



FAMILY *Matters*

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Is my child addicted to internet gaming?

Internet gaming addiction is a relatively new disorder. The diagnostic characteristics are currently tentative with further refinement expected in the coming years. However, there are currently 6 diagnostic characteristics; 1- gaming dominates the child's activities most of the time. 2- deceptive behaviors which may include lying about usage or buying online access without permission. 3- ever-increasing priority given to gaming over other activities most of the time. 4- continuation of or increasing gaming despite apparent negative consequences. 5- severe impairment of personal, family, social, educational and/or occupational areas of functioning. 6- problems exist almost daily for at least 12 months. Addiction would only be diagnosed if there is a severe impairment in one or more of the areas noted above in characteristic 5. Current research indicates that the prevalence of Internet gaming addiction is quite low (1- 6%). It is more likely that a child has an overuse problem rather than an addiction.

To assess whether your child has an addiction or overuse problem, record daily use of video games, social media, watching videos, email and/or texting. Then compare that to other non-gaming activities such as doing homework/schoolwork, reading, family activities, socializing, and athletic or

performance activities, etc. Consider whether your child's current academic performance is at their potential or not, and if not, are video games taking up time that could otherwise be used for academics. An addiction would only be diagnosed if there is a severe impairment in one or more of these areas: personal, family, social, educational and occupational. Since determining the severity of impairment is subjective, professional consultation may be beneficial to determine if there is an addiction. If your child does not meet the criteria for Internet gaming addiction, your child could have a video gaming 'over use' problem meaning that video games may be interfering with their current functioning. In this case, your child may just need assistance rebalancing gaming and non-gaming priorities.

While internet gaming addiction or overuse is a problem to solve, it is important to consider that research also indicates that playing video games, in moderation, can be beneficial to cognitive development such as visual spatial awareness and spatial memory. Therefore, prohibiting gaming may not necessarily be advisable. Most importantly, as a parent, be aware and monitor internet activity to determine if there is, in fact, an addiction or overuse issue.

What should parents do?

- Take stock of all current internet activity and behaviors compared to non-Internet behaviors as mentioned above.
 - Consider whether internet videogame behaviors are interfering with academics.
 - Seek professional consultation if you suspect an internet or gaming addiction characterized by severe impairment of personal, family, social, educational and occupational areas of functioning.
 - Consider seeking professional consultation if you suspect that your child may have a video game over-use problem for behavior management techniques.
 - While there is no clear answer to the question of how much internet video gaming is too much, parents need to decide on reasonable limits to gaming.
 - Use access to video games as a reward for completing other non-Internet video game-based activities (i. e., homework, reading, socializing etc.)
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