

# KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

A partnership between:



**BE AHEAD  
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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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## Acknowledgements

**Kids Thrive resource authors, including videos:**

Dr Andrea Lemon, CEO and Creative Director  
Andrea Rienets, Artistic Lead and Programs Director

**Kids Thrive creative:**

Katherine Branch  
Sal Cooper  
Dan Goronszy  
Will Mahon  
Anna Manuel  
Darren Mullen  
Simone Wright

**Kids' Big Ideas Lab:**

Caleb, Charlie, Eleni, Gideon, Jimi, Karla, Logan, Luca and Ollie

**Altona North Primary School curriculum co-design:**

Lee Blunt  
Libby Blunt  
Jessica Duffy  
Robyn Gregson  
Chris James  
Wal Raghdo  
Grade 5/6 students

**Content consultants:**

James Dunne, Rachel Burns, Jay Vij and Amber Cassidy, Hobsons Bay City Council  
Steven Dupon, Institute of Games  
Ian Ferretter, Gambler's Help at IPC Health  
Robyn Treyvaud, Schools Education Program consultant

**Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation resource editors:**

Niamh Eikenhout, Senior Prevention Program Advisor  
Andrea Hince, Senior Communication Advisor  
Rachel Maggiore, Senior Prevention Program Advisor  
Mark Riddiford, Senior Prevention Advisor (Education)  
Heidi Rose, Branch Head, Prevention & Programs  
Fiona Skivington, Manager, Media & Communication

**Design and typesetting:**

Alexander Vasic, Graphic Designer, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation  
Ben Galpin Graphic Design

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Address: Level 6, 14-20 Blackwood Street, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051

Mail: PO Box 2156, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Victoria 3050

Ph: (03) 9452 2600

ABN: 72 253 301 291

Website: [responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au](http://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au)

Email: [contact@responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au](mailto:contact@responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au)

# Key terms and concepts

This document outlines the key terms and concepts used in The Bridge.

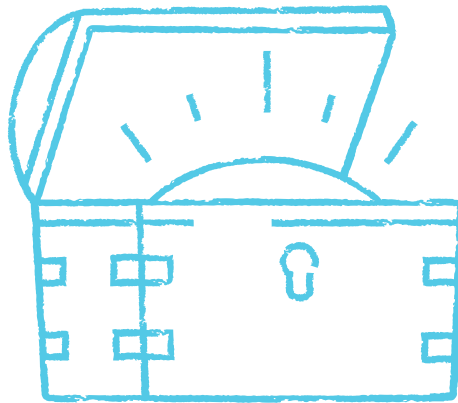
<p><b>Adrenaline<sup>1</sup></b></p>	<p>Adrenaline is a hormone released into the body of a person who is feeling a strong emotion, such as excitement, fear or anger. It triggers the body's fight or flight response by causing an increase in heart rate that results in a temporary boost in energy.</p> <p>Playing immersive video games can generate a range of emotions, including fear, stress, excitement and frustration, which can stimulate the release of adrenaline. The extra energy produced by a surge of adrenaline can leave the player feeling restless and irritable.</p> <p>See also, <b>dopamine</b>.</p>
<p><b>Avatar<sup>2</sup></b></p>	<p>An avatar is the character a player chooses to be in a video game. The name of Helmette's avatar is 'Helmet Head'.</p>
<p><b>Bells and whistles</b></p>	<p>The Bridge uses the term 'bells and whistles' to describe the bright colours, flashing visuals and exciting sounds that accompany the opening of <b>loot boxes</b> or winning of points during a video game. Frequently, a player learns to associate these visuals and sounds with winning. The accompanying release of <b>dopamine</b> can strengthen the emotional experience created by the bells and whistles, which is a technique designed to reinforce a player's desire to keep playing.</p>
<p><b>Bright colours</b></p>	<p>Bright colours elicit strong emotions. Video game designers use colours and their corresponding emotions to keep players engaged in games. Emotions experienced during a game might include surprise, fear, joy and anger. These emotions are known to correlate specifically with the colours light blue, dark green, yellow and red, which is why designers frequently use them in online video games, as well as poker machines.</p>
<p><b>Chasing wins</b></p>	<p>The urge to keep playing to recapture the great feeling players get when winning points or valuable items, even if this occurs less and less frequently. Online games often ensure there are just enough wins to keep people playing.</p>
<p><b>Cyberbullying</b></p>	<p>Cyberbullying is bullying that occurs using online technology. It can include posting or sharing negative, harmful, false or hurtful content about someone with the intention of causing harm or humiliation.</p>

<sup>1</sup>Video 1 - 02:50

<sup>2</sup>Video 1 - 01:26

<b>Default</b>	<p>'Default' is an insult coined by players of some popular online games. The term is used to mock and bully players who haven't bought skins (cosmetic items) to enhance the appearance of their <b>avatar</b>.</p>
<b>Dopamine<sup>3</sup></b>	<p>Dopamine is a feel-good chemical released in the brain. It is associated with pleasurable sensations and helps regulate mood, sleep, appetite, digestion, learning ability and memory.</p> <p>See also, <b>adrenaline</b>.</p>
<b>Escape</b>	<p>Escape means to get free from, or avoid, something.</p>
<b>Free-to-play</b>	<p>Many online games are free to play. This means that either the game itself is free or, once purchased, a game can be played without any further financial commitment. However, many games offer in-game purchases, called microtransactions, such as loot boxes or opportunities to advance more quickly in the game without having to waste time on grinding activities.</p> <p>These small purchases can easily add up to significant costs over time.</p>
<b>Getting drawn into the game</b>	<p>Prolonged involvement in playing the game.</p>
<b>Getting hacked</b>	<p>Getting hacked refers to the infiltration of a computer, account or system without the owner's knowledge or permission.</p> <p>Engaging with strangers in online games can be risky. Players may actually be hackers who are participating in online games in order to steal personal data and money from other players. Although The Bridge does not focus on cyber safety, it is an important aspect of online gaming. Cyber safety advice and tips are available from <a href="http://www.esafety.gov.au/kids">www.esafety.gov.au/kids</a>.</p>
<b>Grinding</b>	<p>Grinding is a simple, repetitive and often boring activity within a game. It may be used to increase an avatar's strength or power, or help them advance to the next level of the game.</p> <p>Grinding can have the effect of increasing and maintaining a player's emotional investment in a game if they have spent a significant amount of time on these activities to reach a higher level.</p> <p>Alternatively, players can pay to advance in a game without grinding, which is a key method used by game designers to make money.</p>

<sup>3</sup>Video 1 - 02:50



<p><b>Loot boxes<sup>4</sup></b></p>	<p>Loot boxes often appear in online games as chests, crates, or card packs that players can pay to open using in-game items, virtual currencies, or real-world money.</p> <p>The contents of loot boxes include tools, weapons, armour or items that can change a character's appearance. However, it's a lucky dip because the contents of a loot box cannot be revealed to the player before payment is made, and the value of the items varies widely.</p> <p>Loot boxes are often compared to gambling because they involve players risking their money for the chance to gain something of higher value.</p> <p>Similar to gambling, players can be enticed to keep purchasing loot boxes if they feel like they have only just missed out on a more valuable item. This is called a near miss.</p> <p>The opening of loot boxes is often accompanied by bells and whistles, even when the contents are worthless. This design feature - losses disguised as wins - is also built into pokies to make people feel like they are winning even when they are losing so they will keep gambling.</p> <p>The purchase price of loot boxes may seem insignificant in isolation but can easily add up over time, even in free-to-play games.</p>
<p><b>Near misses</b></p>	<p>A near miss describes an outcome in which a player feels like they only just missed out on winning a point or gaining an item of value.</p> <p>While near misses may be frustrating, their occurrence tends to encourage people to keep playing because they think winning is within their reach, even in games of pure chance where the probability of winning never changes.</p> <p>A near miss can increase a player's heart rate and heighten their arousal, engaging them more deeply in the game. They can also trigger the player's fear of missing out.</p>

<sup>4</sup>Video 1 - 02:30

<p><b>Online games respond to player behaviour</b></p>	<p>Many online games are programmed to respond to a player’s behaviour. This keeps the player engaged, ensuring they play more often and for longer periods of time. Games do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tracking play and adjusting the level of difficulty according to the player’s skill, success rate or level of engagement with the game</li> <li>• matching the player with others online who are stronger or weaker players</li> <li>• introducing random surprises, such as new maps or game modes.</li> </ul> <p>Game designers know that the longer someone plays, the more likely they are to make in-game purchases, see more ads, or pay to upgrade to the premium or next version of a game, leading to higher revenue.</p>
<p><b>Programming code<sup>5</sup></b></p>	<p>Video game designers use codes to build games. Codes consist of symbols, numbers and words that a computer interprets as a set of instructions to create and run programs, like games.</p> <p>Programming code appears in some of The Bridge videos.</p>
<p><b>Random rewards</b></p>	<p>Online games sometimes offer players random rewards for certain actions, or simply at random intervals. Rewards vary in value and can be traded with other players.</p> <p>Random rewards can trigger the release of dopamine in the brain, increasing the player’s desire to continue playing.</p>
<p><b>Risk</b></p>	<p>Risk involves uncertainty and the possibility of something bad happening.</p>
<p><b>Skins<sup>6</sup></b></p>	<p>A ‘skin’ is an item that changes the appearance of an avatar through, for example, a new colour scheme, a new look for weapons or other equipment. These changes are purely cosmetic, so they don’t influence the gameplay or improve a player’s skills.</p> <p>Skins can be won or bought and are valued by reference to their scarcity, appearance, usefulness and popularity. Typically, they range in price from less than \$10 to more than \$300, but a rare skin can cost \$1000 or even more.</p> <p>Skins can be used to gamble on websites connected to the game in which they were obtained. Players in possession of a rare skin get recognition and status within the gaming world.</p>

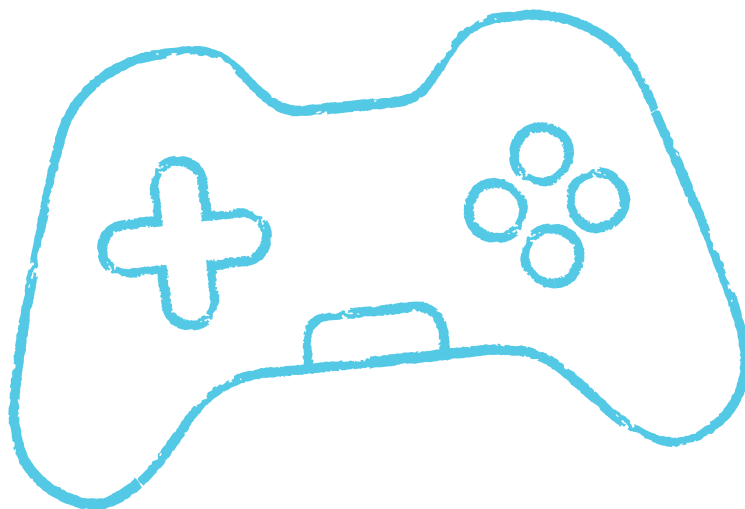
<sup>5</sup>Video 1 - 01:30

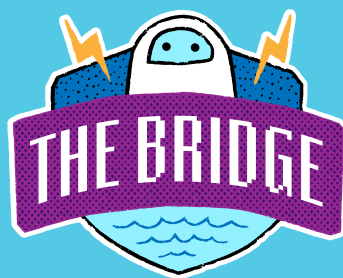
<sup>6</sup>Video 1 - 02:45

<b>Treasure</b>	Highly valued people or objects; or to treat something as precious.
<b>Variable timing</b>	At the beginning of a new game, the wins are frequent and regular. However, as a player progresses through the game or advances in levels, the wins become infrequent and random. This tactic keeps a player focused on the game, because they cannot predict if or when they might win.
<b>Virtual currency and goods</b>	<p>Online games often entice players to spend real money to buy in-game currencies such as virtual gold coins and/or goods to enhance gameplay. For example, in-game currencies can be used to buy skins, loot boxes, access new game levels, create an opponent advantage (weapons, armour), avoid grinding and ads, or simply keep playing.</p> <p>The in-game currency system is the core business model for many online game companies. The player never actually owns the currency, and when the game shuts down, they lose anything they've bought with it.</p>

Alongside The Bridge's discussion themes, it references work by:

- Institute of Games - [instituteofgames.com](http://instituteofgames.com)
- Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation - [responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au](http://responsiblegambling.vic.gov.au)
- Headspace - [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)
- Game-On - [esafety.gov.au](http://esafety.gov.au)
- Gameanax - [gameanax.com/slang-gamers-use](http://gameanax.com/slang-gamers-use).





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