



Doki Doki Literature Club is free-to-play, visual novel online game that begins like a 'cute, romantic novel'. A boy joins a high school literature society and grows close to four teenage girls - before a twist takes players into a psychological horror plot. Players take the role of the boy and interact with the characters (Natsuki, Monika, Sayori and Yuri) by chatting and writing poems. The game, developed by Salvato and launched in 2017, is believed to have been downloaded more than two million times in the first four months. The game has come under scrutiny in the UK media after a father said he felt the game had 'dragged his son in' and contributed to his death in Greater Manchester in early 2018. Police and the coroner investigating the 15-year-old's death have urged parents to be vigilant and called the game a 'risk to children and young people'. Some game reviewers have even described Doki Doki Literature Club as 'one of the scariest games they have ever played'.



18
ADvised Rating

What parents need to know about **DOKI DOKI: LITERATURE CLUB**

'BREAKING THE 4TH WALL'

In gaming, the term 'fourth wall' is an imaginary wall which separates the fictional world from reality, keeping players separate from the game they are playing. Doki Doki breaks this 'fourth wall', by making the player feel like the game can 'see them' and encourages them to complete tasks. When a character directly addresses your child, it is likely to deeply affect them and make them feel emotionally attached to the game. Your child can make choices through the game which can lead to different outcomes, for example, at one point in the game, your child will be forced to access the game's files on their computer and delete a specific file to progress further.



SUICIDE & VIOLENCE

Doki Doki features graphic references of violence, suicide and self-harm throughout. While the game appears to be light-hearted and fun at first, your child will soon encounter unsettling situations that will put them on edge and unsure what to expect next. During the game, a childhood friend of the character your child plays, reveals she has been battling with depression and in a later chapter, players witness the character hanging in her bedroom after taking her own life. Other scenes include the schoolgirl Yuri killing herself with a knife and another character Natsuki snapping her neck.



IT CAN BE ADDICTIVE

Some players of Doki Doki Literature Club have said they have found themselves wanting to spend more time with its characters, or play the game again to change the outcome. The World Health Organisation has recently classified 'gaming disorder' as a health condition, where children have trouble getting their gaming behaviours under control, letting it reign over their lives and daily routine. If your child is playing the game, keep an eye out for warning signs like a lack of interest in other activities, tiredness or fatigue, neglect of their personal hygiene, a change in character or anger issues when they're told to stop playing.



National Online Safety Top Tips for Parents

"This game is not suitable for children or those who are easily disturbed."

Source: Doki Doki Literature Club website and trailer



IS YOUR CHILD VULNERABLE?

While the game is certainly inventive and praised by many gamers for its horror twists, you need to decide if your child is ready to play a game that is so unsettling and psychologically challenging. Talk to your child about the content of the game and the impact this could have on them. If you think your child is at an appropriate age to play games like this, you may consider bringing their gaming device into a communal area of the house, so you can not only understand what they are playing but also provide a safe space to discuss the mental health issues they may encounter.



DISCUSS THE '4TH WALL'

Depending on their age and developmental stage, they may be less clear about what is real and what is imaginary. Encourage your child to chat about their concerns and communicate that it is completely understandable how they feel if they think the character is talking to them. For children of all ages, the most important thing is to reassure them that they are safe.



SOURCES

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