

LOOT BOXES: WHAT ARE THEY AND HOW DO THEY AFFECT ADOLESCENTS?

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Compass Mark

- County-funded addiction prevention providers in Lancaster, Lebanon, and Chester Counties.
- Been serving local communities for over 50 years.
- Our mission is to prevent addiction through education, skill-building, and community mobilization.



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Objectives

After this presentation, the audience will be able to :

- Define loot boxes and their place in gameplay.
- Explain how loot boxes are related to gambling.
- Describe the effects that loot boxes can have on adolescents.
- Employ strategies for parents/caregivers to prevent the overuse/abuse of loot boxes.



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Loot Boxes

- Something that gives a player a random set of items
- Items can be cosmetic or competitive
- Can be earned in game or purchased with in-game or real-world currency
- Games use a variety of terms interchangeably for loot boxes:
 - Loot Crates
 - Daily Rewards
 - Prize Crates or Chests
 - Card Packs
 - Spinning wheel
 - Surprise Mechanics



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Counter Strike Go



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Overwatch



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FIFA 2015



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NBA 2K19



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Cosmetic vs. Competitive

Cosmetic

- Skins-costumes, outfits, hats, decorations, etc.
- Emotes-character dances/behaviors
- Special lines/voices

Competitive

- Improves performance in the game.
- Typically provides an edge
 - Run faster
 - Camouflage clothing
 - More powerful weapons
 - Stronger armor



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Loot Box Information

- Started to grow in popularity in 2010 in Japan.
 - Similar to gacha games
- In 2018 loot boxes earned gaming companies an estimated \$30 billion.
- Most titles make more money in loot boxes and microtransactions than initial game sales.
- Purchasing loot boxes is looked down upon by competitive gamers and banned in E-sports.
 - Considered “pay to play”
 - Really came under fire after Star Wars Battlefront by Electronic Arts

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How do you get Loot Boxes

- Loot boxes can be earned during game play or as the result of completing a portion of the game.
- Daily rewards are given for returning to the game.
- Loot boxes can be purchased using in-game currency that is earned as part of the game.
 - Microtransactions to convert real world money to game points, gems, or coins.
- Loot boxes can be purchased with real world currency.
- Loot boxes, and their contents, can be bought, sold, traded, and wagered on black market sites.



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Microtransaction

| Call of Duty Points | Price (USD) |
|---------------------|-------------|
| 200 | 1.99 |
| 1,100 | 9.99 |
| 2,400 | 19.99 |
| 5,000 | 39.99 |
| 9,500 | 74.99 |
| 13,000 | 99.99 |

2,400 CALL OF DUTY POINTS
19.99USD

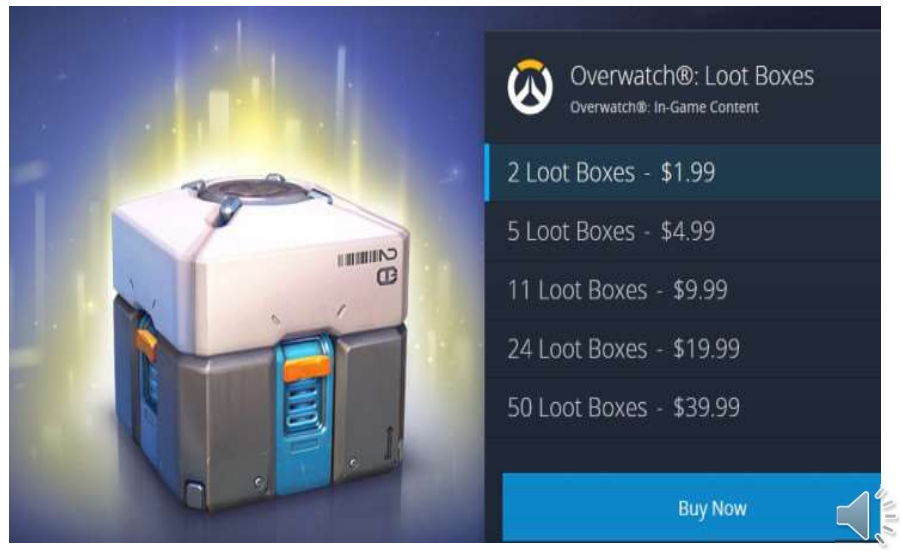
This bundle includes 2,000 + 400 Bonus Call of Duty® Points (CP) for an extra 20% value. Call of Duty®: Modern Warfare® Remastered game required, sold separately. CP are the in-game currency that can be used in Modern Warfare® Remastered to obtain Supply Drops for use in Multiplayer game mode. CP purchased may also be used to obtain in-game content in Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare and Call of Duty: Black Ops III. Infinite Warfare and Black Ops III games required and sold separately. Modern Warfare Remastered must be launched and CP registered in game before these CP will appear in Infinite Warfare.

PlayStation®Store

Scroll Description Social

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Purchasing Loot Boxes



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Loot Boxes and Adolescents

- The brain can become re-wired, similar to substance use disorders.
- Children's' brains are especially vulnerable because they are still developing.
- Many studies have shown a connection between loot box buying and issues with problem gambling later in life.
 - Most large studies are from Canada and the United Kingdom.
- Loot box reveals use sounds and colors akin to slot machines.
- Loot boxes in games are randomized in a way to make people want to play longer , and more often.



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- Parents can feed into issues with loot boxes leading to unintended consequences.
- Multiplayer games and can become the new landscape of cyber bullying and loot boxes can be seen as the way out.
 - Young people will purchase loot boxes to try and obtain upgrades to “keep up” with their peers in game.

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Loot Boxes and Gambling

- Risking money, or something of value, on an unknown outcome.
 - There is no guarantee of the value of items in a loot box
- Reveals mimic slot machines, normalizing behavior
 - Sounds and colors
 - Losses disguised as a win
- Same brain chemicals released as when gambling or using substances.
 - Just as with gambling, an early “big win” can be a warning sign of future issues
- Gambling is becoming a larger part of gameplay with loot boxes a part of that extension.

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Canadian Study from 2019

- Zendle, Meyer, & Over (2019). Adolescents and loot boxes: Links with Problem Gambling and Motivation for Purchase. *Royal Society Open Science*
- 1,155 participants aged 16-18. Participants were asked:
 - If they opened a loot box and if they paid for a loot box in the past month.
 - How much money they paid for loot boxes in the past month.
- Captured problem gambling behaviors via the Canadian Adolescent Gambling Inventory.

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Loot Boxes and Problem Gambling

- The more adolescents spent on loot boxes, the more severe their problem gambling behaviors.
 - Adolescents who paid the most had over two times the amount of problem gambling behaviors than those who spent nothing.
- Two loot box features strengthened the link between loot box spending and problem gambling.
 - Items available for a limited time
 - Players offered “free” loot boxes
- Adolescents who were more impulsive had more severe gambling issues.
- Link does not equal causation.

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Motivation for Purchase

- The most common reason for purchase was for gameplay advantages, to “keep up” or “compete” with other gamers.
- The second most common reason was to gain resources within the game.
- Some participants stated enjoying the feeling they felt opening loot boxes.
 - This feeling is linked to the random nature of the loot box contents.
- Some also reported purchasing loot boxes to fit in with a social group.

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Maxwell's Video



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Loot Box Governance

- Europe is on the leading edge of regulating loot boxes.
- Loot boxes are currently banned in Belgium and The Netherlands.
 - Determined that game companies were exploiting people with problem gambling behaviors.
- Lot boxes are labeled as gambling in China.
- There are no current regulations on loot boxes in the United States.
 - Increased labeling regarding loot boxes
 - Listing of odds for premium rewards
 - Subscription services

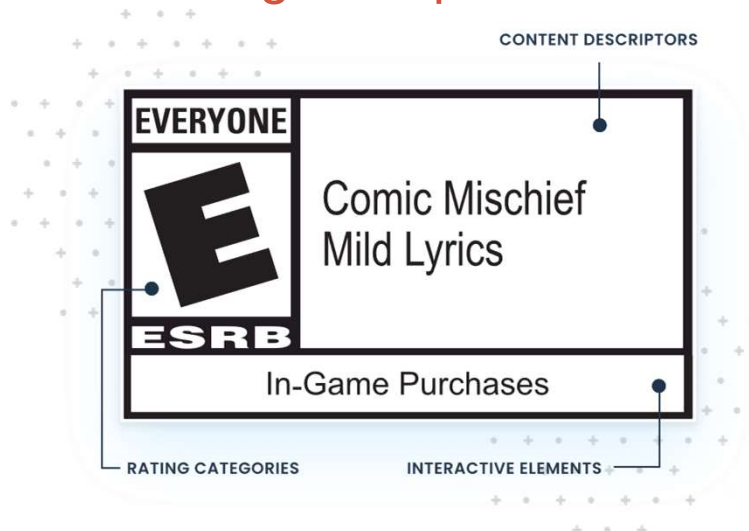
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Video Game Ratings

- Newer games will have in-game purchases listed as part of the rating process from the Entertainment Software Rating Board.
 - The ESRB is made up almost entirely of former entertainment software industry workers.
 - They have no regulatory power.
- Common Sense Media rates games for age appropriateness.
 - Also has reviews from parents and other game players.
 - Reviews include not only video games but apps, movies, and tv as well.

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ESRB Rating Example



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What can parents do?

- Stay educated! Games are constantly changing. Know what you children are playing and what is included in those games.
- Research! Common Sense Media and the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) are places that will rate games and tell you about the content of games including violence, language, and the availability of loot boxes.
- Be vigilant! If games are bought online your credit card information is usually stored on the device. All that is needed to purchase loot boxes at this time to press "buy". Know where your information is stored and watch your accounts for unusual purchases.



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- Be Proactive! Have conversations with children early and often. Talk about the randomness of loot boxes and the variability of rewards. Explain the likelihood of receiving top tier rewards.
- Seek help, if necessary! Counseling and treatment is available for adolescents struggling with problem gambling issues.

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Resources

- Common Sense Media- www.common sense media.org
- Entertainment Software Rating Board- www.ESRB.org
- Compass Mark- www.compassmark.org



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