

- » Following along with the game the children in your life are playing
- » Letting Minecraft serve as a teaching tool
- » Getting started with Minecraft
- » Staying safe on Minecraft
- » Increasing your Minecraft knowledge via YouTube

Chapter **1**

Minecraft Is for Everyone — But What Is It?

Minecraft is what you make of it. It can be a complete waste of time, or it can be a place to learn, explore, create, and compete — at all ages and coming from various backgrounds. I wrote an entire book about it, *with* my kids! It's not just for kids. Minecraft is for everyone!

Although the rest of the book is coauthored by my son, Joseph, with some tips interspersed by another of my children, Alex, this chapter has been written entirely by me, the dad, who's familiar with the concerns of parenting a Minecraft “Steve” or “Alex” — which are the names of the default male and female characters everyone assumes when they begin to play Minecraft.



I, Jesse's 11-year-old son, am named Alex, but in addition to "Steve," who identifies as he/him and is a boy in the game, you can also choose to start as a she/her girl character named "Alex" in the game. Don't get me confused with the default girl Minecraft character, though, when you read the "Alex's Corners."

When my friends and other parental figures find out that I helped write the book *Minecraft For Dummies* with my children, I'm usually flooded with millions of questions: "What is Minecraft?" "Is it safe for children?" "My kids are always on Minecraft — isn't it a waste of time?" "I need your book! Will you sign a copy for me?"

I always smile whenever they ask that last question. I hope that you're one of these people, and that I, and my kids, have signed your book.

The truth is that Minecraft is an amazing teaching tool and a product that every parent can use to encourage exploratory learning, where children get to explore new concepts in a controlled environment.

Playing Minecraft with the Children in Your Life

The best thing you can do in Minecraft as a parent, coparent, guardian, or that favorite uncle or aunt for the kids in your life is play with them. They'll bond with you in ways you never anticipated, and you'll get to know the game — *and* find new ways to teach the kids by using the game. Minecraft is an excellent educational tool for kids, and the gameplay is full of opportunities for parental figures and teachers to participate in the learning process. I personally — as a single, divorced coparent — enjoy using the game as a way to bond remotely with my kids when they aren't at my house and they're with their mom instead.

Rather than refer you to Chapter 2 to get started, I present a few highlights and cross-references in this section so that you can hit the ground running with the kids in *your* life.

Getting a handle on the basics

Peruse the official Minecraft wiki at <https://minecraft.fandom.com>. It has up-to-date information about Minecraft — more than you’ve ever wanted to know. Ads and downloads that are available on the wiki can introduce malware to your computer if you’re not careful, so consider letting your kids focus on the information in this book and reserving the wiki for yourself.

Minecraft has two main modes: Creative and Survival. In Survival mode, you can still play with other players, but dangerous mobs abound (usually, evil characters that can kill you) and you can die (see Figure 1-1). If you play in Survival mode, check out the section in Chapter 3 about setting up for your first night. Few people survive the first night on their first attempt.



FIGURE 1-1: A hostile mob in Minecraft.

If you truly want to play the game and dodge evil, Survival mode might be for you. But if you simply want to explore and learn by playing with your kids, try out Creative mode, as explained in the following section.

Playing in Creative mode

In Creative mode in Minecraft, you can truly do anything you want without having to risk dying — in this mode, nothing can kill you except yourself. And you have access to almost every resource in order to build anything you want. And you can even fly!

To get started in Creative mode, you can either select it as you start gameplay (see Figure 1-2) or, within Survival mode, if cheats are enabled, type `/gamemode creative` and it automatically switches to Creative mode. Refer to Chapter 2 to see what you can do within Creative mode.

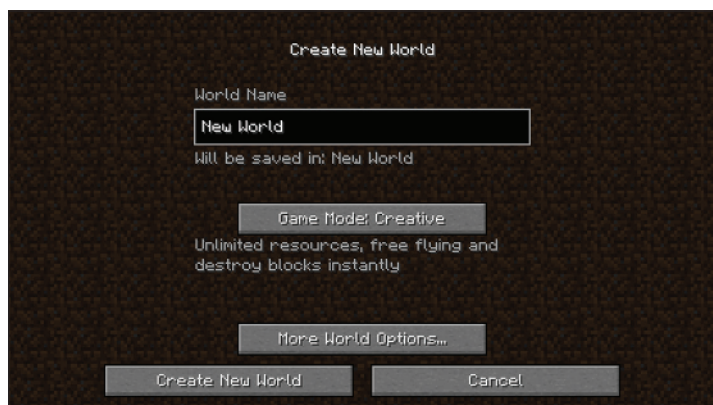


FIGURE 1-2: Selecting Creative mode as you start Minecraft.

Winning the game

After you've had some practice in Creative mode, you can start playing in Survival mode to win the game — though the truth is that you never actually win the game. Minecraft is a *sandbox* game: It has no true beginning or end, so the focus of the game is entirely on exploring, and on surviving, as you explore the game.

You'll want to achieve some initial goals, however, as described in the following list, before you move on to plain ol' exploration (refer to Chapter 11 for details on each step).

Letting Minecraft Help You Teach

I asked my sons, Joseph and Alex (and before that, Thomas, in the previous edition) to write most of this book because I wanted them to be the ones to show me what topics pique their interest and to explain why those topics are interesting to them. If you spend some time reading the chapters in this book, you'll quickly realize that Minecraft is much more than a silly-looking game.

In fact, I mentioned this to one of my children's schoolteachers and they invited my children to come talk about Minecraft to their class, for this very reason! Minecraft lets you explore an entire world where you experience life by engaging in these types of activities:

- » **Mining and geography/geology:** The sole premise of Minecraft is that you dig into your world's natural resources and gather different types of stone, precious metals, ore, and wood in order to build and create structures, as shown in Figure 1-3. The more you mine, the more you can build and create.



FIGURE 1-3: The first concept that your kids explore in Minecraft is likely to be geology and the process of mining to “create” structures.

Kids can quickly see that certain types of metal and stone cut faster than others. Wood can burn if placed near a flame or lava. Lava lurks deep within the earth. And dangerous creatures roam among the trees and plants!

- » **Farming:** Our family announced our latest pregnancy by taking a screen shot of a pink sheep and a blue sheep that had just produced a random pink sheep. (Yes, it was a girl. See Figure 1-4 to see the announcement.) In Minecraft farming, you get to learn about the birds and the bees by viewing animals in 8-bit format — a format that's safe for young kids to view (and fun, too).



FIGURE 1-4: We used two mating sheep in Minecraft to announce an upcoming birth.

On a Minecraft farm, you learn about growing plants and about needing to water plants to make them grow. You learn about preventing pests and other creatures that can harm your plants and animals. You also learn that the meat you eat comes from real-life animals that you have to kill before eating them. (Don't worry: It's all in 8-bit format, so kids don't see real violence.)

On a Minecraft farm, you can do things like shear sheep and collect wool. Thomas even created a farm that automatically breeds, hatches, collects, kills, and cooks chickens for eating later.

- » **Nutrition:** In Minecraft, you have to keep your character healthy. (Every default user is named Steve for boys, and Alex for girls.) Gathering nutritious foods best maintains your health. Try some beetroot soup. Or have an apple. Keeping your character's nutrition level stable helps the character last longer in the game.
- » **Art and architecture:** From full-tilt architecture to simply building fun designs and contraptions, you can express the artist in you in Minecraft. You can create dye from objects such as beets and flowers that you collect throughout the game. You can then use the dye to create panels to decorate your house, for example, or to color wool for other types of items in your house or dwelling place.

Players have created extravagant items such as ships and castles and even entire reproductions of various landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower and the *Millennium Falcon* (from *Star Wars*). Entire cities have been reproduced in Minecraft. The sky is, quite literally, the limit.

» **Logic and math:** This is one of our favorite features because we're computer nerds. Joseph and Thomas (who wrote the previous edition of this book with me) are studying computer science and engineering in college, and my entire career has been in the tech world! Minecraft uses binary logic to implement contraptions from an electricity-like dust called *redstone dust*. You can use redstone to create logic-based devices that react in different ways based on power supplied to them. Even if your children don't realize it, creating redstone contraptions helps them learn binary logic, which is a primary element of programming and electronics that can be applied later in life. Check out Chapter 8 to see more about the topics your child can learn about with redstone.

» **Electronics:** When you're working with redstone, you're creating simple electronic and mechanical devices. Many of the devices work as transistors, capacitors, and even resistors to some extent, which are the basic building blocks of any electronic device or chip. If you can figure out how to compare the different redstone devices, you'll be able to help your child apply these contraptions to real life to build their own real-life robots and other fun, electronic devices.

We're big fans of LEGO Mindstorms. Using the concepts he learns about in Minecraft, Thomas builds real-life circuitry using LEGO blocks, a little programming, and some simple logic.



TIP

» **Computer programming:** Computer programming and electronics truly go hand in hand. Like electronics, computer programming uses logic to decide what happens in the computer program. Because the redstone circuits in Minecraft are virtual, each circuit is, in essence, a computer program.

In addition, you can do some fun things with actual computer programming if you want to let your kids experiment outside of Minecraft. For example, many players create their own mods of Minecraft to do fun things that are not natural to the game. Or you might let your kids set up their own Minecraft server and learn a little about systems administration in the process.

Knowing Where to Get Started with Minecraft

If you have kids or you work with kids (Minecraft is useful for teachers as a learning platform!), there's a good chance they're approaching you and asking you to buy Minecraft for them. Likely, they'll direct you to <http://minecraft.net> and ask you to buy them an account. This account is required if they want to play the PC version. If your kids are playing on a phone or on a game console like the Xbox or PlayStation, they don't need an account, but you still need to purchase the app to allow full gameplay.

In Chapter 2, we walk you through the entire process of setting up an account, including explaining the different types of Minecraft — whether you're on an Xbox or a PlayStation, a mobile device, a VR headset, or a PC or Mac. Go to Chapter 2 to find out more about getting started with Minecraft for the first time.

Keeping Your Kids Safe

As a single coparent of yes, seven children, I can relate to the constant, nagging feeling of wondering whether your kids are safe online. This feeling doesn't fade when your kids play Minecraft. Though I believe that Minecraft is a safer environment than lots of other games you can buy, I would at least follow a few principles to be sure that your children are staying out of trouble.

Knowing with whom your kids are playing

The biggest worry you should have as a parent of a child playing Minecraft, or perhaps any game or program, is not what they're playing but rather *whom* they are playing with. In the stand-alone game, players play alone, but if your children play on a server, they can be playing with *anyone*, anywhere around the world. And, in a game played mostly by children, predators are *undoubtedly* trying to take advantage of this situation.

Another concern about children playing games online is whom they're playing with in person. Knowing who is physically present at their friends' houses when they play can be critical information.

Here are a few tips to keep your kids safe as they play Minecraft with other people:

- » **Pay attention to whom they're chatting with.** Most interaction with players in Minecraft happens within the chat system. Your kids may even experience forms of cyberbullying (called *griefing*) that can trouble them, if you're not aware. You might want to look over your kids' shoulders every so often to understand what they're saying in chat and to ask them whom they're chatting with. You should know, and be comfortable with, every person your kids interact with in Minecraft.
- » **Establish a list of safe servers.** The easiest way to avoid griefing on Minecraft is to establish a safe list of servers that your kids can join. Find a server or two that you're comfortable with, and work with your children to ensure that they connect only with those servers.
- » **Set up your own server and establish rules on who can join.** This process may require a little more skill than you're willing to contribute, and the topic is well beyond the scope of this book. You can find many tutorials online, however, to show you how to set up your own Minecraft server. Doing so gives you the benefit of controlling what happens within the game and who is allowed to join. You can bar cursing and set gameplay rules, for example. My children play mostly on a server that our neighbors have set up, and the kids definitely know the rules that have been established.
- » **Don't play with strangers.** The old adage "Don't talk to strangers" applies to Minecraft as well. Though players have opportunities to meet new people in the game, these opportunities can be dangerous for minors if they don't know whom they're chatting with.
- » **Play with your kids.** The easiest way to keep your kids safe is to play the game with them. It's not only fun but also a wonderful opportunity to interact with your kids at their level, to learn the same concepts they're learning, and to provide teaching experiences in the process. In addition, you get to know the other players they interact with. Or, if the only person they interact with is you, that's okay too. We can't recommend this advice strongly enough. Who says that you have to interact with your kids only in real life? If they're still learning information that can improve their future, I say go for it!

Subscribing to Minecraft channels on YouTube

If your child is playing Minecraft, there's a pretty good chance that they not only play the game but also watch other people play it, *repeatedly*, on YouTube. We're extremely familiar with this phenomenon in our family: Minecraft is the new version of Saturday morning cartoons for our kids. They'd much rather watch Minecraft videos on YouTube than watch TV programs.

If the preceding paragraph describes your children, have no worries — your children are simply learning new ways to play the game. They're likely learning about new items they can create, and new ways to manipulate redstone and other blocks to build truly neat structures, which can likely apply to real-life knowledge.

Here are a few tips for protecting your children as they watch these videos:

» Watch videos only from channels they've subscribed to.

My kids can watch videos only on YouTube channels they subscribe to. I then have to approve each YouTube channel they're subscribed to. If we catch them watching a YouTube video on a channel they haven't subscribed to, or if they've subscribed to a channel we haven't approved, they're banned from watching YouTube videos.

If a YouTube channel allows cursing or other objectionable material (you determine what's objectionable for your kids), it shows up in more than one video on their channel. So, if I see it on one video, I generally disapprove of the channel as a whole. This way, my kids are more likely to be watching videos only on channels that have safe content for kids.

» Watch a few of the videos your children watch.

Don't let your children randomly watch Minecraft videos. Objectionable, adult-oriented videos abound on YouTube, so be sure to establish a few guidelines to help your kids decide what to watch. Spend a little time watching a few of the videos your kids are watching. If you object, set some rules so that they don't watch the objectionable content again.

» **Limit the amount of time your kids spend on YouTube.**

Set some time limits to control how much time your kids spend on YouTube. If you need help, parental control software such as Norton Internet Security can allow you to set limits on how long your kids are online, and monitor the sites they have access to. Use that if you need to completely enforce time limits for your children. Or tally it on your own — you should always know how often your kids use the Internet.

» **Place in a public area the computers your children use.**

The best way to keep your kids safe is to put the computers they use in a public place in the home so that everyone can see what they're doing. This strategy also forces you to know more about what they're doing in the game (and other software). Our family also has a rule to prevent having mobile devices in our kids' rooms. Everything they do has to be in a public place so that we parents know what's going on.

» **Talk to your kids.** By all means, maintain a continual dialogue with your kids to keep tabs on what they do in Minecraft. This strategy becomes even more important as they grow older and don't always play online at home. If they know they can talk to you about their experiences in the game, or on YouTube, or anywhere else on the Internet, they'll talk to you when they have problems or see things that make them uncomfortable.



TIP

You can subscribe to the official — and safe — YouTube channel for this book, managed by Joseph. (Figure 1-5 shows the *Minecraft For Dummies* YouTube channel.) You can subscribe to it at <http://youtube.com/minecraftdummiesbook>. At these sites, we share examples from this book — and much more.

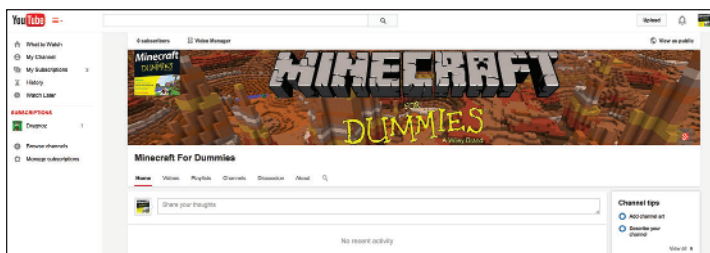


FIGURE 1-5: The *Minecraft For Dummies* YouTube channel.

Teaching Proper Minecraft Etiquette

If you don't teach your kids good Minecraft etiquette, they may learn about it the hard way, by being banned from the server. Talk to them ahead of time, at their convenience, when they aren't playing the game. The following sections describe some best practices for interacting with other players.

Preventing server crashes

When playing on other people's servers, believe it or not, activities within the game can crash the server, causing undue stress for the person managing it. You should follow certain principles to avoid server overload. These are tips your kids ought to follow; otherwise, they may learn the hard way (by being banned from the server they're playing on).

- » **Mass explosions:** My son Joseph crashed a server he participates on by creating a contraption that produced unlimited dynamite (which shortly after explodes and destroys everything around it) in the game. So much dynamite was generated that it caused a massive explosion of dynamite, causing an infinite loop that eventually crashed the server. Our neighbor, the administrator of that server, asked Joseph not to create that contraption again.
- » **Infinite loops:** Anything that quickly produces an unlimited number of new items — explosions, spawn, or automated contraptions, for example — may cause undue stress on a server. Be careful not to do anything that is too complex for the server you're playing on to handle, to avoid being banned.

Recognizing that stealing is wrong

In real life, everyone knows that stealing is wrong. You may not go to jail, especially if you don't get caught, but stealing in Minecraft can get you banned from the server you play on. Sometimes it's fun to play pranks on other players in the game, but always remember that the server administrator can tell who is doing what in the game. You *will* get caught in the end.

In addition, vandalism and breaking items that others create are generally frowned on by most server managers. Treat other players' property with respect in Minecraft, and they'll treat yours with respect.

Asking permission

When in doubt, ask. If you're unsure whether a certain behavior is acceptable on a particular server, ask the server admin about it. Different servers have different rules and cultures, so what may be okay on one server may not be okay on another.

As a parent, see whether you can get to know some of the server admins on the servers your kids participate on. Get in the game and play with them. Chat with the admins or find out who they are. See whether you can find ways to get in contact with them and get to know them, or ask your kids about them. The more you know, the more you can help your children stay safe.

