



Season 2
Episode 2 Transcript
R U Ok? Virtual Friend Saves Gamer's Life

Torah Kachur:

When does someone stop being a stranger?
Is it when you meet them for the first time? When you are standing in front of them, face to face? Looking in their eyes?
Maybe.
But the world we live in now is so incredibly virtual... has that definition changed?
What if you've never been in the same room, or the same city, or even the same country... but you've connected... virtually?
Are they still a stranger?
Would they still be a stranger if they saved your life?

It's just after eight in the evening and seventeen-year-old Aidan Jackson is at home in Widnes. It's a small town, about halfway between Liverpool and Manchester in the north of England.
He's in his bedroom... on his computer.
Aidan is playing Fortnite.

Aidan Jackson:

I have spent the past five years playing that game

Torah Kachur:

It's a massively popular game, with a long history.

Aidan Jackson:

Fortnite originally was a third person tower defense type game. It was quite strategic. And then in December 2017, they released a massive multiplayer version of it called Fortnite Battle Royale.

Torah Kachur:

The cool part about the game is that you aren't playing against computer-controlled enemies... you are facing off against real people playing on-line in real time.

Aidan Jackson:

Honestly, it can be anyone. You can encounter literally anyone in the world.

Torah Kachur:

Meanwhile, downstairs....His mom and dad are in the family room.

Aidan Jackson:

Watching TV like every other night, simply assuming that everything was okay upstairs.

Torah Kachur:

...except... it's not.

Aidan Jackson:

the next thing they know, police car turning up outside, soon followed by an ambulance.

Torah Kachur:

Aidan's mom jumps off the couch, peers through the curtains.

Police officers and paramedics rush out of their vehicles, heading straight to her door.

Aidan's father pulls it open.

Standing on the front step, a police officer explains there's been a call that someone at this address needs help.

"Everyone here is fine," he tells them.

That's when the officer says the call asking for help.... Came from Texas.

Aidan Jackson:

As soon as the officer said that it was from the US, my mom was running upstairs straight away to my room because that's when she knew there was no other way that they were going to get a call from the US if it wasn't for me.

Torah Kachur:

I'm Torah Kachur - and this is "Tell Me What Happened - True stories of "people helping people" - an original podcast by OnStar.

Every day when you wake up... you don't know if you'll be a person who needs help ... or if you will be a person that helps someone else.

It's important to remember, that it's in all of us to be either one of those things, every day.

It's early afternoon in Dallas, Texas

The weather couldn't be better: Warm and sunny

And driving on those sunny streets is a twenty-year-old woman named Raven Wolfsbane.

Raven Wolfsbane:

I was just coming back from running errands...

Torah Kachur:

It's January and Raven's making good on her New Year's resolution.

This is the year she's going to keep on top of everything

She isn't going to let anything slide...

And that includes taking care of her car.

Raven Wolfsbane:

I had just gone and gotten my car checked, gotten my tires refilled, all that fun stuff.

Torah Kachur:

Raven, like most of her friends – loves video games.

Raven Wolfsbane:

I've been a gamer for as long as I can remember // it's just always been a part of my life.

Torah Kachur:

She started with a Nintendo DS and then moved to an X-Box.

Raven Wolfsbane:

For my graduation from high school // my dad // bought me a custom-built computer and my cousin built it for me.

Torah Kachur:

She now games exclusively on that custom built PC.

And what she likes to play the most is... Fortnite.

In the game, not only do you play against other real people... you can form squads... play as a team... and work together.

To do that you have to turn on the live chat feature and talk over your headset.

Usually it's just ... "Hey look out behind you," or "I'm going to hide behind this building."

But if you play enough and you cross paths with the same people enough...

you can actually become friends... and you can schedule your gaming sessions to play together.

That's what happened with Raven in Texas, and Aidan in England.

Raven Wolfsbane:

We had plans to play Fortnite, that was the game at the time that we were really into and having fun with and playing the most.

Torah Kachur:

There is a six-hour time difference... so although Aidan is ready to play... Raven is still out running her errands.

Aidan Jackson:

I'd wrapped up a few matches on Fortnite, and I was just sitting in my chair, waiting for Raven to come home... and she fortunately joined voice chat on her way home when she was in the car.

Torah Kachur:

They chat about the game and the weather... just killing time until Raven can get home and log on.

Aidan Jackson:

I had a bit of a headache, so I was going to lay down. I moved my microphone so that she could still hear me because I was just going to sit on my bed and talk until she got home. And that's sort of when everything spiraled from there.

Torah Kachur:

Raven's about a mile and a half from her house when Aidan suddenly stops talking.

Raven Wolfsbane:

It was like gasping and just like sounds that you wouldn't normally hear from somebody.

Torah Kachur:

Alone in her car... Raven doesn't know what is happening... or what to do.

Raven Wolfsbane:

I tried to get his attention and say his name a couple times, but he didn't respond

Torah Kachur:

She begins to suspect he's having a seizure.

Raven Wolfsbane:

There was no warning to him having a seizure because he was already laying down in bed. He didn't fall to the floor or have anything like that happen. It was literally just him having a seizure in his bed.

Torah Kachur:

Raven listens through her headset... hoping to hear someone rush into the room to help him... but there's nothing... just the painful gasping noises Aidan is making. That's when she realizes that even though she's 5000 miles away... she's the only person in the world who knows Aidan needs help.

Raven Wolfsbane:

It went quiet and I was the only person who knew

Torah Kachur:

This is 'Tell Me What Happened' a podcast created by OnStar to showcase how important a human connection is when you need help.... Whether you are lost on a backcountry road... or alone in your own house.

Raven Wolfsbane is driving home after running a few errands.
Her plan for the rest of the day is a few hours of online gaming with friends
from all over the world ... including Aidan Jackson.
But right now, she's on the phone with him and he isn't talking...

Raven Wolfsbane:

It was like a, "I can't breathe, there's no air. I'm not... where I am."

Torah Kachur:

As soon as she's home she rushes upstairs to her computer.

She knows Aidan's last name is Jackson... and that he lives in Widnes in
England... but that's about it.

Raven Wolfsbane:

First, I tried to look up his mom's phone number

Torah Kachur:

But there are an awful lot of Jackson's in Widnes.
She doesn't know Aidan's parents' first names
She doesn't know what street he lives on.
And she doesn't have time to call all the Jacksons one by one.
So, she tries something new...

Raven Wolfsbane:

Trying to figure out how to contact the Widnes police

Torah Kachur:

911 doesn't work. That's a North American service.

Raven Wolfsbane:

I tried to contact just the UK police in general,

Torah Kachur:

She dials 999 - the British equivalent.

Raven Wolfsbane:

But it wouldn't let my phone call go through,

Torah Kachur:

Because you can't reach that service from America.

All the while, she's listening on the headset to what's going on in Aidan's
room... but there is nothing but silence.
Then... in the middle of this desperation - she has an idea.

Raven Wolfsbane:

I was actually going to be sending him a gift And I had maybe a week or two before, asked for his address and i had it pinned in my Discord

Torah Kachur:

Discord is a social media chat platform they used to stay in touch outside of the game.

Raven Wolfsbane:

And I remembered, that I could use that.

Torah Kachur:

Raven pulls up Aidan's home address from her Discord account...
Then, figures out which local police unit covers the part of town Aidan lives in...Googles their direct number... and dials.

Police Operator:

Hello Widnes Police station - How can we help you?

Torah Kachur:

Raven tells them her incredible story - desperate for them to believe her.

Raven Wolfsbane:

I wasn't being hysterical, but I was obviously very stressed out over the situation and worried ...

Torah Kachur:

But she gets the run around.

Raven Wolfsbane:

I had to be transferred to a specific unit and retell them what was going on so that they could send an ambulance over there.

Torah Kachur:

The British responders tell Raven they're on their way... but it's now been 30 minutes since Aidan had his seizure.
All this time ... Aidan's parents are one floor down... oblivious to what's happening.
Police officers and paramedics rush to the front door of Aidan's house.
A confused conversation ensues... then Aidan's mom leads them upstairs to his room.
In Texas... Raven is still listening online.
She hears a door open, and a voice she later learned was Aidan's mom.

Raven Wolfsbane:

She was like, "Are you okay? The paramedics are at the door saying that

somebody from the internet said that you had a seizure.”

Torah Kachur:

More people rush into the room and a bunch of new voices start talking quickly. Raven listens in while they start treating Aidan.

Raven Wolfsbane:

The paramedics started inspecting and doing all that. And they were like, “Yes, he should probably go to the hospital to make sure that he’s okay because he’s definitely had a seizure.”

Torah Kachur:

At the hospital... Aidan is checked out ... and thankfully there is no serious damage.

Aidan Jackson:

I’m waking up suddenly, completely disoriented, And there was just a massive gap in my memory there.

Torah Kachur:

Later that night, Aidan called Raven from the hospital to give her an update.

Aidan Jackson:

My mom came into my room and thanked Raven profusely.

Raven:

She was like it was amazing that you figured out how to do this at all. And it means a lot to us that you’re looking out for our son. And we just wanted to say, thank you and all that fun stuff.”

Torah Kachur:

The experience has turned their on-line friendship into a real one, even though they are still on opposite sides of the world.

Raven:

It’s never felt like a crazy heroic situation. I just feel like I did what I had to do to protect my friend.

Aidan Jackson:

She’s the kindest person that I know. She’s one of my best friends.

Torah Kachur:

One update on the story of Aidan and Raven... they did eventually meet in person. A TV show heard their story and invited them to New York City to have a first meeting on live television.

Aidan Jackson:

The meeting itself was amazing. ... it was quite an emotional moment. I almost felt my body move on its own. I wasn't planning to run towards her on the set, nor was she, but seeing her, I couldn't stop myself.

Torah Kachur:

It was emotional, but brief.

After that one visit, they've resumed their normal relationship... gaming and chatting and hanging-out online.

Aidan Jackson:

You have that friendship as if they were always right next to you.

Torah Kachur:

Aidan isn't the only person who was saved directly or indirectly by the video game social community... in fact, for a lot of people, gaming culture is crucial to their mental health.

Dr Kelli Dunlap is a gamer and also a clinical psychologist who also has a story about how someone can be rescued by online gaming.

Kelli Dunlap:

I was meeting this young boy for the first time, and he was coming in because he was having some issues at school that he wouldn't talk to anybody.

And then I saw his shirt and it said, "All day, I dream about video games."

I think I was playing Halo 2 at the time. And it's always talking about the level design, and name dropping designers and all those kind of things to show my bonafides. And his face just lit up because I was speaking his language. I was showing that I cared and I was interested and I wasn't just going to shut him down. Because his favorite game was Call of Duty, and I didn't instantly say that was dumb or a waste of time or dangerous. It was something that we started ... We built a rapport around that. And so we started talking.

We used that going forward, not just for rapport, but we eventually worked it into like clinical homework. Like, I would give him homework in Call of Duty to do, and he would come back and we would talk about it.

Torah Kachur:

What kinds of homework can you do on Call of Duty?

Kelli Dunlap:

So one of the things that this particular individual had some anger management issues. And so I would say, "Okay, go play. And then notice how you start to feel. Like, become aware of your feelings. Notice when you start to get tense. Notice when you start to get angry. And then what I want you to do is to notice how your playing goes." Because typically if someone's rage-y or really, really angry, their skill goes down. It's called being on tilt. And that's

what I wanted to show him is that it's not just good to regulate your emotions because the adults are telling you to. It's good to regulate your emotions because it makes you a better player. It keeps you level. It prevents you from going on tilt. So that was one of our homework assignments.

And another one was, what is it that gets you upset? Is it when you're playing campaign or is it when you're competing? Is it when you're playing by yourself or when you're playing with your friends? So we kind of developed a way of, what triggers him in the game in terms of his anger? And then we also talked about, well, is that accurate outside of games? Do you also get angry if you're playing a pickup game of soccer on the soccer field? Or do you do better with people or do you do better by yourself? Is competition hard for you or not? And so we just generalized it to things outside of the game as well.

Torah Kachur:

I never want to pass up the chance to learn from an expert so I asked Dr Dunlap to explain how something as seemingly frivolous as video games could be so important to our mental health.

Kelli Dunlap:

So you can't talk about the benefits of game without understanding how critical play is to human development.

Our need for play doesn't change as we get older, but society tells us we have to.

So if you saw a group of 40-year-olds running around playing tag, you might think that's kind of weird, or you're playing a game of like flag football, but that's because flag football is a game.

And so we are allowed as adults and as adolescents and even as older adults to engage in this play behavior that gives us feelings of accomplishment, that gives us a sense of connection and community, and allows us to feel masterful and like what we do matters, like we can have an impact on the world. I have goosebumps talking about it, because it just, it's all those good feelings that come from being competent and connected, and games give that to us in a way that society says is okay.

Torah Kachur:

Do you think that the degree of connectedness that you feel over some of these games is misunderstood? And what is the value of that level of connection?

Kelli Dunlap:

I mean, human beings are socially ... We're social creatures. Like, we need to have social connections.

And I think especially through the pandemic, we've seen the massive negative impacts of being isolated from the people we care about and from the communities that we care about, and we feel very, very alone. And I think what games allow us to do is to stay socially connected, even when we're physically distant. And so when people are thinking about those kinds of relationships online, they often tend to get kind of side-barred into, oh, well

they're not real friends, or they're not real connections just because you made them online.

And that just ... Like, the science clearly shows that's not true. If you've made a good friend online, then you've made a good friend whether or not you've ever met them in person. But yeah, the internet can be a scary place. And for a lot of people ... You do have to be careful. It's not all puppies and rainbows. But those connections that you get through online play, whether it's in the game itself, whether it's talking about the games in forums, so like ancillary spaces, whether you're talking with your own friends on a Discord server about the game, it's facilitating all these different kinds of connections, which we really need.

Torah Kachur:

Can you comment on how gaming that includes particularly interaction with other people, sometimes just strangers can be a real lifeline for people who are worried and feeling too alone in their lives?

Kelli Dunlap:

For people who have social anxiety, one of the things about social anxiety is you're terrified of being embarrassed and being unable to escape that embarrassment.

And so in a space like online spaces, if something doesn't go your way, you can leave. You can block the other person. You can mute communications. Like, you can move things around. You can change games. You're not stuck with one group, one social group, like you would in, say, a workplace or in a school. And so if you do mess up, it's not the end of your social world.

Torah Kachur:

What are some other kinds of skills that gaming can teach people that will help with their quote unquote real life?

Kelli Dunlap:

Games are this fantastic possibility space where we're allowed to experiment with difficult skills and difficult challenges, and there's no consequence. Like if you fail in a game, it's not a big deal.

And there's safety in that. Like, everybody's going to screw up. Everyone's going to fail. And so that allows us to be more creative, more experimental, to flex problem-solving skills that maybe in real life would be really, really scary to do because the consequences of failure are so enormous. The social consequences of saying the wrong thing could be detrimental to a teenager who are very sensitive at that age, whereas when they're online, they get to practice those skills. And if they screw up, it's a big internet, and they can find other people to talk to.

Torah Kachur:

What's the role of the feeling of escapism when it comes to games?

Kelli Dunlap:

So escapism gets a really bad rap. It's traditionally framed as something that's bad. And one thing that I talk a lot with my clients about is if you're needing to escape, it's probably because you're overwhelmed. If you're needing to just divert all of your attention someplace else, that's probably because the demands of the world are exceeding your capability of coping and you basically need to put yourself in time out, and that's okay. There's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with ... I mean, we always often talk about escaping into a good book, and nobody thinks of that as being negative, you know? And so it's very much the same thing of, if you're doing it because you need a break and you are ... you get the good, warm, fuzzy feelings from playing the game, there's nothing wrong with that.

The little asterisk there is that if you are retreating so much into games that other life responsibilities are falling by the wayside, like maybe you forgot to pick your kid up from school. Maybe you're no longer going grocery shopping and you're just GrubHubbing everything. Maybe you're showing up to work late, or maybe you're not doing your homework in a reasonable amount of time. Those are all indicators that maybe this has gone too far. And again, games often kind of get tagged with that. But that's any activity. If you were reading a book for 20 hours a day and not showering, that would also be problematic. So it's not so much the medium as in what we do with it.

Torah Kachur:

What do you say to a parent whose kid is maybe preteen or getting into the teenage years, playing a lot more games, and maybe they come to you with a concern. What's your advice?

Kelli Dunlap:

Know what they're playing, who they're playing with, and what they're playing on. A really common issue is they won't stop playing when I tell them to stop, and then they get mad about it. Well, most of the time that's because they're in the middle of something and parents want them to stop, right when they say stop. Whereas a lot of games, sometimes there's not a pause button, and sometimes if you quit out in the middle of the game, there are negative impacts. Maybe your score goes down. Maybe your rep goes down. I had a parent yank the cord on one of my kiddos, and they got so mad, and there was this big thing. And when I finally got them to talk to each other, the kid was doing a raid with his friends. And so when the parent yanked them off the console, the kid felt like he let his friends down. It'd be like a parent coming in and just grabbing somebody off the football field or off the soccer pitch in the middle of a game. Like, who wouldn't be upset by that?

And I also like to tell parents, if you are doing the crossword puzzle and your kid comes in and rips it out of your hand and says, "Hey, it's time to go," you're probably going to be kind of upset too. So just normalizing that like, okay, sometimes we need to have limits. Give them warnings. And again, it

comes back to knowing what game they're playing. Can they hit pause? And if they can't ... So, for example, Fortnite. There's no pause button in Fortnite. And games last about, depending on how good you are, they can last like 15, 20 minutes. Or they can last like five seconds. And so figuring out, okay, if dinner's in 30 minutes, you have time for at least one full game of Fortnite. And then after that, we're going to have to make decisions.

Torah Kachur:

Kelli, thank you for re-energizing my understanding of games and also my permission of them for my child. I think that she'll probably benefit a lot more than I expected.

Kelli Dunlap:

Well, thanks so much for having me. And you know, if it helps to bring a parent and kid closer together, then I'll put that on my I did it today list and I'll check that off.

Torah Kachur:

That's it for this episode of OnStar's 'Tell Me What Happened - true stories of people helping people.'

If you'd like to read more stories like this one, or if you want more information about how to help someone in a medical emergency... there's a link in the show notes to take you to our website.

Or you can go straight to onstar.com and tell us your favorite story about a time that a stranger helped you. Let's share some love for people who help others, in big ways and small.

On behalf of OnStar... I'm Torah Kachur -- and please.... "Be safe out there."

Find more episodes of *Tell Me What Happened* at OnStar.com/podcast