

# Adolescent Internet Dependency

## The New Addiction

**What is The Problem?** There is growing research evidence supporting the conclusion that many Internet users are being negatively impacted by their Internet use. In an age of increasing use of technology in schools, for its many benefits, we cannot ignore the new dangers that it may bring to adolescents. Like other addictions, Internet Addiction can be devastating to an adolescent's life and in particular to their educational goals. The fallout from Internet-related problems can include in the short term flunking out of school, but in the long term include divorce, job termination, debt and legal trouble. Being aware of Internet addiction is also a matter of safety for adolescents.

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| Five Types of Internet addiction ( <i>Keen &amp; Samson, 2004</i> ) |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Net-Gaming</b>   | Includes participation in online games or Multi-User Dungeon, virtual casinos, e-auctions, online trading or online shopping. This type of addiction can be expensive as adolescents may rack up charges on a parent's charge card or Internet bill.             |
| <b>Cyber-Relational Addiction</b>                                   | Occurs when online relationships in chat rooms become more important than relationships with family and non-Internet friends. Long-distance charges may accumulate as the conversations begin to enter the non-virtual world.                                    |
| <b>Information Overload</b>   | Occurs when adolescents may become obsessed with tracking down certain types of information and organizing it. Surfing the web and conducting extensive searches of online databases may become an all-consuming activity, reaching obsessive-compulsive levels. |
| <b>Computer Addiction</b>   | Can involve computer games that can be played with or without access to the Internet, which can become addictive to some adolescents.  |
| <b>Cybersexual Addiction</b>  | Occurs when adolescents typically spend time viewing, downloading or trading online pornography  |

*Note: The Internet can be a vehicle used to enhance another addiction that may need to be addressed.*

## Alert Parents If You Observe a Student Who...

- △ Loses track of time while online
- △ Sacrifices needed hours of sleep to spend time online
- △ Becomes agitated or angry when online time is interrupted
- △ Checks email several times a day
- △ Becomes irritable if not allowed access to Internet
- △ Spends time online instead of doing homework or chores
- △ Prefers to spend time online rather than with friends or family
- △ Disobeys time limits that have been set for Internet usage
- △ Lies about amount of time spent online or 'sneaks' online when no one is around
- △ Forms new relationships with people he or she has met online
- △ Becomes more tired and irritable than before using the Internet
- △ Seems preoccupied with getting back online when away from the computer
- △ Loses interest in activities that were enjoyable before he or she had online access



**Not Sure If An Adolescent is Addicted to the Internet? Have Parents take the online “[Parent-Child Internet Addiction Test](#)”.**  
(Center for Online and Internet Addiction, 2004)

### Be Aware of the Symptoms, and ask Parents and Students about their Internet Usage:

#### Psychological Symptoms

(Computer Addiction Services, 2004)

- Having a sense of well-being or euphoria while at the computer
- Inability to stop the activity
- Craving more and more time at the computer
- Neglect of family and friends
- Feeling empty, depressed, irritable when not at the computer
- Lying to employers and family about activities
- Problems with school or job

#### Physical Symptoms

(Computer Addiction Services, 2004)

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Dry eyes
- Migraine headaches
- Back aches
- Eating irregularities
- Sleep disturbances

Note: It might be good to incorporate this into a health lesson.

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### **Internet Safety Guidelines to Teach Adolescents** (notmykid.org, 2004)

- 📄 Never reveal your name, address, telephone number, or any other identifying information to anyone online.
- 📄 Do not send pictures of yourself over the Internet or through the mail to an online acquaintance.
- 📄 Do not make phone calls to people that you meet online.
- 📄 Do not arrange to meet in person with anyone that you meet online.
- 📄 Remember that not everyone you meet online is necessarily telling the truth about himself or herself - or about anything else, for that matter.
- 📄 Always tell a parent or teacher if online postings are rude, nasty, suggestive, or make you feel uncomfortable in any way.
- 📄 Don't pretend to be someone you are not while chatting with others online.
- 📄 Never order anything online, or sign up for free offers, without your parents' permission.
- 📄 Don't reveal your password to anyone except your parents.

### **Tips to Communicate to Parents** (notmykid.org, 2004):

1. **Monitor:** Parents should monitor the amount of time their adolescent spends on the Internet and look for the warning signs.
2. **Create a Plan:** Develop a structured plan that gradually reduces Internet usage to a more reasonable amount of time.
3. **Create External reminders:** A timer and a visible copy of the agreed-upon schedule may help to keep track of time and more easily adhere to the new routine.
4. **Move the Computer:** If the adolescent's computer is currently located in an isolated area (i.e. bedroom), it may be helpful to move the computer into a kitchen, dining area, or other room in the home that is more open and visible.
5. **Alternative Activities:** Come up with a list of alternative activities that adolescents can engage in when not online.

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**As with any adolescent addiction, seeking advice from a professional is always advised. Resources for teachers, parents and adolescents to seek help:**

**The Internet Addiction Support Group**

<http://www.netaddiction.com/resources/iasupportgroup.htm>

**Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery**

<http://addictionrecov.org/trtensl.htm>

**Preventing and Treating Internet Addiction**

<http://www.notmykid.org/parentArticles/Internet/default.asp>

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