

NEVER ALONE

< K I S I M A I N N I T C H U N A >



Parent Guide

A child in a brown bear costume is walking in a snowy landscape. A small white dog is following the child. The background is a bright, hazy sky with some light rays.

“Gather close and I will tell you an unipkaaġ, a story that has been passed to me from generations past. I learned this tale from Nasruk many years ago. He told me that there is great wisdom in listening for those who are willing to hear. Remember, when you are part of the Iñupiat people, you are never alone.”

Welcome Parents

Welcome to the Parent Guide for Never Alone.

We created this guide to help you make the most of the co-play experience with Never Alone (game rating and age recommendations on pg 5). Whether you are new to games, an experienced gamer, or just wanting to better connect with your child through games, our goal is to provide you with useful information for starting on your adventure with Nuna and Fox, exploring the Iñupiat Alaskan Native culture, and playing together as a family.

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Can games be harnessed for sharing, celebrating and extending world cultures in a culturally appropriate and truly engaging format?

We believe, yes.

About Never Alone

Never Alone is an atmospheric puzzle-platform game steeped in traditional Alaska Native stories along with the culture and values of the Iñupiat community.

The game was created through an unique partnership between the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, a pioneering Alaska Native tribal organization, and E-Line Media, a leading developer and publisher of digital games that engage and empower.

In *Never Alone*, players take on the roles of Nuna, a young Iñupiaq girl and her companion, an Arctic Fox, as they search for the source of an endless blizzard that is threatening her village.

The game features striking visuals, two-player cooperative gameplay, and emphasizes the themes of resilience, interdependence between land, people and animals, and the importance of intergenerational exchange. The game includes additional indigenous stories and rich cultural content that is ‘unlocked’ through gameplay.

The game was crafted through an inclusive development process where Alaska Native elders, storytellers, and writers worked closely with leading game developers, all drawn to the rich culture and storytelling tradition of the Alaska Native peoples. The game is in the Iñupiaq language and subtitled in 11 other languages at launch.



Never Alone Creative Director Sean Vesce with Alaska Native elder Minnie Gray, reviewing the ‘Kunnuksaayuka’ story, which serves as the game’s narrative arc and was passed down through her family.

Additionally, to provide more context the team created a series of 24 short video Cultural Insights that include interviews providing additional insight about the Alaska Native culture, region, and making of the game.

Over thousands of years, Alaska Natives have lived and worked together in challenging environments, learning and passing down knowledge, skills and values that have kept communities viable and self-sufficient over time. It is truly a game 10,000 years in the making.



When the Owl icon appears in the game (above, left image) it unlocks a short Cultural Insight video (above, right image) featuring Alaska Native elders, writers and storytellers. There are 24 Cultural Insight videos in the game and more on the Never Alone website.

“Kisima Ingitchuna” translates to “I am Not Alone” in Iñupiaq. This traditional value, representing the importance of community, was reflected in the inclusive process that created the game.

Why Co-Play with Never Alone

Research shows that co-viewing television shows, like Sesame Street, promotes deeper engagement with the content than when children watch alone. Simply put, when parents watch educational shows with their children, children learn more. We believe this is also true for co-playing the right video games with your children.

Parents believe their children have learned a lot from media, and many report that educational media has sparked their children to take actions that extend their learning beyond the screen, such as undertaking projects inspired by educational media.

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center

While Never Alone provides a powerful anchor point, it is through the interactions around the game that the real potential of co-play is unlocked. It is in the moment where you and your child solve a hard problem together, when you help connect the game to the real world, or when together you share your experience with others that the game becomes truly impactful.

We suggest that you do not introduce Never Alone to your kids as an educational experience. Rather, encourage your children to see Never Alone as a game intended to be engaging and entertaining. Invite your child to watch the trailer with you and mention some of the big commercial games that the team has worked on to provide some credibility (Tomb Raider, Tony Hawk Skateboarding, SOCOM).



In fact, the best way to make games a safe, fun, and enriching part of everyday life is for parents to take an active interest... It also proves encouraging to children, provides a shared activity all ages can come together over, and fosters greater communication and understanding across generations.

Video Games and Kids

Co-playing can take many different forms:



If you are comfortable with platform games, you may be able to **jump right in and play together with your child.**



If your child is a more experienced gamer, she or he can **serve as your guide and mentor** in the experience.



Sometimes with younger children, you might be more experienced and can serve as a **guide or mentor.**



Even if you are not comfortable with gaming, you can watch your child play with a sibling or friend, and **talk with them as they play.**

This guide will help make it as easy and fun as possible to get started with Never Alone. You can play through a few chapters, if not the whole game, and then tease out many of the interesting themes and questions that can be explored through the co-play experience.

Additional Resources for Video Games & Co-Play

- Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop
<http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org>
- Play2Connect
<http://play2connect.org>
- Mindshift: How Will We Learn?
<http://blogs.kqed.org/mindshift>
- Video Games and Kids
<http://www.videogamesandkids.com/>

Is Never Alone Appropriate for Younger Children?

Never Alone has a Teen rating from the ESRB (which covers North America). Parents of younger children may be concerned about whether Never Alone is appropriate for their child. This section will help with determining if the game is appropriate.

A Teen rating suggests that a game is generally suitable for ages 13 and up. Visit http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp to read the ESRB ratings guide.



We believe that Never Alone may be appropriate for children under the age of 13, especially when played with a parent.

To help make the right decision for your child, we have included some context and screenshots. A goal of the game is to give players a sense of the great challenges of living in the Arctic region, so there is a sense of threat in the game. Players die as a result of polar bears, falling into the ocean and ice, and as a result of encounters with fantastical creatures such as the Sky People and the Manslayer. Although these are depicted from a distance and stylized, they can be intense for younger children.

****A note about death and rebirth:** While players 'die' and restart all the time when playing a game, this is different than death as we ordinarily think of it. In Never Alone the death and rebirth of a character is an important part of the narrative arc of the game that parents may want to be aware of.

The next few images are screenshots from the game to give you a sense of some of intense scenes:



An example of a Polar Bear Death scene.



Environmental and Weather Death scene.



Escaping Manslayer is a frequent source of tension early in the game.

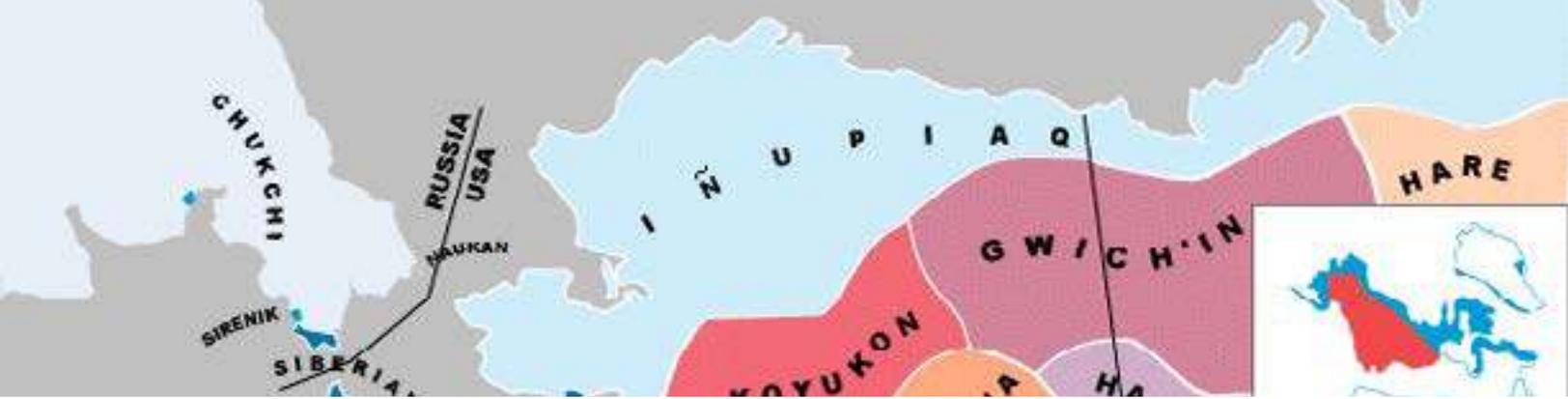
Additional Resources for Guidance & Media Reviews

- Common Sense Media
<http://www.commonsensemedia.org>
- Geek Mom
<http://geekmom.com/>
- Geek Dad
<http://geekdad.com/>

Deeper Exploration & Discussion

In the next few pages we provide some ideas and resources for deeper exploration of the main themes in the game. These explorations can begin after you have played a few levels and watched a few of the Cultural Insights. We hope you as you continue to play together, and learn more about Nuna, her journey and the Iñupiat people, you will revisit and extend the discussion and activities.

- Theme 1: Exploring the Alaska Native Culture, Language and Region
- Theme 2: Exploring Your Culture and Identity
- Theme 3: Exploring the Core Themes in Never Alone



Theme 1: Explore the Alaska Native Culture, Language & Region

The Iñupiat are an Alaska Native people whose traditional lands are north of the Arctic Circle. They are one of seven major indigenous groups in Alaska, and place a high value on subsistence hunting and fishing in one of the most challenging environments on Earth. They have developed a deep connection with nature, which is reflected in their resiliency and incredibly rich storytelling tradition.

Never Alone is in the Iñupiaq language. A key goal for the game is to introduce the Iñupiaq language to a global audience. This was a very important choice. According to the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Fairbanks, there are roughly 3,000 native Iñupiaq speakers, all over the age of 40, and the language has never before been featured in a commercial video game. In fact, there are thousands of languages that have never appeared in a commercial video game.

It is estimated that, if nothing is done, half of 6000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century. With the disappearance of unwritten and undocumented languages, humanity would lose not only a cultural wealth but also important ancestral knowledge embedded, in particular, in indigenous languages.

United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organization

Suggested Discussion Themes

One of the most important and unique aspects of Never Alone is that this game is not simply about the Alaska Native peoples; it was made with the Alaska Native peoples. Here are some questions to explore as you play or reflect on the game (at dinner, in the car etc.):

- Does Never Alone look and feel like other games? What do you think influenced the similarities and differences?

- Do you have a better sense of the life and culture of Alaska Native peoples after playing Never Alone?
- What is your great-grandparents' native language? Is there a game in that language?

Activity: Explore More Resources

1. This is an anthology that explores the rich storytelling tradition of the Inupiaq with over eighty stories: Dall Sheep Dinner Guest: Inupiaq Narratives of Northwest Alaska <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/dall-sheep-dinner-guest-wanni-wibulwasdi-anderson/1119584314?ean=9781889963747>
2. This is a book of stories by Robert 'Nasruk' Cleveland, who's telling of the Kunnuksaayuka story helped inspire Never Alone: Stories of the Black River People <http://www.amazon.com/Unipchaanich-imagluktugmiut-Stories-People-Shungnak/dp/B000730GRW>
3. Explore the Iñupiat Heritage Center website where you can learn more about the the Iñupiat Culture: <http://www.inupiaheritage.org/>
4. Visit the University of Anchorage website and explore: Traditional Inupiat games: <http://ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/NativeGames/resource.html#INUPIAQ> Listen to the Languages: <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/phrases/> Learn the many words for snow: <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/snow/> Find an Alaska Native language name for your dog: <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/>

Additional Resources for Alaska Native Culture

- Alaska Humanities Forum: AK History & Cultural Studies <http://www.akhistorycourse.org>
- Alaska Native Heritage Center <http://www.alaskanative.net>
- University of Alaska Anchorage: Alaska Native History & Education <http://www.alaskool.org> Alaska Native Language Center <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/>



Ishmael Angalook
- Writer



Amy Fredeen
- Cultural Ambassador

Theme 2: Exploring Your Culture and Identity

In novels, movies, music, and even newer popular media like graphic novels there are many examples of commercial releases that are created by, or in close collaboration, with indigenous cultures around the world.

These include movies like *Whale Rider* and *Fast Runner*, the whole genre of world music, and a great many novels.

Games represent opportunities and challenges for extending, enhancing, and transforming storytelling, especially when tackling deeply resonating cultural themes that celebrate, share and extend world cultures.

Suggested Discussion Themes

- How do video games portray different people? Are some of the depictions problematic?
- Are girls represented similarly to boys in video games? Reflect on some of the differences and whether they are positive or negative.
- Can you think of a video game that portrays another culture in a negative light? How about a positive one?
- Is your culture represented in video games? If it is, do you think the portrayal is accurate or authentic?

Activity: Make your own cultural game

For parents with children who are really interested in making games - explore making a game from your own culture. Here are some steps to pursue this as an activity with your child:

1. Explore stories or myths from your culture that might make a good game – especially short stories.
2. Read the story together and try to identify potential game mechanics – the verbs in the story – that might make for good game play.
3. Also explore the key themes, characters and narrative elements that might work in a game.
4. Other elements to think about: What is the end goal of

the game? How might the player level up?

If your child is really motivated, she or he can write a game design document, and even make a paper-based version game.

Here is a link to a good resource on game-making tools – some of which are free – as well information on how to create a game design document:

<http://www.stemchallenge.org/stem/#/resources/>

Activity: Create your own Cultural Insight

To augment the meaning and cultural storytelling in *Never Alone* the team created a series of short video Cultural Insights that include interviews with the Alaska Native elders, storytellers, and hunters. These videos provide additional insight about the Alaska Native culture, region, and making of the game.

1. Discuss the Cultural Insights with your child and share your favorite one. Why was it your favorite? Talk through how these videos relate to the game play and how the cultural aspects you learned about it might relate to, and differ from, your own culture.
2. Share a Cultural Insight from your background. Then, for this activity, challenge your child to choose a story about your family or culture and identify his or her own Cultural Insight.
3. Draw a picture, make a video, record an interview, or come up with another idea. Whatever method your child chooses, remind her or him to think about the visual and story elements you will include, and why these elements are meaningful for sharing the story.





Theme 3: Explore the Core Themes in Never Alone

Never Alone was developed around themes of resilience, interdependence between land, people and animals, and the reality of human vulnerability and the importance of sharing knowledge across generations. These are each core themes of Alaska Native culture, key to its survival in one of the harshest environments on earth.

There are many ways that the themes are realized in the game play experience. For example, the decision to make the game a two player cooperative game reinforces the theme of interdependence. To succeed in the game both Nuna and Fox need to work together and leverage their different skills and abilities.

Use this section to support discussions around these themes with your child. Talk about how they relate to your experiences, in your own culture and everyday life.

Interdependence

One of the more obvious examples of interdependence in Never Alone is how Nuna and Fox depend on each other to progress through the game.

While you are playing the game together, point out the different ways that each character helps each other:

- How does relying on another person make the game more fun? More challenging?
- How is the connection between Nuna and Fox similar to relationships with people in our lives?

Another example of interdependence is the role of nature and weather in the game.

As you play, keep track of the environment in the game:

- How do they help or hinder Nuna and Fox?
- If the game took place where you live, what kind of characters would nature and weather be?

Resilience & Sharing Knowledge

Resilience and sharing knowledge can go hand in hand.

Think about how our capacity to recover from adversity can depend on knowledge that we gain from our families and previous generations:

- How does the wisdom of the Alaska Native people help Nuna?
- What does Nuna learn as she struggles to return home?
- Describe examples of resilience in your life.

Activity: Core themes in your life

1. Draw or describe a challenge you have overcome in your life, include the people that helped you succeed in resolving the challenge. Reflect beyond your challenge, describe what lessons you would pass on to help others as they face similar challenges. You can do this as a comic, drawing, video, or even a poem.
2. Draw two scenes at two different times of the year, and explain the differences. Describe how the seasons affect your life. Again, you can do this as a comic, drawing, video, or even a poem.

Resources: Learning More about Alaska Native life

Use these resources to explore the core themes from Never Alone in Alaska Native outside of the game:

- DVD: Kuuvaum Kangiani <http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/publications/detail/index.xml?id=226>
In her Iñupiaq language, elder Minnie Gray provides glimpse into her life as she does subsistence fishing on the Kobuk River in Ambler.
- Book: My Name is not Easy http://www.debbdahledwardson.com/my_name_is_not_easy_107683.htm
YA Fiction: Evokes a time and place for the Alaska Native culture when powerful institutions made decisions that challenged them to find new ways to survive.

Playing Never Alone

Video games come in many different genres: platformers, sports, role-playing, adventure, shooters, and many more. Never Alone is a puzzle-platform game. The genre traces its lineage back to classic game franchises like Donkey Kong, Mario, Sonic, and Pitfall.

At the core of any game are its mechanics: what the player does in the game. This is the key difference between games and movies, books, and other linear media. It is sometimes helpful to think about game mechanics in terms of verbs. The puzzle platform genre features action verbs (running, jumping, etc.) and thinking verbs (exploring, puzzle solving, etc.).

Mastering the core mechanics in Never Alone requires two broad sets of skills:

- 1) dexterity and timing for the action of the game, and
- 2) puzzle solving for the thinking parts of the game.

Note that in Never Alone, Nuna and the Fox each have some unique verbs that they can do, which the other cannot. For example, Nuna can climb ladders and ropes and move boxes, while the fox can jump higher, climb walls faster, and interact with those that Nuna cannot.

The game also features a variety of two-player puzzles. You will need to use all of the above skills to solve these increasingly complex puzzles. There is often a logic to the puzzles that experienced players are savvy at figuring out but can be hard for new gamers.

The game includes documentary footage presented as 24 short video Cultural Insights, including interviews with elders, storytellers, hunters, that are unlocked throughout the game and provide additional depth and richness to the overall experience.

Mastering the Core Mechanics



This section reveals some of the key actions in the game, some players may wish to discover these through gameplay.

These are the mechanics/verbs that are unique to Nuna and Fox (requiring co-op play):

Nuna's Mechanics:

- Ladder and Rope Climbing: Nuna has thumbs and can climb ladders and ropes.
- Using the Bola: Throwing the traditional Alaska Native hunting weapon.

- Pushing/Pulling: To move boxes and other things.

Fox's Mechanics:

- Fox jumps higher and farther than Nuna and fits into small, tight spaces.
- Wall Climbing: Fox can climb certain vertical walls that Nuna can't.
- Wall Jumping: Fox can climb a wall and then jump back onto a ledge or a spirit.

Practicing the core mechanics

The game opens with a short, dramatic level. This level, called Prelude, requires quickly timed running and jumping while being chased. If this level is too difficult (definitely worth a try!) consider having a more experienced gamer play it and then jump in on the next level, the Tundra level, which is a bit slower paced and is a good level to practice the core mechanics and get a feel for the controls.

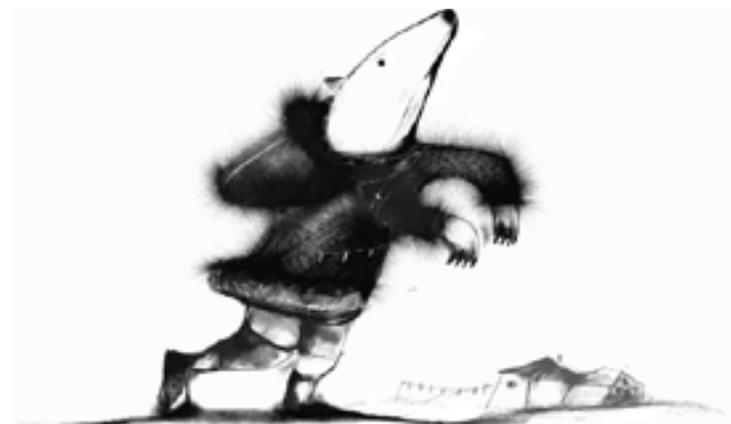
Navigating the Puzzles



This section will guide you through some of the puzzles of the first few levels of the game. Don't read this section unless you are completely stuck.

The following section outlines puzzles in the first three levels. Once you successfully complete these three levels, you (and your co-players) will have most of the skills needed to finish the game, though the mechanics will get progressively more difficult. There will be a few new mechanics introduced, but we want to keep some surprises!

The game features a variety of two-player puzzles. You will need to use all of the above skills to solve these increasingly complex puzzles. There is often a logic to the puzzles that experienced players are savvy at figuring out but can be hard for new gamers. The following section outlines some of these puzzles through the first three levels.





Prelude level

The game starts with a 'cinematic', introducing the story using traditional scrimshaw style art (see Cultural Insight "Scrimshaw" for more). Then, the gameplay begins with Nuna being chased by a Bear. You need to run to the right, and continue to run and jump to stay ahead of the Bear.

- Prelude puzzle: The Bear will catch Nuna and corner her against a ledge. This is where Fox shows up. The game will prompt you to switch characters, from Nuna to Fox (note: the switch control varies by game system). Press the control button for which you are prompted, so that Fox can distract the Bear by running back to the left of the screen. The Bear will chase Fox onto the ice and once the Bear falls into the water, Fox can return to meet up with Nuna.

At this point Nuna and fox can run together off to the right which triggers the next level. In single player mode, the player can select Nuna or Fox at this point and the other character will follow.



Tundra level

This is a great level to practice running and jumping because the timing is slower than during the Prelude level. You will also notice that Nuna can slide down hills as

she is running along the course. In this level you learn to brace to avoid the gusts of the blizzard. Here, both Nuna and Fox learn to see and hear cues for when the blizzard winds are kicking up.

- First Tundra Puzzle: Shortly into the Tundra level, you will come to a high wall that Nuna cannot jump. Here you need Fox's wall scramble ability to climb the wall. To do this, the player playing as Fox should tap Fox's jump button rapidly as the fox jumps up the wall. Once on top of the wall, Fox can kick the rope down to Nuna.
- Second Tundra puzzle: Fox conjures Spirit Helpers along the journey because Fox is in tune with nature. To move the Spirit Helpers try having the fox walk back and forth slowly on the spirit. Also note that you need to be patient with the spirit helpers. The gameplay in Never Alone will often force the player to slow down. Learn more about Spirit Helpers by watching the Cultural Insight with the same title once it is unlocked.



Nuna's Village

Although Kunuiksaayuka was a good hunter during clear weather, the blizzardy weather simply was not a time to hunt.

Robert Cleveland (Nasruk)

In this level Nuna arrives at her village to find it destroyed. As you go along the level you will continue to encounter Spirit Helpers and you will learn to use the wind to carry you across long jumps. For example, early in the level you will come to a ledge and see a shack across from you. The wind will gust in both directions and you must time your jump to carry you across to the rooftop of the shack with strong gust as it blows to the right.

- First Village Puzzle: You will come to the ruins of a

wood shack with small wall pieces and a Spirit Helper after the ledge. Fox needs to jump to the lower wall piece, from there Fox needs to jump back to the upper wall piece, and then jump again over the lower wall to the Spirit Helper. This is tricky and may some practice, but does become easier after you get it once or twice. This is a move used by Fox throughout later levels to navigate moving upward.

- Second Village Puzzle: Nuna and Fox will come to the high ledge of a canyon. Navigate to the bottom of the canyon without falling too far along the way. At the bottom Nuna will learn how to grab and pull/push a box with a candle. She and Fox will use this box to navigate a tower and follow the Little People underground. They must quickly run and jump across platforms. At the last platform one of the Little People is throwing small boulders. Nuna and Fox must dodge these boulders while allowing a few to weigh down the left of the platform. As this happens, the right side of the platform will rise and Nuna and Fox can jump up to the ledge from where the person is standing. While still dodging his boulders, run past him to collect Owl Man's drum. Now, Nuna and Fox can continue back to the left to navigate out of the canyon (again using the pull/push mechanism and Fox's wall jump).

At the end of this level Owl Man will present Nuna with her bola and she will have to quickly escape Manslayer using her bola (the bola is controlled by using the the right thumb-stick to aim and throw) to break small ice caps along her way.

Exploring World Culture through Games

Many parents are concerned that the digitally-infused, media saturated nature of life in the 21st Century results in youth becoming increasingly disconnected from world cultures, their own culture, and the wisdom of elders.

There is also a concern that the more time kids spend playing video games, the less time they are connecting with cultures not represented in popular video games; especially given that many minority and indigenous cultures are either not represented at all in games or caricatured, stereotyped and otherwise misrepresented

*By knowing your past, you will see the future.
--Alaska Native saying*



through the medium.

Game design represents a new way of sharing and exploring culture; one that is both authored and player-driven. Instead of passively listening or watching, players can impact how the story unfolds, individually and collaboratively. Games represent opportunities and challenges for extending, enhancing, and transforming the art of cultural storytelling, especially when tackling deeply resonating cultural themes that celebrate, share and extend world cultures.

Rather than looking at games as the problem, however, the Never Alone project is attempting to harness the unique power of the medium to share, celebrate and extend a unique culture never before represented in a popular commercial game - Alaska Native culture - and, hopefully, serve as a model for exploring other world cultures through games.

Finally, thank you, parents for using this guide along with playing Never Alone. We hope this is just the start of your co-play adventures as a family. To learn more about video games and positive social impact, as well as find more resources for rich family play experiences, please visit the Center for Games & Impact online at <http://gamesandimpact.org>.

QUYANAQ!
(THANK YOU)



www.neveralongame.com

“Steeped in Inupiaq values, the game draws players of all ages into the heart of a traditional narrative through whimsical and engaging game play.”

- The Ethos Project

This guide was created by the team at the Center For Games & Impact at Arizona State University :

- **Juli James**, Managing Editor at the Center for Games & Impact
- **Michael Garcia**, Graphic Artist at the Center for Games & Impact
- **Sasha Barab**, Professor at ASU Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College
- **Betty Gee**, Professor at ASU Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

As well as the following collaborators and advisers:

- **Paul Whitener**, Graphic Designer at Fontsnob.com
- E-line Media
- Cook Inlet Tribal Council

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