

Ark BDA Wellbeing Check:

Is Your Child's Gaming Out of Control?

What is gaming addiction?

Video games stimulate the parts of the brain that are responsible for impulses and rewards. Especially during lockdown, when other types of activity are less accessible and young people are spending more time bored at home, you may find that your child is spending a worrying amount of time playing online video games.



The World Health Organization defines 'gaming disorder' as a mental health condition describing people who play excessively in a way that impairs educational, familial, personal, occupational and other functionality in the real world.

You should be concerned about your child's level of 'addiction' to online gaming if they begin to spend most of their time gaming over doing other things in their life, particularly if their gaming behaviour escalates or persists despite negative consequences, and they suffer withdrawal effects when they stop. Symptoms of excessive gaming in young people may include your child being reluctant to turn off games in order to attend school or online lessons, refusing to complete their homework, showing reluctance to get involved in sports or outdoor activities, being unwilling to socialise with others outside gaming networks, or losing interest in other life activities.

Why are video games so addictive?

Game creators work hard to hook players to their games. They use predictive algorithms and principles of behavioural economics to make the gamer binge. Games become "addictive" because they trigger the brain's reward system and shape the child's behaviour. Studies have shown that video games can have a similar effect on children's brains as drug abuse or alcoholism.

Massive multiplayer online role-playing games immerse the player in real time because of the seemingly endless possibility of discovering more powerful loot or items. The player is also enticed to complete events and achievements that requires a lot of gaming time. The social element makes gaming even more compulsive, and hard to quit. Social gaming satisfies the human need for being in charge, feeling competent, and feeling connected with others. Some online gamers may tell you that they "have" to go online because others rely on them – or their "clan" needs them for a "scrim".

According to experts, some of the most addictive online games are:

- Fortnite Battle Royal
- World of Warcraft
- Call of Duty
- Minecraft
- Battlefield
- Farmville
- Angry Birds
- Solitaire

How can I tell if my child has a gaming addiction?

Although the existence of video game addiction as a disease is not yet settled in the scientific community, it has been observed that even excessive video game playing have serious negative effects on many young people. Here are some of the bad effects of video game addiction:

- **Obsessive behaviour** – Always preoccupied with getting back to the game and displaying irritable, restless and aggressive behaviour when not playing. A child can be so obsessed with gaming that he is only motivated by it, talks about it all the time, and most of his thinking centres on playing.
- **Lack of sleep** – Young people who play excessively do so up to very late at night. This results in sleep deprivation, which is more harmful to minds that are still developing. When they have school the next day, it affects their attention and learning. Their lack of sleep also causes them to have headaches and feel fatigued throughout the day.
- **Physical problems** – Young people who play excessively exercise less, if at all. This results in other health problems, as well as losing the opportunity to develop brain since exercise is good for the brain. Overuse of mouse or controller may lead to carpal tunnel syndrome. Other complain of dry eyes, migraine headaches, and backaches. Other gamers also neglect their hygiene.
- **Emotional problems** - Being deprived of playing time for some young people can make them become emotional about not being able to play. A very small minority experience withdrawal symptoms like cold sweats and anger. Some young people will choose to use gaming as a form of 'escapism' rather than engaging in difficult discussions or upsetting topics.
- **Social isolation** – Excessive playing takes time away from young people to interact with family members and friends. Being isolated most of the time may deprive a child from developing social skills that he could learn from hanging out with friends. Although online games are mostly social, the skills young people can learn from it are very limited because they are not face-to-face interactions.
- **Neglect of school activities and responsibilities** – A young person might be reluctant to attend school or complete homework due to wanting to game excessively. When young people play excessively, they are less interested in other hobbies that make them develop intellectually such as reading a variety of books and engaging in creative activities or other skills they would need in the future.
- **Deceitful behaviour** – Excessive gaming can lead a child to be dishonest or deceitful to his parents about time spent on video gaming. In some cases they may even steal physical video games or money to be spent on gaming. This could lead to serious personal troubles.

How can I help my child to end their addiction to video games?

If you are concerned that your child has a video gaming addiction, here are five ways for parents and family members to help teens addicted to video games:

1. Track and Limit Game Time:

Start by monitoring gameplay. Parents should move a computer or console to a location where family members can keep track of the time a child or teenager spends playing games. Set firm limits reinforced with a timer, productivity software, or programs that make it possible to block or disable games on a computer or device.

It may also be helpful to require a teen to log the amount of time he or she spends gaming every day. Increased awareness of time spent gaming can serve as a wake-up call to the opportunity costs of gaming addiction.

2. Maintain Firm Consequences:

Teens should face firm and consistent consequences for exceeding agreed-upon gaming time or gaming without satisfying the necessary conditions — such as chores, completing their homework, or lower grades. Inconsistent consequences can create a slippery slope toward pushing boundaries.

Parents and teens should agree on consequences ranging from uninstalling a computer game to locking up or removing a console or device from the home. Parents and family members should alert players when the allotted time is almost up so that they can wrap up activities and refrain from starting new challenges.

3. Put Gaming in Perspective:

Addiction emerges when players become reliant on the cycle of challenges and rewards that games reliably provide. Family members and friends should make an effort to involve teens addicted to video games in other pastimes.

For example, improving a teenager's mind-body balance can regulate some of the emotional and mental factors that cause gaming addiction. Encourage your child to take part in healthy offline activities. Reading or learning to play a musical instrument may provide off-screen mental stimulation and rewards. Learning to code can also be a rewarding opportunity for teens interested in gaming that can pave the way toward a fulfilling career.

4. Look Out for Social and Open-Ended Games:

Online games with social components pose an increased risk of addiction. These immersive programs encourage players to pursue achievements and participate in events that require substantial time commitments. Gamers are drawn in by a need for connection and feelings of competence and control.

Players of social games share a sense of mutual responsibility and reinforcement that makes it harder to log off or quit. Parents may want to discourage these games if a teen is prone to addiction. Even open-ended single player games or games that are hard to stop or pause may not be ideal. Opt for games with short, timed rounds that encourage play in short bursts rather than marathon sessions.

5. Support Moderate Play:

Healthy video game use can strengthen cognitive skills and improve academic performance, social skills and self-esteem. Scientific studies have suggested that up to one hour per day of play can be more beneficial than watching television, but also recommend no more than one to two hours per day spent looking at screens for non-academic purposes, which adds up to seven to 14 hours per week.

Families struggling with children and young people who they believe are addicted to video games should start by taking these five measures. You can also reach out to the

BDA Safeguarding team for help and advice by emailing safeguarding@burlingtondanes.org More information, as well as links for extra help and support, can be found at: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/gaming/>