

Internet Gaming and Youth: Addiction or Affection?

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What is Internet Addiction Disorder?

Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) is excessive computer use that interferes with physical and emotional health, relationships, work, school and other parts of daily life. It can cause the user to go days without showering or eating, which can lead to the breakdown of relationships and the degeneration of school and work obligation fulfillment.

There are two models with which we can understand IAD.

The first is the self-correcting, or Phasic Model:

Use → Excitement → Overuse/Imbalance → Correction/Balance

In this model, the user becomes excited by the newness of a game, the Internet, or other object of interest. This excitement turns to over-use and imbalance; then, the user becomes disenchanted and uninterested in the object. After the middle phase of lack of interest in the object, healthy, balanced use can occur.

The second is the more common Addiction Model:

Use → Overuse → Abuse → Addiction

This model describes an escalation of use that must be intervened upon in order to stop. Here, the user does not self-correct, but instead becomes more and more interested in the game, more and more obsessed and unbalanced until crisis erupts and intervention and treatment are needed to prevent serious harm or even death.

After much debate, IAD will *not* be added to DSM-V (it does not currently qualify as a mental disorder). Much about Internet addiction – including whether it is, in fact, a disorder – is still unknown. The term “Internet Addict” is often used by parents and spouses as a heated term or “name calling” that translates to “you spend too much time on the computer,” “I am worried about your Internet use” or “I miss you when you play the game all day.”

In children, teens and adults, the most common use (and abuse) of Internet time is social networking, gaming, and watching videos. Porn or sex addiction are also growing in use and concern. If we can find a way to incorporate gaming into education, and help users develop a healthy relationship with the aspects of gaming that work for them, we’ll be helping people who are candidates for IAD find balance and make good use of their interests.



Digital Immigrants And Digital Natives

People born Generation X and before are Digital Natives, fluent in the language of the digital era. Baby Boomers and older are Digital Immigrants – they may be tech friendly, but they will always be adopters of the language rather than natives.

Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants often clash in their approaches to communication, ways of socializing, work, school and relationship to technology (Adapted from Dr. L. Rosen):

Digital Natives	Digital Immigrants
Communication comfort zone is online, via FB, text, email,	Communication comfort zone is on the phone, in person, by letter
Prefer to communicate online in the workplace, find in-person meetings inefficient	Accustomed to the structure of in-person meetings, see value in spending face-to-face time together
Use the digital age abbreviations: ttys, f2f, thx, lol	Often find digital abbreviations to be juvenile, unprofessional
Find current educational model un-engaging & outdated – Learn by playing games	Find value in the “old ways” – view computer games as a waste of time
Learn intuitively, by experimenting	Use manuals and protocols, follow directions to do a project
Multitask with FB, homework, music, IMing and texting	Multitask by driving and talking on the phone
Image-based: Like their images before their text	Text-based: Like their text before images

Effects of the Digital Age on the Brain

“Although the vast majority of today’s educators and teachers grew up with the understanding that the human brain doesn’t physically change based on stimulation it receives from the outside—especially after the age of 3— it turns out that that view is, in fact, incorrect.

“The brain constantly reorganizes itself all our child and adult lives, a phenomenon technically known as neuroplasticity.

“One of the earliest pioneers in this field of neurological research found that rats in enriched environments showed brain changes compared with those in impoverished environments after as little as two weeks. Sensory areas of their brains were thicker, other layers heavier. Changes showed consistent overall growth, leading to the conclusion that the brain maintains its plasticity for life.”

This means we continue to grow and change – in many ways, including our brains.



Source:

Prensky, M. (2001). *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part II*

[http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-](http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part2.pdf)

[%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part2.pdf](http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part2.pdf)

Multitasking and “Hopping”

Most of us digital immigrants multitask, and proudly so – we drink coffee while talking on the phone and driving to work. But for the younger generations, multitasking just is what it means to live in this day and age. And to them, it means a whole lot more than two activities.

They do homework, listen to music, have a couple g-chats going, and text intermittently. They Facebook, watch a video on YouTube, comment on it, IM a friend and return to doing math problems.

Young people growing up in the digital era thrive on constant stimulation and fast rewards. Gadgets are perfect for this – friends are just a click away, and at all hours of the night, someone somewhere is commenting on a Facebook post, available to chat online, play a game, etc.

In this way, multitasking and a close relationship to gadgets gives a sense of continual connection and engagement for young people.

For simple tasks, people really can focus on more than one thing at a time – for instance, listening to music and driving. However, more complex tasks require “hopping” – the brain “hops” from one activity to another, adjusting quickly. When people describe multitasking, the tasks are often not being executed at the same time.

Instead, we simply adjust as fast as we can to the gadget or project we’d like to attend to. Some people enjoy this greatly – the sense of constant stimulation and variety. For others, it can seem like a frenzied nightmare.



Online Gaming

Children, teens and adults who love online gaming do so for good reason: Games are challenging, social and fun. The most popular games allow for flow of creativity, fantasy and imagination. Second Life, for example, allows for personalized avatars, the purchase of space, and the execution of projects such as therapy or putting on a play.

This venue is a unique outlet for creativity and sociality. Players can hear each other or type to converse, and end up forming relationships, having children and exploring parts of their personality which may not have an outlet elsewhere.

Another example of a popular role-playing game is World of Warcraft. With 10 Million players, this game incorporates principles of collaboration and warfare to engage players for hours and years.

What do players like about games?

- **Fun**
- **Challenging**
- **Engaging**
- **Collaborative**
- **Opportunity to build community**
- **Can play any time**
- **Meet new people – all at one’s fingertips**
- **Work in hierarchy and be part of a social structure**
- **Opportunity to be imaginative**
- **Opportunity to create – build games**

While many games are educational, challenging and cooperative, there is concern that violent games may increase violent behavior. While we have research on the effect of watching violent acts and copying them (BoBo doll experiment), we do not have conclusive research about the effect of violent video games. Even though some games have a “dumbing down” effect, we know that gaming is going to be a major force and an essential component in future education.

Internet & Gaming Addiction: Assessment

Are these warning signs present?

1. A preoccupation or obsession with FB, gaming, YouTube, porn, etc.
2. Lying or hiding online gaming and Internet use
3. Disobedience to time limits
4. Diminished interest in other activities (that used to be pleasurable)
5. Social withdrawal from family and non-virtual friends
6. Psychological withdrawal from the game (when player stops) or the Web (when offline)
7. Using gaming as a psychological escape from depression, anxiety, spiritual or existential void, etc.
8. Continuing to game or be online despite the negative consequences to sleep, physical or emotional health, relationships, school, or work.
9. Engaging in illegal activities, such as cyberbullying or hacking



Internet/Gaming Addiction: Treatment

Numerous treatment options are available for Internet and Gaming addicts. The best one for a given addict or over-user will depend on the age and temperament of the person afflicted, the resources available and type and severity of the addiction or use. Ultimately, the answer is healthy use of technology and balance among online and offline parts of life. Cyber Wellness (to be discussed) involves a healthy balance between on-line and off-line life.

While abstinence may be possible with online gaming and porn addiction, it is not realistic with general use of the everyday life of digital technologies, such as e-mail, text, social networking, and online banking. Controlled use, harm reduction, Cyber Wellness and seeking online-offline balance are more likely to be relevant, effective, and successful.

Here are some of the most common treatment options:

Behavioral Modification – *Develop a schedule for less use of technology, set boundaries, use a log to track time spent gaming or surfing, change the inner through new habits*

<http://www.crisiscounseling.com/articles/internetaddiction.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavior_modification

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) – *Thoughts cause feelings that trigger behavior.*

Change thought patters

<http://www.nacbt.org/whatiscbt.htm>

Harm Reduction Model – *Technology is here to stay! Minimize negative effects, such as gaming just two hours daily (on an average) instead of ten*

<http://www.harmreduction.org/section.php?id=62>

Treatment Centers – *More expensive, residential programs for those severely afflicted. Patients learn to engage socially offline and get into their bodies*

<http://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/>

Outward Bound – *Shares principles of regular residential programs, but completely without technology. Patients overcome fear through conscious exploration of physical risk, such as camping, rafting, hiking in edgy terrain*

<http://www.outwardbound.org/>

Online Gamers Support group – *Meets Internet and Gaming addicts right where they already are. Allows for anonymity, which may be important where there is shame (such as porn addicts)*

<http://www.olganon.org/>

<http://alcoholism.about.com/library/weekly/aa990830.htm>

Abstinence - 12 Step (AA) Model – *Admit powerlessness over addiction, seek the help of a higher power, use group support in person and online*

<http://www.netaddictionanon.org/>

CyberBullying

Rate yourself on the following point scale according to if, and how many times, you have done the below activities.

Give yourself:

- 0 points if you've never done it
- 1 point if you have done it 1 or 2 times
- 2 points if you have done it 3-5 times
- 3 points if you have done it more than 5 times.

Have you ever...

- Signed on with someone else's screen name to gather info?
- Sent an e-mail or text from someone else's account?
- Impersonated someone over IM, text, or online?
- Teased or frightened someone over IM, text, or e-mail?
- Not told someone who you really are online?
- Forwarded a private IM conversation or e-mail without the permission of the other person?
- Changed your profile to embarrass or frighten someone?
- Posted pictures or information about someone on a Web site without their consent?
- Created an Internet poll without the other person's consent?
- Used online information to follow, tease, embarrass, harass?
- Sent rude/scary things to someone, even if you're just joking?
- Used bad language online?
- Signed up someone for something online without permission?
- Used an IM or e-mail address that looked like it was someone else's?
- Used someone's password without their permission?
- Hacked into someone else's computer or sent a virus?
- Insulted someone in an interactive game room?
- Posted rude things or lies about someone online?
- Voted at an online bashing poll or posted to a guestbook saying rude or mean things?

Now calculate your total score:

- 0 – 5 Points: Cyber Saint
- 6-10 Points: Cyber Risky
- 11-18 Points: Cyber Sinner
- More than 18: Cyber Bully

Adapted from:

http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/teens/are_you_a_cyberbully.html

Internet & Gaming Addiction: Prevention & Cyber-Wellness

The best way to address addiction is through the conscious training of health and balance that prevents environments where addiction occurs. Cyber-Wellness is a program started in Singapore that teaches kids from kindergarten onwards, through every grade at every school in the country, how to deal responsibly with technology and with each other online.

Lessons taught include how to handle “falling in love” online; how to respond when one’s friends are illegally hacking or cyberbullying; whether to send a nasty text or picture sext after a breakup.

Communicating through technology has upsides and downs – the anonymity and physical distance allow for freedom to express, but also freedom to abuse. Learning how to use technology as a helpful tool for self-understanding and connection, rather than distancing and hurting, is vital for our digital society.

As the nation’s adults, the most helpful thing we can do is to take an interest in and practice healthy use of technology. Like in other areas, aversion and compulsion are equally unhealthy.

Parents, educators, counselors, nurses, therapists – Do not degrade, insult their online activities. Acknowledge to digital natives that online and offline lives are both important. Value what they like online, AND take them out to see a baseball game, encourage them to go dancing, go to lunch with their friends, etc.

We can live in balance – it will be a team effort.

Healthy living means finding balance in our lives between:

*high speed and low speed
acceleration and stillness
acceptance of what “is” and desire to change, transform, and transcend
watching online trading and watching sunsets
reading blogs and e-mails and reading novels, poetry, or sacred texts
attending to everyday, mundane ‘stuff’ and attending to the bigger picture
attending to our own individual needs and to community or world needs
spending time with people and embracing solitude
engaging in virtual and face to face communication
surfing the Internet and surfing the Inner-net*

Online Resources

Zur Institute, LLC & Ofer Zur, Ph.D.: www.zurinstitute.com

- Digital Natives & Digital Immigrants:
<http://www.zurinstitute.com/internetaddiction.html>
- Educational Games: <http://www.zurinstitute.com/onlinegaming.html>
- Online courses and CE Certification in Internet Addiction and Gaming:
<http://www.zurinstitute.com/internetwebcert12course.html>
- Free articles digital ethics <http://www.zurinstitute.com/articles.html>

Net Addiction: Dr. Kimberly Young: Assessment and Treatment Resources:
www.netaddiction.com

Marc Prensky:

- Rich articles, videos, research papers, and resources on gaming and related topics <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing>
- Resources for parents and teachers:
<http://www.gamesparentsteachers.com/>

James Paul Gee: Good Video Games and Good Learning
http://www.academiccolab.org/resources/documents/Good_Learning.pdf

John Suler: Cyberspace as Psychological Space
<http://www-usr.rider.edu/~suler/psyber/psychspace.html>

Singapore's Cyber-Wellness Task Force Report:
http://www.mda.gov.sg/wms.file/mobj/mobj.553.cwtf_final_report.pdf

Video - A Hole in the Wall:
http://www.ted.com/talks/sugata_mitra_shows_how_kids_teach_themselves.html

TED – Videos on Online Gaming:
http://www.ted.com/talks/tom_chatfield_7_ways_games_reward_the_brain.html
http://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_gaming_can_make_a_better_world.html

Beard & Wolf - Criteria for Maladaptive Internet Use:
<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2005/08/21/beard-and-wolfs-2001-criteria-for-maladaptive-internet-use/>

reSTART Recovery Center – Internet Addiction Treatment Center in Washington, USA <http://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/>

Jennifer Carrier Dorman: Engaging Digital Natives
<http://www.slideshare.net/cliotech/engaging-digital-natives>

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