

## What is Internet Addiction?

Internet addiction is described as an impulse control disorder which does not involve use of an intoxicating drug and is very similar to pathological gambling. Signs of Internet addiction include the following:

- Preoccupation with the Internet. (Thoughts about previous on-line activity or anticipation of the next on-line session.)
- Use of the Internet in increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction.
- Repeated, unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop Internet use.
- Feelings of restlessness, moodiness, depression or irritability when attempting to cut down use of the Internet.
- On-line longer than originally intended.
- Jeopardized or risked loss of significant relationships, job, educational or career opportunities because of Internet use.
- Lies to family members, therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet.
- Use of the Internet as a way to escape from problems or to relieve a dysphoric mood. (e.g., feelings of hopelessness, guilt, anxiety, depression.)



### **Problems caused by Internet Addiction**

Internet addiction results in personal, family, academic, financial and occupational problems that are characteristic of other addictions.

Impairment of real life relationships are disrupted as a result of excessive use of the internet. Internet addicts spend more time in solitary seclusion and spend less time with real people in their lives. Arguments may result due to the volume of time spent on-line. Internet addicts may attempt to conceal the amount of time spent on-line, which results in distrust and the disturbance of quality in once stable relationships.

Financial problems may occur due to the significant amount of time spent on-line and the service provider charges. Common financial issues are large bills for use of some services, the telephone connection charges and telephone bills for calls made to friends in chat rooms. Other financial charges may include a connection with compulsive spending/shopping. Internet addicts may choose to shop on-line and credit card charges for purchases may become high. Also, a connection with gambling exists with the availability of on-line casinos.

### **What makes the Internet addictive?**

Some internet users may develop an emotional attachment to on-line friends and activities they create on their computer screens. Internet users may enjoy aspects of the internet that allow them to meet, socialize and exchange ideas through the use of chat rooms or "virtual

communities". These communities allow the person the means to escape from reality and seek out means to fulfill unmet emotional and psychological needs, which are more intimate and less threatening than real life relationships.

Some Internet addicts may also create on-line personas where they are able to alter their identities and pretend to be someone other than themselves. The highest risk for creation of a secret life are those who suffer from low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and fear of disapproval from others. Such negative self-concepts lead to clinical problems of depression and anxiety.

There is help for Internet Addiction. The Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery at Proctor Hospital provides assessment and treatment services for the Internet addict. Counselors trained in the identification and treatment of Internet addiction provide professional assessments to determine if addiction to the Internet exists and placement into a level of care for treatment.

A free, confidential assessment may be scheduled by calling the Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery at Proctor Hospital at (309) 691-1055 or 800-522-3784.

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