Video Game Addiction: A Gamer's Perspective

Resources

1. Caltech Counseling Center: 626-395-8331, 1239 Arden Road behind the tennis courts

2. Olganon: Online Gamer's Anonymous www.olganon.org; this is a self-help online community

3. Nineline Crises Hotline: 1-800-999-9999 or www.NINELINE.org; many addicted gamers call this hotline for advice and to get help when they experience cravings

4. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

5. Books:
   - Game Addiction: The Experience and the Effect by Neils Clark and P. Shavaun Scott
   - Hooked on Games: The Lure and Cost of Video Game and Internet Addiction by Andrew P. Doan, Brooke Strickland, and Douglas Gentile

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What Does It Look Like?

- Losing interest in other hobbies and recreational activities
- Inattention to personal hygiene because of game playing habits
- Chronically playing games for longer than originally intended
- Lying to friends about the amount of time spent playing or because of embarrassment about the amount of time spent playing
- Chronically missing classes, work, or appointments
- Falling behind on sets or lab work due to gaming
- Withdrawing from real-world friends and family because you’re more involved with in-game friends and gaming

If any of this looks familiar, read on...

Video game addiction develops when a player’s gaming habits have become so extreme that they interfere with an individual’s normal functioning. This means that their gaming habits may be getting in the way of academic work, jobs, social and familial relationships, personal hygiene, mental health, etc. Their gaming habits may also be worsening existing problems, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-confidence.

Why do people get addicted to games? The reason will be different for everybody, but the main factor is that they are getting something from the game that they do not get in real life. It may be social relationships, a sense of identity, relief from painful emotions, or distraction from real world problems they don’t want to deal with. No matter the reason, the game is meeting a need that real-life is not, even if it is an unhealthy way to meet that need.

It is also important to know that behavioral addictions, like excessive gaming, actually cause changes in the brain similar to those seen in chemical addicts. This makes breaking the behavioral addiction just as serious as breaking a chemical addiction, but most of the time this will require the help of a trained professional.

What You Can Do

1. Identify the Problem
   - Help the gamer realize the impact gaming is having on their life; they may not be aware of the contribution their gaming habits have on their current functioning

2. Identify what the gamer is getting out of the game
   - The game is providing something the gamer is not getting in real life. The game may provide the gamer with risk-free social interaction, a distraction from painful feelings, avoidance of real-world problems, etc. Work with the gamer to try to figure out what need the game is meeting.

3. Find alternatives to serve the same function
   - If the gamer is meeting social needs with the game, help them make friends, invite them out more often, practice social skills with them, etc.
   - Are they avoiding problems or painful feelings? Encourage them to talk about these feelings or help them problem-solve instead of escaping into games.
   - Maybe it’s about feeling out of control with their life. Help them find things they like doing and things they’re good at. They have more going for them in real-life than they think and it may help for you to point those things out.

4. Remember to be supportive, not pushy. It needs to be their decision to change or it won’t work!