

## HOW TO HELP TEENS WITH COMPUTER GAME ADDICTION

90% of children play computer games. 10% of them are addicted.

The dangers of computers games have been in the news again recently with the death of a teenager in Taiwan after playing for 40 hours straight without refreshments or leaving the computer. Internet computer games have an addictive dimension to them that some young people are very susceptible to. Once addicted adolescents can become depressed, their schoolwork suffers, they drop other interests and social interaction can become a problem.

Susan McLean cyber safety expert and Generation Next speaker advises parents to “Do your research, get online and play as well. See what it rewards and what it punishes. And then hopefully, with your fully-formed brain and your mature mind, you can make a decision for your child.”

Games fall into 3 motivational drives:

- 1) Social: games include Penguin and Farmville, where players can hang out with ‘friends’ and control their world.
- 2) Pleasure (intermittent reward): games include Call of Duty, World of Warcraft and Star Wars; these games reward the player intermittently so they are motivated to keep playing to get the next pleasure hit. These games are often Massive Multi Player online games and are played against opponents all over the world.
- 3) Pain: games include World of Warcraft. They punish players who log off by threatening to take away any rewards or points that have been gamed so the players keep playing to secure their position and avoid loss.

Associate Professor Douglas Gentile a Developmental psychologist from Iowa USA warns that “A well-designed game trades on all of our evolved needs and our fears and our wishes and ... including things like being able to do stuff you wouldn’t normally get to do.”

When does a young person need help?

- They feel really happy when they’re online or playing games, but as soon as they have to stop, they get angry or upset.
- They think about going online or playing when they are supposed to be focusing on other things, like doing school work or having dinner with your family.
- They spend more time on the computer than physically hanging out with their friends.
- They go to bed very late and have trouble sleeping.

Tips on how to beat a computer game addiction;

- Help the young person realize they have a problem by looking at how they feel about school, their friends, socializing face to face and participating in other activities.
- Make sure the computer is not in their bedroom but a common area of the house like the lounge or rumpus room so that they cannot hide away and play all the time.
- Computer games should be played in free time so help decide when free time is and what other commitments they might have (e.g. chores, homework, other activities).
- Go to bed earlier and earlier. Often, someone addicted to computer games will stay up late. Get them to go to bed earlier each day, so instead of the early hours of the morning it is a reasonable time in the evening.
- Replace computer time with more productive activities. They can exercise, read, place board games or do something else that stimulates and interests them.

- Encourage them to go out with their friends more. Friends are important in life: they're there to support you.

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