

Keeping Myself eSafe

Information for Teachers

Internet Addiction

Internet Addiction

Although the internet offers new and varied opportunities for both learning and recreation, for some people it can also lead to compulsive or addictive behaviours.

Children can easily become hooked on multi-user games, instant messaging and chat rooms. The engaging nature of internet communications and interactive games also means many young people have trouble keeping track of time when they're online.

Children who are unpopular or shy with peers are often attracted to the opportunities for creating new identities in online communities. Boys, in particular, are frequent users of online role-playing games, where they assume new identities and interact with other players. Although playing these games with thousands of other users may appear to be a social activity, for the introverted child or teen, excessive playing can further isolate them from friends and peers.

Risks

Internet addiction creates particular problems for children and young people. Some of the main issues concerns are:

- Neglecting homework and studying
- Lower achievement at school
- Neglecting contact with family and friends
- Obesity, headaches, backaches and general ill health
- Eating irregularities, such as skipping meals
- Neglecting personal hygiene
- Insufficient sleep and rest
- Disturbances in sleep and changes in sleep patterns
- Tiredness, mood swings and irritability
- Problems distinguishing between the virtual world and the real world
- Increased risk of contact by sexual predators
- Increased risk of viewing inappropriate content such as pornography

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Warning signs of internet addiction

Psychologists and media experts believe that the following signs indicate a young person might be exhibiting addictive behaviours.

- Using the internet to escape from real life problems
- Losing track of time while online
- Sacrificing sleep for the opportunity to spend more time online
- Preferring to spend time online rather than with friends or family
- Lying to family members and friends about the amount of time or nature of surfing being done on the internet
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies that were previously enjoyable
- Poorer concentration and lower achievement in school work
- Withdrawal symptoms including: anxiety, restlessness, or trembling hands after not using the internet for a lengthy period of time
- Difficulty distinguishing between the virtual world and the real world

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Safety Strategies

- 1) Admit to yourself that you might have an addiction to the internet. There's no point in avoiding the truth.
- 2) Keep track of how much time you spend online and the nature of your online activities.
- 3) Limit your time on a computer. Decide how long you are going to stay online and stick to it. Take regular breaks away from your computer.
- 4) Try to have at least one day a week where you don't go on your computer.
- 5) Do your homework and studying before you go online to chat or to play games.
- 6) Try to stay off websites that can be addictive such as Bebo, Facebook, MySpace and YouTube.
- 7) If chatting with your IM buddies interrupts your studying and homework, most IM programs allow you to go 'invisible' - you'll still be online but you will only receive messages from people who really need to contact you.
- 8) Call people instead of messaging them. Better still, get out and meet them face-to-face.
- 9) Make sure you have other hobbies and interests in your life. Get involved with teams, clubs, sports, music, dancing, or singing. Go for a run with a friend or exercise together.
- 10) Use the computer at your school library. You won't be as tempted to look at certain websites (such as Bebo, MySpace) and they usually have a limit on how long you can stay online.
- 11) Make sure that you spend time with friends and family. Your social life is important.
- 12) Set yourself targets to make sure that you get enough exercise and sleep.