

Internet Game Addiction

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Playing digital games occasionally on a computer screen or mobile handset may be considered as just one of many recreational activities during leisure time. But, unfortunately some of the gamers may become immersed in their digital games. An excessive use of computer games by one where he/she builds a strong dependence and which interferes with his/her everyday life is an addiction. The gamer loses control over gaming. He/she gives increasing priority to gaming over other activities and continues gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences. With the availability and mobility of new media, proportion of teen children are seen spending countless hours by playing internet games or computer games either in desk top computers, laptops, tablets or mobile handsets.

Teen children, more often boys¹, are more at risk for internet game addiction. Prevalence rates of problematic video gaming may range from 1.7% to over 10%.² Personality traits like trait anxiety, sensation seeking, neuroticism, and aggression appear to be related to the development of gaming addiction.³ A teen who is not involved in other activities outside school is more vulnerable to develop this kind of addiction. Socially maladjusted teens are also more vulnerable.

It is not clear what actually causes computer game addiction. But experts believe that dopamine, a neurotransmitter, is released during gaming. Due to elevated level of dopamine in the brain, the player experiences a feeling of pleasure. Again, the compulsive gamers may enter into the virtual life to escape their real-life troubles and unpleasant emotions.

Internet game addiction may be manifested by many of the wide range of behavioural symptoms. Some of the symptoms are:

- Frequently playing the computer or video games and spending more and more time with the games,

- Cannot abstain from gaming for more than a few days,
- Sacrificing time at work or school in order to play,
- Becoming angry or depressed when not allowed access to the game and becoming aggressive towards those who try to prevent or limit access to game,
- Expressing calmness, peacefulness and euphoria while playing the game,
- Loosing interest in previously enjoyed activities and hobbies,
- Trying to justify the excessive use of computer,
- Playing the computer game at the first available opportunity,
- Spending much money on new games and computer upgrades,
- Declining social invitations so that he/she can continue playing games,
- Spending less time with family and friends,
- Playing upto late hours of night and lack enough hours for sleep,
- Development of poor or irregular eating habits,
- Becoming irritated if unable to play.

There may be some physical symptoms as well. The gamer increasingly ignores personal hygiene and gives up healthy physical activities. He/she may become obese. There may be headache, red eyes, and pain in neck or back. There may be features of 'Carpal tunnel syndrome' where there is pain, numbness and tingling sensation in the hand and fingers

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Internet game addiction can negatively affect the life. The gamer may become withdrawn and isolated, may avoid school, work and responsibilities. Internet gaming addiction is a special problem for the students.⁴ It is negatively associated with academic achievements.⁵ Gaming addiction is also associated with higher rates of anxiety and depression, and poorer academic performance.⁶ Younger children may miss important social development.

Treatment of internet game addiction is not well established. However, the problem may be treated in much the same way as in other addiction. Counseling and behavior modification are the primary means of treating addicted gamers. Cognitive behavioural therapy is a recommended treatment method for computer gaming addiction.⁷ One-on-one counseling and family counseling are both effective. Consultation with a psychiatrist or psychologist is of immense importance. Cognitive behavioural therapy involves setting healthy goals, monitoring gaming patterns, changing behavioural habits, and challenging thoughts that maintain or intensify gaming addiction. Behavioural therapy allows the addict to shift his/her thoughts towards healthier thinking patterns replacing those that led him/her to compulsive gaming.

In addition to that, some steps may be taken at the family level. The parents may limit the game time to a specific duration per day. They can encourage the child to complete his/her prime tasks like homework, study for examination, etc. before gaming. The parents may think of some other activities, such as regular physical exercise, nature seeing, contact with people in the society, outdoor games, reading story books, cultural activities, family talks, etc. for the child that can take the place of gaming.

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