

Self-Help:Computer Addiction

Some people develop bad habits in their computer use that cause them significant problems in their lives. The types of behavior and negative consequences are similar to those of known addictive disorders; therefore, the term Computer or Internet Addiction has come into use.

While anyone who uses a computer could be vulnerable, those people who are lonely, shy, easily bored, or suffering from another addiction or impulse control disorder as especially vulnerable to computer abuse.

Computer abuse can result from people using it repeatedly as their main stress reliever, instead of having a variety of ways to cope with negative events and feelings. Other misuses can include procrastination from undesirable responsibilities, distraction from being upset, and attempts to meet needs for companionship and belonging.

While discussions are ongoing about whether excessive use of the computer/Internet is an addiction, the potential problematic behaviors and effects on the users seem to be clear.

The Signs of Problematic Computer Use

A person who is “addicted” to the computer is likely to have several of the experiences and feelings on the list below: How many of them describe you?

- You have mixed feelings of well-being and guilt while at the computer.
- You make unsuccessful efforts to quit or limit your computer use.
- You lose track of time while on the computer.
- You neglect friends, family and/or responsibilities in order to be online.
- You find yourself lying to your boss and family about the amount of time spent on the computer and what you do while on it.
- You feel anxious, depressed, or irritable when your computer time is shortened or interrupted.
- You use the computer repeatedly as an outlet when sad, upset, or for sexual gratification.
- You develop problems in school or on the job as a result of the time spent and the type of activities accessed on the computer.
- When you are not on the computer, you think about it frequently and anticipate when you will use it again.

Being “addicted” to the computer also can cause physical discomfort. Are you suffering from the following physical problems?

- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (pain, numbness, and burning in your hands that can radiate up the wrists, elbows, and shoulders)
- Dry eyes or strained vision
- Back aches and neck aches
- Severe headaches
- Sleep disturbances

College Students May be at Risk

Do any of these stories sound familiar to you?

- You have difficulty getting your homework done because computer games occupy a great deal of your time.
- You connect to the Internet and suddenly discover it is several hours later and you have not left the computer.
- Your friends are worried about you going on a date alone with a person known only from a chat room.
- You spend most of your time on-line talking to friends from home, instead of making new friends at college.
- Almost all of your friends are from on-line activities and contacts.
- Your romantic partner is distraught because you have replaced your sexual relationship with Internet pornography and online sex.

Treatment must begin with recognizing that there is a problem. Overcoming denial should be followed by other treatment steps, including;

- Generating a behavior modification plan, such as setting a timer for usage, planning a daily schedule, keeping a log of moods when going online, matching time spent online with time spent socializing face to face and taking part in non-computer related activities.
- Focusing on other areas for needed skill enhancement, such as problem solving, assertiveness, social skills, overcoming shyness, and anger control.
- Assessing for other disorders like depression or anxiety that may need medical treatment.
- Assistance in locating or forming a support group for other students who are trying to regain control over their computer use.

How to Help Computer Obsessed Friends

- Be a good role model. Manage the computer use in your own life well.
- Introduce them to some other people who handle their computer use sensibly.
- Get them involved in some non-computer related fun.
- Talk to your friends about your concerns with their computer use.
- Support their desire for change if they think they have a problem.
- Encourage them to seek professional counseling.