What Parents & Carers Need to Know About
AVAKIN LIFE

12+
App Store Rating

Described as a place where teens and adults can make new friends, Avakin Life is a mobile game that has more than 1.4 million daily users. The game lets players create a virtual avatar (an 'Avakin'), style it in fashionable outfits, buy and decorate properties, and interact with others in communal spaces. It's this social aspect which has caused safety concerns, with many parents and carers unsure if the game is suitable for teenagers at all.

Age Rating

Listed as 12+ on the iOS store (and 'Teen' on Google Play), Avakin Life asks for a player's age at the start – but doesn't ask them to verify it. The game states that players found to be a different age to the one entered will be banned, but all that's needed to create an account is an email address, which anyone can set up. This has led to cases of adults entering the game under a false identity to groom children.

Adult Themes

Avakin Life is full of suggestive and adult themes. While the game itself leans into ideas of gambling (users are encouraged to spin a prize wheel for free coins each day) and customising avatars with revealing outfits and seductive dance moves, the primary risks stem from other users. The in-game chat can often move onto sexual topics, while depression and suicide are discussed openly.

Chat Function

'Social spots', where 'Avakins' gather, feature a live chat which displays messages publicly. Anything users in that vicinity say appears on everyone's screen. Profanity is starred out – but users can still post hurtful or sexual messages, or harass other players. When two players become 'friends' in the game, they can then chat privately. If personal details are shared and conversation moves away from the game, that represents a clear risk.

In-Game Spending

Although free to download and play, Avakin Life has two in-game currencies: Avacoins and Gems. Users are gifted small amounts of these as they play – but are also encouraged to buy larger quantities of these fictional currencies with real money (with the incentive that it allows access to more clothes, furniture, etc). Buying these bundles can cost up £39.99 with the simple press of a couple of buttons.

Potential Addiction

MMO (massively multiplayer online) games like this have often raised worries over their addictive gameplay. Avakin Life employs lots of techniques to prolong its appeal. Glamorous in-game rewards for playing, unlocking exotic new items and levelling up can all give a feeling of accomplishment that can quickly become consuming – especially for those who aren't aware of the signs.

Advice for Parents & Carers

Block and Report

Other players can be blocked by clicking on their in-game avatar, selecting their name and going to their profile. Blocking the player means they can't contact your child or be put in the same social space again. Players can be reported by repeating these steps but selecting 'Report' instead of 'Block'. Follow the on-screen prompts and your report will be assessed by a human member of the development team.

Download It Yourself

Avakin Life is a free download, so if your children use it or are talking about it, you could try it yourself: see how it works and if you feel it's safe. If you're not convinced, explain that to your child. Listen to what they think about the game; discuss alternatives that might be safer. If a device has parental controls that prevent age-restricted apps being downloaded, it's best to set them up as soon as possible.

Warn about Strangers

Young people should not be communicating with strangers: that's as vital a lesson online as it is in real life. This game has a less-than-stellar reputation for attracting predators and scammers who prey on the innocence of younger players. Talk to teens about how not everyone online is who they claim, and make sure they know how to deal with such situations if they occur. Report, report, report!

Be Alert to Addiction

If you're worried your child might be addicted to an online game, it's vitally important to intervene before it's too late. A child may become irritable when not playing, lose interest in other hobbies and personal hygiene, and stop seeing friends or communicating with them outside the game. If you spot any of the symptoms of gaming addiction, it might be wise to limit (or stop) time on the game.

Disable Payment Methods

It's easy to make an accidental purchase on mobile games like Avakin Life; children might not even realise they're spending actual money on in-game items. Ensure that whatever device your child is using to play doesn't have any credit cards or other payment options linked to it. If you do notice that money has been spent without your permission, the game's website states you can apply for a refund.

Meet Our Expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for five years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.

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