

INTRODUCTION AND EXPLAINER

A partnership between:



**BE AHEAD
OF THE
GAME**



Victorian
Responsible
Gambling
Foundation

With additional funding from:



The Bridge is a Kids Thrive program, created in association with the Kids Thrive - Kids' Big Ideas Lab and Altona North Primary School.

Kids Thrive is a leading social purpose organisation using creative approaches to foster child-led social change.

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The Bridge: introduction and explainer

About the program

The Bridge is a free, creative program developed for upper primary students (years 5 and 6). The curriculum-aligned program explores the risks of online games, which may feature gambling or gambling-like elements.

The Bridge caters for all teachers, regardless of their knowledge or experience of online gaming, by providing detailed lesson plans, activity guides and background information. Key terms and concepts are also explained.

The Bridge aims to:

 <p>Empower young people to think critically about online games, recognise signs of harmful gaming behaviour, and develop strategies to manage their activities.</p>	 <p>Equip educators with the knowledge, resources and tools to support young people to develop positive online gaming habits.</p>	 <p>Engage parents and the wider community to raise awareness of the risks of online gaming and foster safer online gaming environments.</p>
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Features of the program include:

- lessons linked to Victorian curriculum domains (levels 5 and 6)
- engaging discussion ideas to explore themes of online gaming
- fun and creative kinaesthetic learning activities
- animated videos
- strategies for harm prevention and reduction.

The Bridge helps students, parents and teachers identify if a child's online gaming changes from a fun and safe activity to one that could be damaging to their health, wellbeing, safety and personal relationships.



By working through each of the four modules, teachers can help students to understand:

- how online gaming mechanics can influence them to play longer and spend more money than they might have planned
- how changes in their social and emotional environment can affect their gaming activities
- if their online gaming is negatively affecting their wellbeing.

The Bridge concept

The Bridge is the name of the fictitious online game played by a child named Helmette.

The three videos featured in the program follow Helmette's journey from harmless fun online with friends, to risk-taking and potentially harmful gaming behaviour.

The videos help students identify the gambling-like mechanisms used by online game designers to convince players to invest more time, energy and money in a game than they might have intended. Helmette's journey also explores some real-life consequences of risky gaming.

'Crossing the bridge' in the game played in the videos is a visual metaphor for showing Helmette's journey from safe to unsafe online gaming.



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Online gaming and links to gambling

Online games – played on social networking sites, phones, tablets and PlayStation and Xbox consoles – have become a part of everyday life for children and adults alike.

Just like offline games, online games can be great fun and provide a range of benefits for children, including opportunities to:

- meet new people, develop social skills and make friends
- develop and hone physical and mental skills, and improve problem solving skills
- explore new worlds, concepts and ideas
- adopt different roles and characters, strategise and undertake risk-taking safely.

However, there is growing community concern that online gaming exposes children to gambling-like mechanisms that are designed to keep them playing longer and spending more than they planned.

More than ever, the line between online gaming and gambling is blurring.

Games marketed to children can include gambling-like elements, such as loot boxes. Such gaming elements may lead to harmful gaming among children and may increase the likelihood they will experience gambling harm in adulthood.

Risks of online gaming

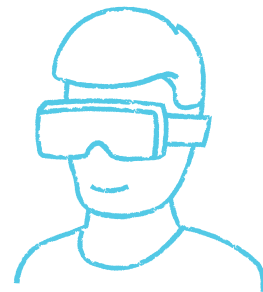
The online nature of gaming may put the wellbeing of kids at risk if they are left unchecked. Some of the risks of online gaming include:

Spending too much time and money

Spending too much time in the online gaming world may have a negative effect on a student's schoolwork, chores, personal relationships and physical health. Arguments and tension may arise when adults tell kids to stop gaming and pay attention to their real-world responsibilities. While gaming may provide a healthy form of escapism for some, it may also be a way to avoid or exacerbate uncomfortable feelings or real-world problems.

The Bridge helps kids and adults recognise the mechanics of these games and how they can persuade players to play for longer and keep spending money within a game. It also provides tips and strategies to help children avoid becoming immersed in a game at the expense of other activities.

While gaming may provide a healthy form of escapism for some, it may also be a way to avoid or exacerbate uncomfortable feelings or real-world problems.



Bullying and abuse

Online gaming can sometimes involve bullying and abuse (trolling) because players can hide behind anonymous profiles and play may be unsupervised by adults.

Cyber safety and hacking

Engaging with strangers online can be risky. Players may pretend to be someone they are not and hackers can steal personal data and money. Although The Bridge does not specifically focus on cyber safety, it is an important aspect of online gaming. Cyber safety advice and tips can be accessed via <https://www.esafety.gov.au/kids>.

Exposure to inappropriate content

Not all games are appropriate for all age groups. If cyber safety tools are not in place to block or prevent access to these games, kids can be exposed to inappropriate or extreme content and gambling apps.

Keeping children safe when playing online games

The Bridge is both a prevention and early intervention program that has been developed to engage upper primary aged children before they experience, or when they demonstrate early signs of, unsafe gaming.

The program approach draws on two key public health concepts.

1. **Harm reduction** is about minimising the harms associated with an activity rather than stopping the activity itself.¹ It is applied to social practices that can cause harm, such as gambling. Harm reduction is a widely accepted and effective public health theory and forms the basis of a range of government policies in Australia.²
2. **Peer education**, in this instance, is a process whereby pre-adolescent students are supported to communicate health promotion messages to other young people, thereby boosting message 'acceptability.' Peer education, particularly in the context of young people, has been found to enhance behaviour outcomes, increase knowledge and skills, and expand the reach of health promotion interventions.³

Raising awareness among children of the risks of online gaming, and giving them tools to manage the risks, can help to protect them, not only when they are playing online games, but also when they come into contact with gambling – particularly in an online context.

The Bridge focuses on demonstrating how online games are designed to persuade players to invest greater and greater amounts of time, energy and money to maintain the same level of enjoyment they experienced when they were new to online gaming.

Many online games use the same devices as some forms of gambling (such as pokies, online sports betting and online casinos) to influence players to keep playing and spending.

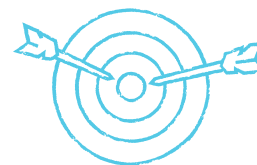


Raising awareness among children of the risks of online gaming, and giving them tools to manage the risks, can help to protect them when they come into contact with gambling – particularly in an online context.

Empowering students to take control of their online gaming activities will help them to learn to manage the risks now and prevent gambling harm in the future. Students will develop greater self-awareness, self-control and the capacity to adjust their behaviour.

The gambling-like devices explored in The Bridge include:

- **Near misses:** a near miss occurs when a player almost wins a point but just misses out, often resulting in the person playing harder and longer. A near miss can increase a player's heart rate and heighten their arousal, engaging them more deeply in the game.

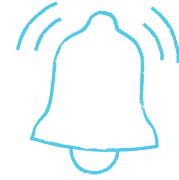


¹Lenton, S., & Single, E. (1998). *The definition of harm reduction*. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 17(2), 213–219.

²Rhodes, T., & Hedrich, D. (2010). *Harm Reduction: Evidence, Impacts, and Challenges*. European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

³Araujo, N. (2018). *Reviewing the evidence of effective peer education among young people*. *Perspectives in public health*, 138(6), 299–300.

- **Loot boxes:** these are like virtual lucky dips that appear in some online games, the contents of which vary in usefulness and value. Players may pay to reveal the contents of loot boxes, which is similar to gambling because they chance real money on an uncertain outcome.
- **Variable timing:** when a player begins a new game, the wins are frequent and regular, but as they progress through the levels, the wins become infrequent and random. This keeps the player glued to the game because they don't know when or if they will win.
- **Bells and whistles:** the bright colours, flashing graphics and distinctive sounds that accompany the opening of loot boxes or the winning of points during a game condition the player to associate them with winning. The resulting release of dopamine can strengthen the emotional experience of the 'bells and whistles', a technique designed to reinforce a person's desire to keep playing.
- **Grinding:** this describes a simple, repetitive and often boring activity within a game that a player must undertake to gain an advantage, or advance to the next level. Grinding can have the effect of increasing and maintaining a player's investment in the game, making them more likely to play longer. In online games players can opt to pay money to avoid grinding.



See **Key terms and concepts** for more definitions of the gambling-like devices used in online games.

Components of The Bridge program

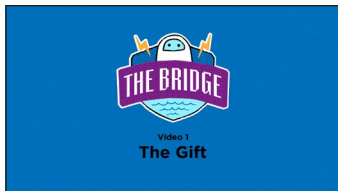
The Bridge comprises four modules. The first three each contain a video that follows the experiences of a young person named Helmette who plays a new online game called The Bridge.

Each module contains resources, including:

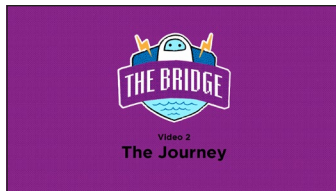
- **Learning intentions, success criteria and assessment notes** to support teachers when planning and using the materials.
- **Starters and discussion themes** to support exploration and knowledge transfer about key issues.
- **Kinaesthetic learning activities** to support fun, experiential learning about key issues, and to reach the broadest range of learning styles in a classroom.
- **Victorian curriculum links** to domains such as critical and creative thinking, drama, English, ethical capability, personal and social capability, visual arts, and health and physical education.
- **Worksheet PDFs, Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts** and **story summaries** for each video.
- **Key terms and concepts.**

Program resources

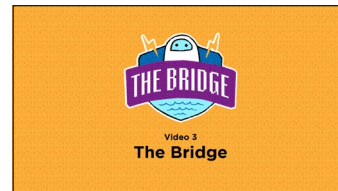
Animated video resources



Video 1:
The Gift

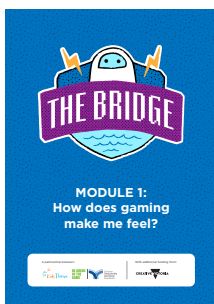


Video 2:
The Journey

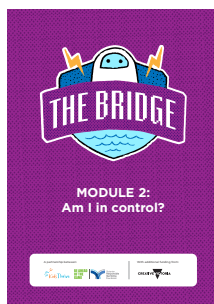


Video 3:
The Bridge

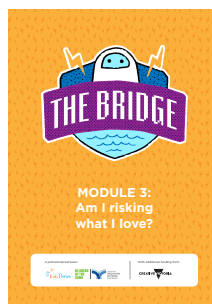
Lesson plans



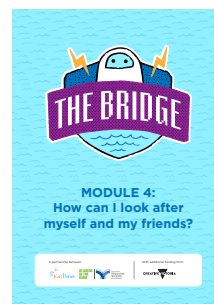
Module 1:
How does gaming
make me feel?



Module 2:
Am I in control?

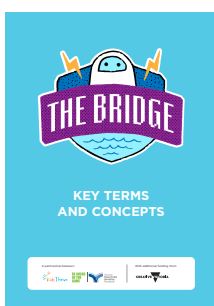


Module 3:
Am I risking what
I love?

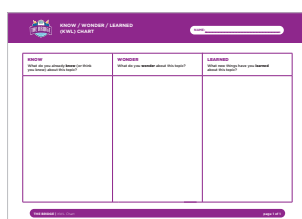


Module 4:
How can I look
after myself and
my friends?

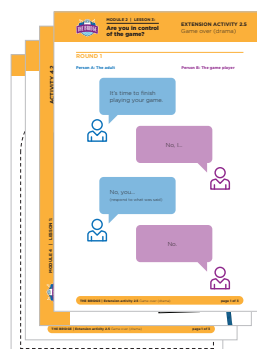
Additional resources



A guide to key
terms and concepts
used in The Bridge.
















Pre-assessment
Know/Wonder/
Learn (KWL) chart



Activity worksheets

Program overview

MODULE 1	MODULE 2	MODULE 3	MODULE 4
<p>How does gaming make me feel?</p> <p>Physical and emotional responses to online gaming.</p>	<p>Am I in control?</p> <p>How online games keep you playing.</p>	<p>Am I risking what I love?</p> <p>Understanding the risks of unsafe gaming.</p>	<p>How can I look after myself and my friends?</p> <p>Strategies for balancing safe gaming, self-care and helping others.</p>
3 x 90-min lessons	3 x 90-min lessons	2 x 90-min lessons	5 x 20-min activities
<p>Video 1 - The gift </p> <p>3-5 mins</p>	<p>Video 2 - The journey </p> <p>3-5 mins</p>	<p>Video 3 - The bridge </p> <p>3-5 mins</p>	
<p>Discussions </p> <p>15-30 mins</p>	<p>Discussions </p> <p>15-30 mins</p>	<p>Discussions </p> <p>15-30 mins</p>	
<p>Kinaesthetic learning activities </p> <p>5 x 30-60 mins</p>	<p>Kinaesthetic learning activities </p> <p>5 x 30-60 mins</p>	<p>Kinaesthetic learning activities </p> <p>2 x 30-60 mins</p>	<p>Kinaesthetic learning activities </p> <p>5 x 20 mins</p>
<p>Worksheet - Activity 1.1 </p> <p>Personal values cards</p> <p>Worksheet - Activity 1.2</p> <p>The full picture</p>	<p>Worksheet - Activity 2.5 </p> <p>Game over</p>		<p>Worksheet - Activity 4.2 </p> <p>Crossing the bridge</p>

Teacher guide to The Bridge

Lesson duration

The Bridge modules are designed for lessons of 90–120 minutes. Not all kinaesthetic learning activities will be achievable within this timeframe, so teachers may select a smaller number of activities, or extend the number of classes taken to further explore each module.

Videos

The Bridge is based on three short videos, each 3–5 minutes in length. For each module, play the relevant video in full and allow some time for quick comments afterwards. Then replay sections of the video using the timings indicated within the lesson plan and pause the video for deeper conversations about the information, ideas and events presented.

Note: the videos include captions that can be turned on or off.

Starters and discussion themes

The starters and discussion themes refer directly to events in each video and are provided as suggestions for teachers to identify issues and lead discussions with students. Each section includes key learning points, ideas for discussion, and a guide to responses to elicit from students, as well as worksheets, activities, and lesson materials.

Kinaesthetic learning activities

Kinaesthetic learning is about learning through hands-on experience - touching, doing, experiencing or being physically engaged. Creativity is a key tool in kinaesthetic learning.

The kinaesthetic learning activities are linked to points in the videos, discussion starters and themes. Teachers can choose to pause the video for conversations at these points to engage students in activities that aim to foster broader and deeper discussions through creative, experiential learning. Worksheet PDFs are provided for some of the activities.

Module 4

The fourth and final module asks students to create their own end to Helmette's story, developing personal strategies to keep their own gaming safe. Students are encouraged to consider their own experiences of crossing the bridge from fun gaming to risky, harmful gaming. This is also an opportunity for students to create a story or script, a stop-motion animation, puppet show, short play, song or rap, to express their experiences in a way they can share with others.

Final presentation

Students are encouraged to create a final journey of discovery presentation for a school assembly. The aims are to embed their personal learning and to share this learning with peers and the broader school community.

Program structure

MODULE 1	
How does gaming make me feel?	
Physical and emotional responses to online gaming.	
Starters	
Introduction to the program, pre-assessment Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts, key words chart, watch video.	
Discussion themes	
1.1	Games and play
1.2	Treasure
1.3	Getting drawn into the game
1.4	Emotional responses
1.5	Is there more to lose than the game?
Kinaesthetic learning activities	
1.1	Personal values cards
1.2	The full picture
1.4	Emotional statuses
1.5	Body mapping
Extension kinaesthetic learning activities	
1.3	Create your own avatar
Program resources	
Video 1 - The gift	
Worksheet - Activity 1.1: Personal values cards	
Worksheet - Activity 1.2: The full picture	
Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts	
Key terms and concepts	

MODULE 2

Am I in control?

How online games use devices to keep people playing.

Starters

Introduction to the program, pre-assessment Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts, key words chart, watch video.

Discussion themes

- 2.1 Tricks of the trade
- 2.2 Are you in control of the game?
- 2.3 Are you in control of your emotions?
- 2.4 The line starts to blur
- 2.5 Choice
- 2.6 Conflict

Kinaesthetic learning activities

- 2.1 What's the sound of...
- 2.2 Grinding
- 2.3 What's in the loot box?

Extension kinaesthetic learning activities

- 2.4 Avatar in trouble
- 2.5 Game over

Program resources

Video 2 - The journey

Worksheet - Activity 2.5: Game over

Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts

Key terms and concepts

MODULE 3**Am I risking what I love?**

Understanding the risks of unsafe gaming.

Starters

Introduction to the program, pre-assessment Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts, key words chart, watch video.

Discussion themes

- 3.1 Gaming risks
- 3.2 What is risk?
- 3.3 Safe gaming and risky gaming

Kinaesthetic learning activities

- 3.1 Upside down you
- 3.2 Trading values cards

Program resources**Video 3 - The bridge**

Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts
Key terms and concepts

MODULE 4

How can I look after myself and my friends?

Strategies for safe gaming, self-care and helping others.

Starters

Introduction to the program, pre-assessment Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts, key words chart, watch video.

Kinaesthetic learning activities

- 4.1 Helmette's journey: what next?
- 4.2 Crossing the bridge - both ways
- 4.3 Writing Helmette's story
- 4.4 Sharing our new expertise with the world

Extension kinaesthetic learning activities

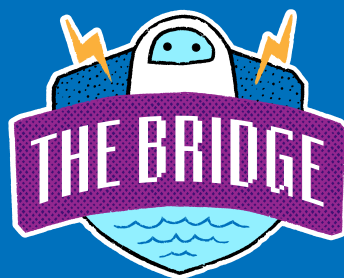
- 4.5 Secret agents for good (asking for help)

Program resources

Worksheet - Activity 4.2: Crossing the bridge

Know / Wonder / Learned (KWL) charts

Key terms and concepts



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