers/laptops, tablet devices and gaming consoles.
- There are different types of Minecraft™ editions. Refer to the table for a comparison between Minecraft™ Java and Minecraft™ Bedrock.

	Java	Bedrock
Platform	Computer or Laptop only- Windows or Linux	Multi-platform – gaming consoles, mobile devices, computers and laptops
Customisability	Players can download skins (for avatar) online or make their own and upload	Skins are limited
Mods	Players can use mods (community made modifications)	Can purchase Add-Ons from the marketplace
Multiplayer and server	Players can customise their experience on self-owned or community servers	Can invite others to play in their worlds Does not need a server to play with others
Cross-play	No cross-play	Allows for cross-play
Resource requirements	Resource intensive: can ramp up system requirements	Lower hardware requirement
Parental controls and moderation	Can be set-up	Has more parental controls and safety features

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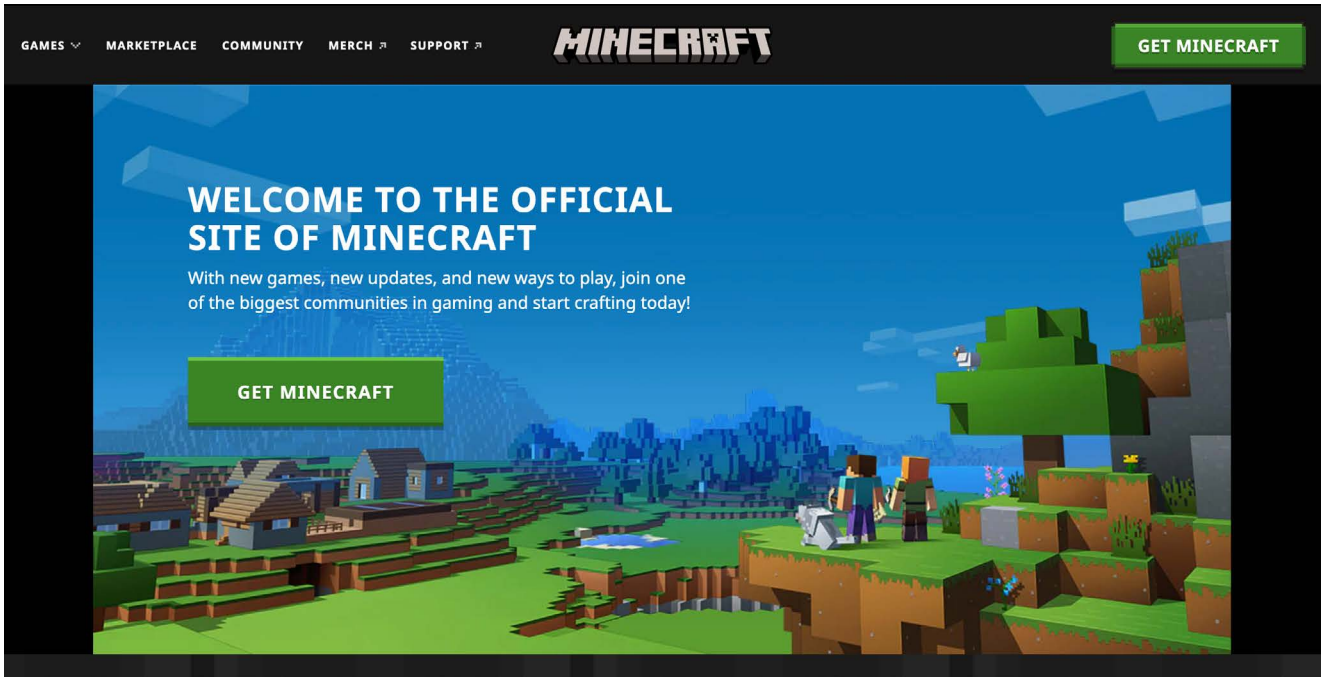


How much does Minecraft™ cost?

- **Involves a once-off cost, ranging from $13 to $40, depending on the platform used- PC, tablet devices, gaming consoles, etc. There may be additional subscription costs associated with gaming consoles, and you will need to check this with the individual gaming consoles.**
- **Gaming consoles will require an active subscription to play online.**

- A **Microsoft account** – This is free and required to create a Minecraft™ account.
- If you are using a gaming console like **PlayStation, Xbox or Nintendo**, you will need to also create an account with the specific gaming systems.
  - When playing on Minecraft™ **Bedrock**, players can play across different devices, for example, one player may be using a **Switch**, while another may be using a computer.
- An **Internet connection**. As Minecraft™ is a digital video game, you need to have an internet connection to be able to play with others online.
- **Communication** options. This is optional, as there is an in-built text-chat function in Minecraft™.
- However, the Minecraft™ communication option does not allow for audio or video communication.
  - **Kids Messenger** – this is a chat, audio and video-calling platform designed specifically for children and is managed by their parents' Facebook dashboard. This means, the parents can oversee and manage their children's connections and communication to ensure online safety.
  - **Discord** – this is a gamers communication platform. It has chat, audio, and video-calling functions.
  - **Zoom, Teams, Whatsapp** – the commonly used voice-over-the-internet system.

How to set it up

1. Purchase and install the game on the devices to be used by the players.
2. Once installed, launch the game to start setting-up.
3. Then select the "**Create a new Microsoft Account**" option at the bottom.
4. This will open up a webpage for you to **sign in** to an existing Microsoft account, or to **sign-up** for a new Microsoft account. To create a new account, select "Create account".
5. Refer to the instructions on how to create a Microsoft account.

The instructions here also outline how to access Microsoft accounts on different platforms like Windows, iOS, Linux, Xbox, Playstation and Nintendo Switch, as well as tablet devices.

6. When the account is set-up, the players can choose a **gamertag***.
7. Go to the Minecraft™ **main menu**, start a **new game** and **create a world**.

** Gamertag is the name given to the avatar and personalise their skin (Skin refers to the avatar).*

How to invite friends to play together

1. Ensure that the multiplayer option is selected for the realm
2. Find out the friend's gamertag
3. Open Minecraft™ and select **Play**
4. Select the **Edit** button next to the **Realm**
5. Select the **Member** button
6. Select **Find Friends**
7. Enter the friend's gamertag and select **Add Friend**

If they are an existing friend on Minecraft™, then,

1. Open Minecraft™ and select **Play**
2. Select the **Edit** button next to the **Realm**
3. Select the **Member** button
4. Select **Invite** next to the friend's gamertag on the **Friend's list**

Only invite familiar friends to play. It is important to note that only invited players will get access to this world.

Here is a video guide on how to set-up **multiplayer** on **Minecraft™ Bedrock**.

What to do if the player is invited to play on another player's realm

1. Make sure that the invitation is from a familiar person.
2. There will be a notification on the main menu to indicate that there is an invitation to join another realm.
3. If the person is familiar, then follow the prompts to join the realm.

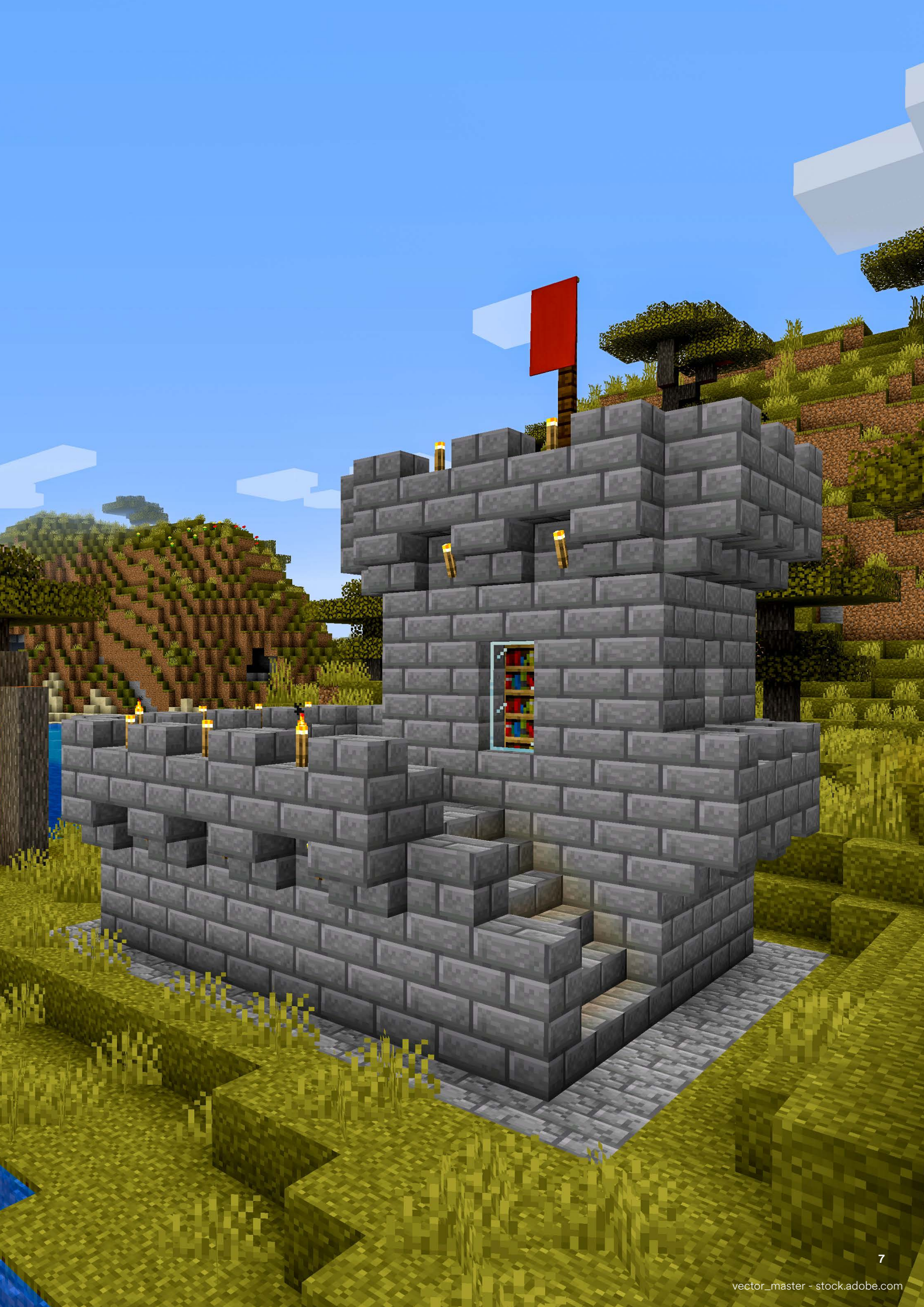
Do I need to set-up a server to play this game with others?

If playing on the **Minecraft™ Bedrock** version, there is **no need for a separate server**. Players can invite each other to their worlds.

A self-managed or community managed server is required if playing Minecraft™ Java.

Tackling potential technical issues

- Minecraft™ updates very regularly.
- The updates do not take long.
- Ensure that Minecraft™ is updated at least 10-15 minutes prior to the gaming session.
- For **Minecraft™ Bedrock**, you must update before you can access the game.
- For **Minecraft™ Java**, updating is optional.
- **Sound** can be adjusted to suit by following the steps in this video guide.



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Step-by-Steps for facilitating collaborative gameplay

Step one

Make sure everyone is set-up

- If every player is joining online, make sure everyone can see and hear each other through the selected video-conferencing platform (please see page 5 for options).
- Make sure everyone is in the game and in the selected Minecraft™ world/realm.
- Get everyone to the same place – in the first instance, the facilitator can decide where the base it.
- Make sure all players understand that the base is also the place to come to if someone is lost. See video on how to return to base (2:00).

Step two

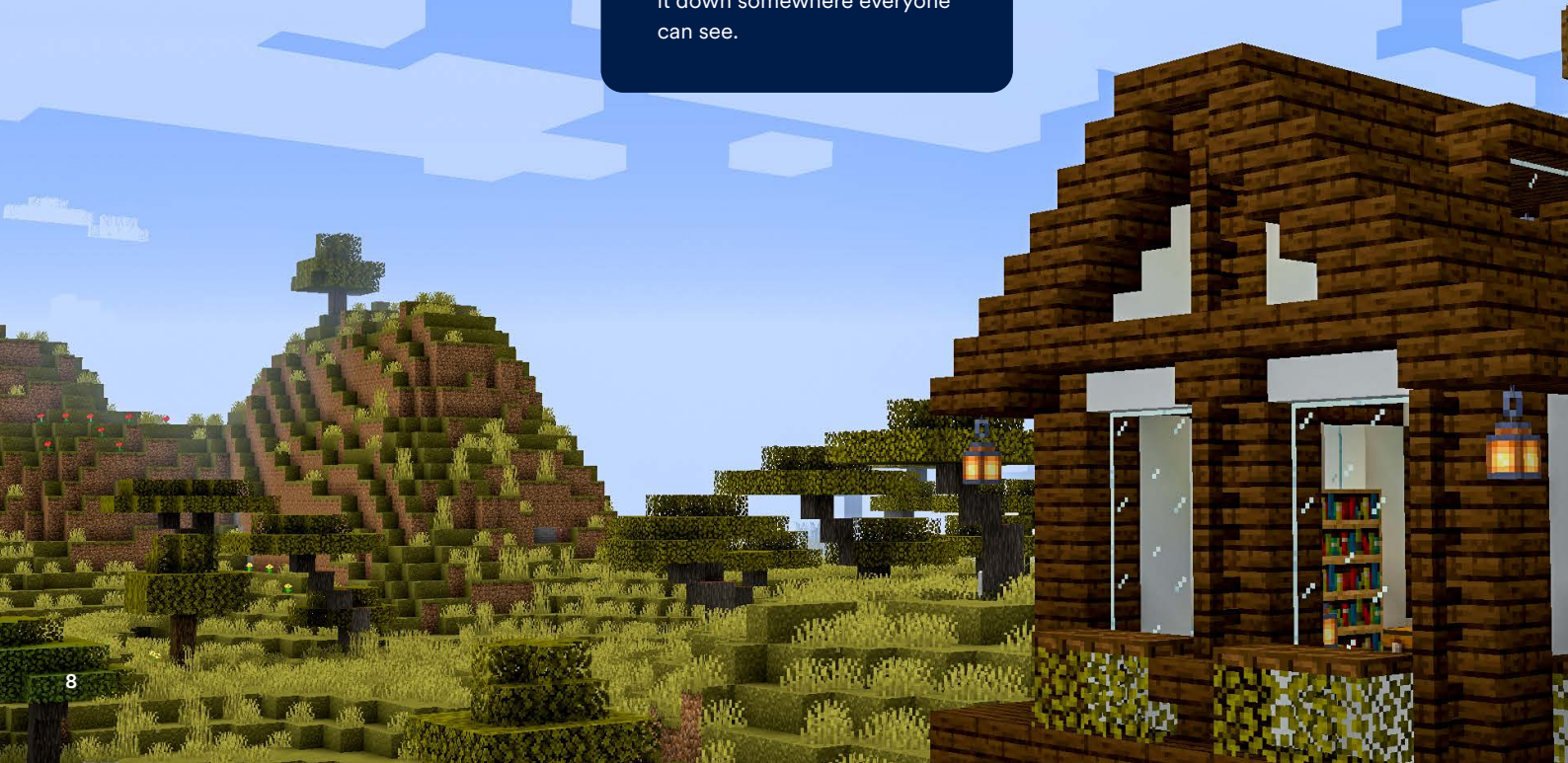
Establish ground rules

- Establish ground rules collectively – demonstrating good teamwork, collaborative practice and compromise.
- Talk about what kinds of language we use, what to do when we get upset, how we can regulate our emotions, how to ask for help, who to ask for help, as well as how to address each other.
- Clarify everyone knows where to go to when they get lost, and how to return to the base.
- Note down the location or the coordinates. If all players are playing online, post this in the chat function. If players are playing in-person, write it down somewhere everyone can see.

Step three

Choose the mode to play in

- Some players may want to play in Creative and others may want to play in Survival.
- Decide together and come to a compromise on which mode to play in. Alternatively, everyone can play in different modes in the same realm (refer back to page 3).
- Explain that everyone can be in different modes and still play in the same world.
- Clarify if everyone understands what the different modes are including the limitations. See video on how to change between modes (0:20).



Step four

Decide on common goals for game play

You can do a lot in Minecraft™! Here are some options:

- **Creative Building Challenges:** Engage the players' imagination by organising creative building challenges. Set a theme (e.g., "Underwater Adventure" or "Future City") and get them to work together to construct impressive structures.
- **Problem-Solving Quests:** Create scenarios that challenge the players to work together to overcome obstacles, such as escaping a maze or finding hidden treasures. Encourage collaboration, shared goal-setting, experimentation, and teamwork as you navigate through these challenges. You can do this planning before starting the game. The "huddle" can take place in the game where everyone collectively identifies where to meet or the base.
- **Virtual Field Trips:** Explore historical sites, architectural wonders, or natural landscapes by recreating them in Minecraft™. Research together, plan the expedition, and build accurate representations. This activity promotes research skills, attention to detail, and a deeper understanding of the world around us. The planning and research can take place while players are in the game.
- **Family Storytelling Adventures:** Stimulate creativity and language development by crafting and sharing stories within the Minecraft™ universe. Build unique settings, characters, and plot lines collaboratively, then take turns adding to the narrative. This activity encourages creativity, communication, and improvisation.
- **Collaborative Resource Management:** Survival mode in Minecraft™ provides an opportunity for players to work together to gather resources, build shelters, and thrive in challenging environments. Allocate roles such as miner, builder, and gatherer, and discuss strategies for sustainable resource management. This experience nurtures teamwork, resourcefulness, and strategic planning.

It is important to understand **the core aim of this program – which is to encourage friendship development.**

If players wish to pursue different activities, they are welcome to do so within the same realm, while still having opportunities to collaborate. This approach is known as parallel play.

Parallel play versus collaborative play:

- **Parallel play** refers to players playing alongside each other while playing in the same Minecraft™ world.
- Being in the same Minecraft™ world will allow the players to share ideas and comment on each other's gameplay while doing different things in parallel play.

The main goal is to get the players together and create a shared platform to **build friendships**.

Step five

Start playing, make friends, create memories, and have FUN!!!

Strategies for facilitating collaborations

- Be clear about the **structure** or outline of how the gameplay will proceed.
- Start with a **Huddle** – this should last between 5 and 10 minutes. It is important to ensure all players are well-regulated and focused on joint decisions before moving into gameplay.
  - Identify the collaborative goals for that session, e.g. finding resources to build a house, going on an adventure, or discovering an ancient city.
  - Players can then work together to achieve the goal collaboratively.
  - If players choose to engage in individual activities (parallel play), this is acceptable; however, encourage them to communicate with each other about what they are doing and how they are progressing.
  - Emphasise that the real goal is teamwork.
  - If all players are meeting online, the huddle can take place via the video-conferencing tool or within the game itself.
  - If players are meeting in-person, the huddle can take place in-person.
  - Ensure that during the huddle, players are not in the realm and playing. It is important that the huddle is completed before the gameplay
  - If a player is already in the realm and started the gameplay, tell them to leave the realm and join the huddle either by encouraging them to come in person or just join the teleconferencing call. It is important to advise them that the facilitator can see what is going on in the game realm.
  - Players can collectively decide where to meet or where the base will be.
- **Gameplay** – approximately 40–45 minutes
  - During the game play, facilitators can join in as a spectator to view what is going on and provide assistance if required.
  - Always encourage the players to seek assistance from each other before turning to the facilitator.

- Facilitators should provide a 5-minute warning and then a 2-minute warning as the end of gameplay approaches.
- **Sensory break** – 15 minutes
  - This is essential.
  - Players should be encouraged to step away from the screen and pause the gameplay.
  - During this time, they can have a snack, use the toilet, and do some star jumps or other non-screen activities.
  - If a player does not move away from the screen, please contact their parents or carers, or remove them from the realm. Ensure that the facilitator warns the player before removing them from the realm and tell them how they can re-enter after the break.
- Resume after the break – spend about 5 minutes discussing what they did during the break.
- **Continue gameplay** for a further 40–45 minutes, using the same structure as before for providing warnings before the session ends.
- **Wrap-up** – 10–15 minutes
  - Reflect on how the game went.
  - Discuss what they plan to do next time.
  - If they wish to play between scheduled sessions, agree on how they can contact each other.

How to regulate emotions?

Emotions can get high when playing games, and when playing games with others. It is important to talk to the players about how to manage their emotions if things do not go the way they want it to go. *For example, sometimes players can get frustrated when the Minecraft™ updates take longer than usual or if the set-up does not work.*

- Talk to the players about the different **Zones of Regulation**. Most schools in South Australia use this chart to talk about feelings and ways to regulate them. **Using a common language** with the players will help orient them to what they are familiar with and facilitate with the emotional regulation.
- They can take a **timed break**. They can choose to do a different activity that typically helps them regulate their emotions. This is different from person to person, but some common examples are: physical activities like star jumps or running, tabletop activities like arts and crafts, building blocks, or sensory activities like fidget objects.

How to manage conflicts

Conflicts can occur at any stage of gameplay. The players may want to be on different modes or do different things. Sometimes, someone might accidentally "destroy" something another player had taken a lot of time to build. What we do when conflicts occur is to remind the players to use kind words and to remember that what is happening in the Minecraft™ realm is not real. Encourage the players to talk to each other about why they are feeling upset or annoyed and how they can play and work together to ensure everyone is having fun.

How to encourage safe language

- Starting sessions with a group 'huddle' to explain the expectations of the sessions. *E.g. types of language to use, how to encourage others, help others when needed, co-develop group goals etc.*

Which mode/difficulty should my child play in?

- Minecraft™ can offer you a choice to play in either '**creative mode**' or '**survival mode**'. You have the choice to switch between these modes while playing the game, so you may wish to start in creative mode, but move into survival mode at a later stage. You can change these options quickly by just going into settings in the game.
- You can choose the level of difficulty and can adapt as you wish while playing the game.
- You may also wish to remove monsters from the game, so there are no elements of combat and focus solely on building your world and finding resources.
- **You can also choose to be in a different mode to the other players and still play in the same realm!**

Additional tips for facilitators

- Do not give too many prompts or structure as this can reduce the socialisation between the players.
- Don't straightaway jump in to help when players ask. Encourage the players to ask each other first.
- Remind players to address other players by their name or gamertag.
- Join in the game as a separate player or in **spectator mode**. This way, you can see the game play while being invisible.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

One of the biggest concerns for families with online gaming is gaming addiction. A key way to manage this is to establish some ground rules about game-play, such as screen-time management, regular sensory breaks, e-Safety measures, and parental control and moderation.

- **Set a screen-time rule**
  Come up with this time limit together as a family and ensure that the player has understood what this is and how this will look like. *For example, set-up a timer and be clear than when the time is up, the game is over, regardless of the stage of play.*
- **Having regular breaks during the gameplay.** Ensure the break is away from screen. .
- **Have a chat with the players about how to be safe online, and about the serious dangers on online interactions, especially with strangers.**
  - It is essential that the player knows only to play the game with "invited players". This then restricts access to only those who have been specifically invited by the player.
  - It is also important to ensure that they only invite familiar people to play with them.

The eSafety Commissioner has developed a brilliant web-based resource for helping Australians have safer and more positive experience online.

Access the **web resource** to learn more about how to be safe online, cyberbullying and managing screen-time.

Are there parental controls for Minecraft™?

Yes. Minecraft™ comes with **parental control features**. This **web-article** tells you all about how to manage parental consent, family settings, and realm and multiplayer settings for a child account.

Acknowledgement

This coaching package is an updated version of the original facilitator guide developed as part of the pilot study, ***The use of off-the-shelf game, Minecraft™, to promote social collaboration skills in autistic pre-teens: A pilot study.*** The pilot was funded by the Emerging Leaders Development Grant, awarded to **Dr Abi Thirumanickam.**

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