

Harry Potter: Wizards Unite – what parents should know



Only 24 hours after being launched in the UK and US, Harry Potter: Wizards Unite — the ‘new Pokemon Go’ — was downloaded more than 400,000 times. Now, millions of children and adults alike are ‘swishing and flicking’ their way through the Wizarding World of the Harry Potter universe.

Here’s what parents need to know about the latest popular mobile game.

What is Harry Potter: Wizards Unite?

Much like Pokemon Go, Wizards Unite is an Augmented Reality (AR) game which means that through geolocation and camera access, it allows players to interact with the world around them by using it as the game’s canvas. It’s free to download and has been given the PEGI rating 7 due to some mild violence and in-app purchases.

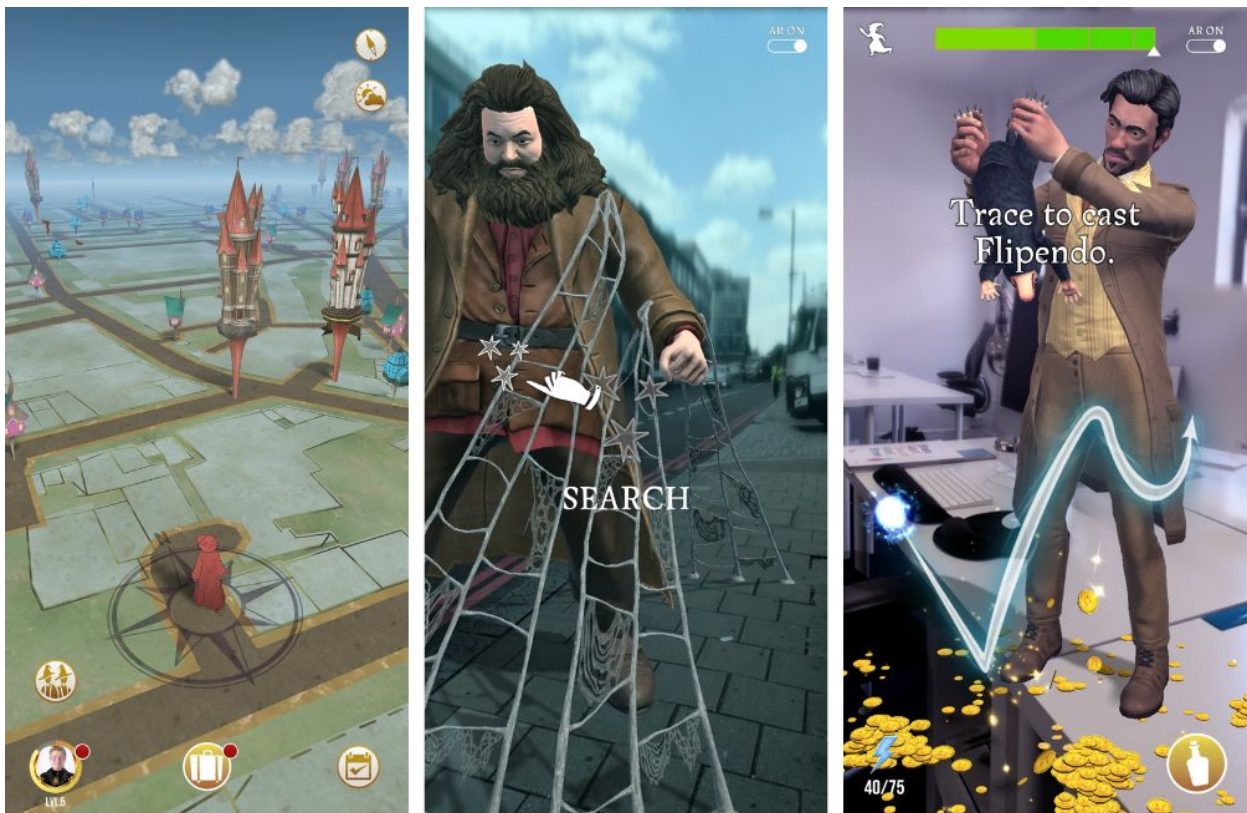
In the game, the player is cast into the role of a witch or a wizard tasked with restoring order as a phenomenon known as the Calamity is destroying the barrier between the magical and ‘muggle’ (non-magic) worlds. The Calamity has scattered magical objects and beings across the real world and it’s the player’s task to ensure that these items, called ‘foundables’, are returned to the magical world so they’re not discovered by ‘muggles’.

To do this, they have to battle malevolent entities called ‘confoundables’, level up their magic skills and — most importantly — interact with players and the world around them.

What's gameplay like?

All you need to play Wizards Unite is an Android or iOS phone with a WiFi or 4G connection. As said, your objective is to track down all the 'foundables' which have been spread across the world. To do this, you will need to physically walk around until you encounter them as the game tracks your movements in real-time. The game's interface is a map of the area you're in — 'foundables' will pop up on the screen as you walk and all local landmarks (statues, train stations, shops, parks) function as so-called Fortresses (for those of you familiar with Pokemon Go, these are the equivalent of Gyms) and Inns (the same as PokeStops in Pokemon Go).

When you encounter a 'foundable' or 'confoundable', the game activates your phone's camera and uses it as the backdrop for the standoff. As the battle begins, you have to cast spells on the entities to defeat them by drawing identical spell patterns to the ones shown on the screen. Battling 'confoundables' and collecting 'foundables' requires spell energy of which you have a limited amount. The images below will give you a sense of how the game augments the real world:



Players have to visit Inns at regular intervals to replenish their spell energy and resources. Fortresses are much tougher to take on and will usually require you to team up with other players. These are different from normal battles in the sense that you'll have to defeat several waves of enemies and you have limited health — so having a partner helps.

How can my child sign up?

When opening the app for the first time, they'll be asked to create an account. It gives the option of either signing in with a Facebook or Google account. For children under 16, some of which might not have a Facebook or Google account, parents will have to create a [Niantic parents account](#), which allows you to change safety settings.

When signing up, the game will ask the player for their date of birth, but no further verification is needed, and requests access to the phone's GPS and camera. They will need to consent to this if they want to play the game, but [Niantic guarantees](#) that the data is handled according to GDPR and will not be used in any other way than to enhance the gaming experience.



Does my child need to give their personal data?

Your child will be asked to enter their first and last name, but this will not be visible to anyone else. Then, they have to enter a username which will be shown to the gaming community. Make sure your child keeps their username free of any personal data, for example, references to where they live or go to school.



Beyond this, all other details are optional. Each player has their own profile — or Ministry ID — where all their progress and achievements are recorded. Filling out the profile page allows children to further immerse themselves in the Harry Potter universe by, for example, specifying what Hogwarts house they're in, choosing the material, core and flexibility of their wand and edit their title.

They don't have to upload a profile picture, but children can either choose from a catalogue of stock images featuring their favourite characters or take a picture of themselves and decorate it with frames, stickers, moving text etc. As they progress, they will be rewarded with more effects, which might incentivise them to upload a picture of themselves. For the time being, the picture isn't visible to anyone but the player, but this could change in future updates.



Will the game cost anything to play?

As with many free-to-play games, you can expect to find paid-for features. In Wizards Unite, it's possible to enjoy all sides of the game without paying a penny — however, it can be a lot more difficult.

For example, to complete missions, take over fortresses or defeat enemies you need so-called 'spell energy'. Many mobile games use the finite 'energy' or 'lives' model which means that once you've used or your energy or lives, you either have to wait for it to be replenished or speeding the process up by spending paid-for in-game currency.

In Wizards Unite, however, energy doesn't replenish over time.

To get more energy, which is required to progress, the player either has to check in at 'inns' daily or complete daily challenges to collect a small amount — or bite the bullet and pay for more. This can be frustrating for children if they had planned to play Wizards Unite for a few hours but then quickly running out of energy and it could lead them to spend real money in the game.

This is done by buying Gold — the game's own currency. Gold can be bought in bundles ranging from £0.99 to £99.99.



In addition to energy, Gold is also used to buy ‘keys’ which unlock so-called Portmanteaus — the game’s version of loot boxes. It’s important, however, to note that these loot boxes aren’t like the ones found in many other games. They can be opened without spending money, it’ll just take a lot more time.

Portmanteaus contain undisclosed items and power-ups but need to be unlocked — if you’re familiar with Pokemon Go, they’re like Eggs. They are found scattered around the game map and are opened by using a key and then walking a set distance, either 2km, 5km or 10km. You will be given silver keys when levelling up or completing certain challenges, but each can only be used on a single Portmanteau.

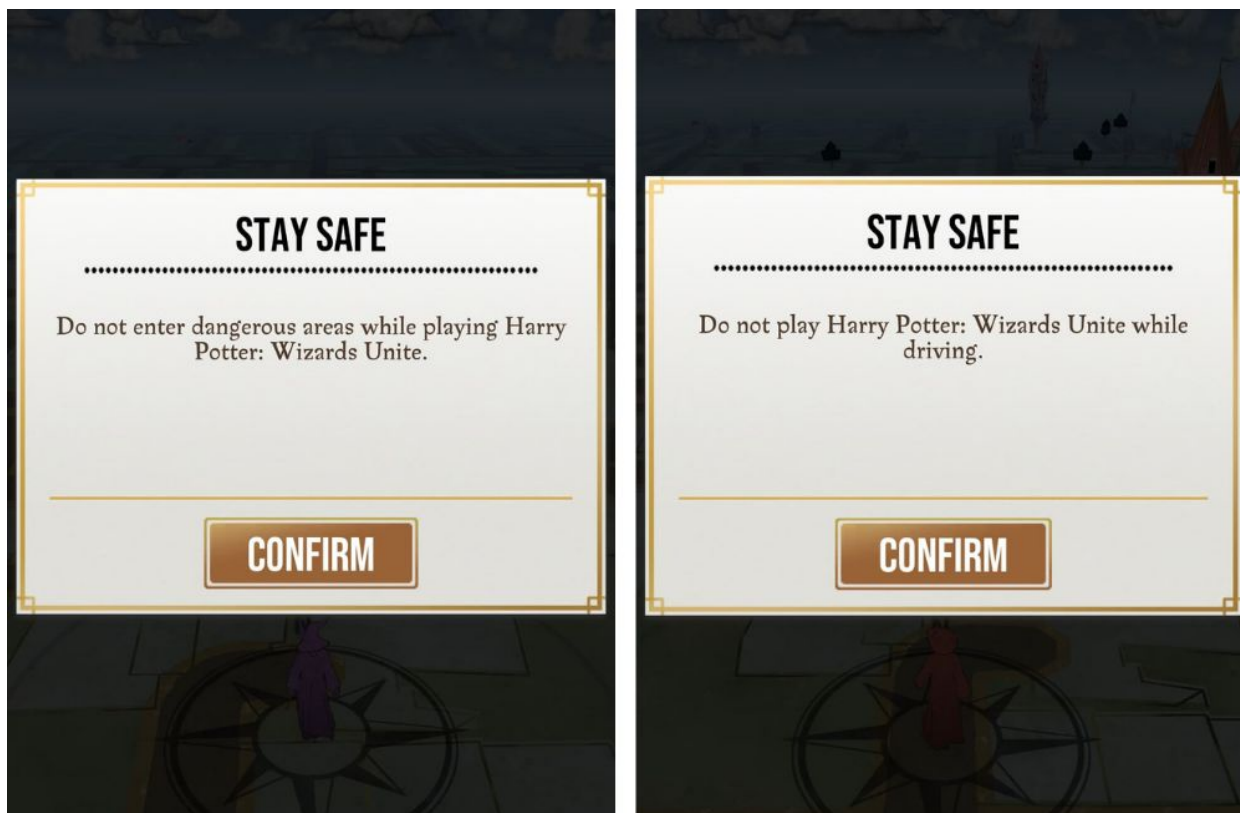
Are there any risks?

Real-world exploration

Wizards Unite is a game which urges players to put their walking shoes on and explore the world around them. Its predecessor Pokemon Go received a lot of praise because it got children moving as hatching eggs would require them to walk a certain distance. Similarly, they would have to walk to known landmarks if they wanted to join raids. The developer has carried this over to Wizards Unite and have repackaged familiar elements like Eggs into Portmanteaus, PokeStops into Inns and Gyms into Fortresses.

This is positive in many ways but it’s important to bear in mind that if children are walking to specific places to capture the right ‘foundables’, there are certain risks involved. If they’re

walking around with their eyes on their phone, they can forget to check whether it's clear before crossing a road or end up in places they shouldn't be. The game makes it very clear from when you open it that players need to be mindful of where they're walking and that they must make sure not to trespass.



Since Wizards Unite is such an immersive game, children can easily get carried away and lose track of where they are and how long they've been playing for.

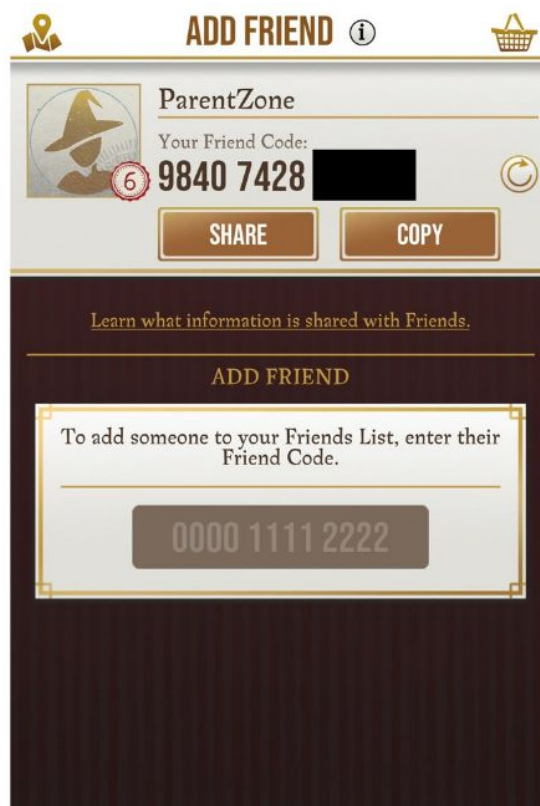
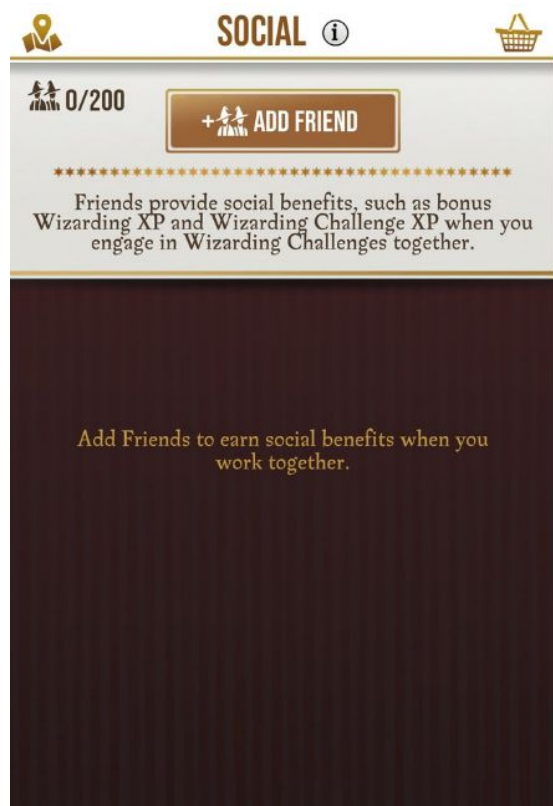
It's a good idea to agree some boundaries with your child about where they're allowed to go and where they should stay away from.

Who are they playing with?

As with any game with a social element, chances are that they will be playing with people they don't know. Although this in itself is not dangerous, it's a good idea to let your child know about the potential risks.

There's no in-game chat or other forms of communication within the game itself, so there's less chance that your child will get in touch with strangers who don't have their best interest at heart. The game does have a 'Friends' system and the people your child chooses to add by using their unique Friend Code will have access to some of their information — like username, stats and achievements — but not sensitive information like your child's real name or location. More than anything else, the 'Friends' system is there so that your child will receive more

rewards when they take on a fortress with their friends rather than connecting players on a personal level.



With games like these, it's fairly common to communicate with your squad on platforms independent of the game itself, like Discord which follows a different set of rules. You can read more about third-party gaming communication in our [Discord Parent Guide](#).

If a group of players are planning a raid on a Fortress, there's the chance that other players will be at that same spot. It could be a way for your child to make new, like-minded friends, but remind them that they shouldn't agree to meet people in private or go to the house of someone they don't know.

Are they spending money?

If your child runs out of energy in the middle of a gaming session, they may be tempted to speed things up by buying more using real money. Similarly, if they don't feel like waiting around to get more Portmanteau keys by levelling up: one simple click and the wait is over.

The app communicates with the App Store or Play Store, depending on which device your child has, so it's a good idea to check if your card details are saved on there without any further security measures to avoid nasty surprises on your bank statement. Make sure to adjust your settings so that purchases must be verified.

Are there any parental controls?

If your child is under 16, you can create a [Niantic parents account](#) which will allow you to adjust the features you want your child to use.

Is the game safe for children?

Wizards Unite will be a hit with any child who's fantasised about receiving their Hogwarts acceptance letter and joining the ranks of witches and wizards.

There's plenty of fun to be had for children (as well as adults) and, all in all, the game seems to be pretty safe.

Here are a few things you can do to help your child stay safer:

- If you're unsure about whether you would like your child to play it or not, try to look up some gameplay videos on YouTube to get a sense of what kind of content it has.
- You may want to download the game yourself and give it a go before deciding whether it is suitable for your child.
- When your child first downloads the game, play together so that you can show them how it works — it could be a lot of fun!
- Make sure they do not include any personal details in their username.
- Explain to them that if they're walking around looking for 'foundables' they need to be aware of their surroundings. They must be careful not to get so absorbed that they forget to check for cars before crossing the road or end up on private property to reach a 'foundable'.
- Accompany your child or make sure they have friends with them if they're going to a Fortress raid.
- If your credit or debit card is saved on the Apple or Play Store, make sure that a password or fingerprint is required to confirm any payments so that your child doesn't accidentally rack up a huge bill. You may prefer to remove the card details altogether.