

What is Addiction?

Addiction is derived from the Latin term for “enslaved by” or “bound to”

It is a chronic disease that changes both brain structure and function. Many people can become addicted to things, regardless of age, sex, culture or backgrounds. Before we explore gaming addiction it is important to understand how addiction occurs and how it affects the brain so you can gain an understanding of why your child is so engrossed with playing on-line.

Gaming addiction

“Some people are susceptible to gaming addiction in the same way others are susceptible to becoming dependant on alcohol”

Source – UK addiction treatment centre

Gaming does have positive attributes, it creates a social aspect for people, creating virtual playdates, and enabling the player to play with several of their friends at a time. For single child households this is particularly helpful as they still generate conversation and play with others despite being on their own at home.

Often the games that require several players encourage teamwork to help each other out and if a player is injured in the game it can bring out peoples' caring nature.

Some on-line games encourage interaction and physical activity, who can forget the 'floss' dance from Fortnite which captured people of all ages to try and learn and was many a footballers' goal celebration. It made dancing cool, whether you are a boy or a girl.

Gaming encourages conversation which can spill out whilst they playing, talk of school, home life, homework or arranging actual playdates and activities. This is particularly helpful to those who lack social skills or find being in a large group of people face to face slightly intimidating.



This issue we are facing is when things spiral from pleasure to an addiction.

People with an alcohol or drug addiction are addicted to a substance which releases dopamine's (the feel good hormone). Gaming is a behavioural addiction, gamers become addicted to a certain behaviour rather than a substance to stimulate the release of dopamine.

Addicts receive pleasure as a direct result of the reward centres in their brain being used. With gaming the rewards are frequent. Every time they achieve a new level they receive an adrenaline rush and this continues each time they move up a level. With games like Fortnite there is literally no end in sight, generating reward and reward, rush after rush, with no point of a player saying I am finished. A bit like someone playing the slot machines at an arcade. How many times has the allure of the potential cash-fall coming your way ensured that you continue to spend your 10p's in the hope that coin is the one to push the rest of the money off the ledge and into your coin cup?

**“41% who played admitted they played to escape from the real world.
7% of these people admitted becoming dependant on games”**

Gaming offers players opportunities to act in ways that would never be acceptable in the real world. They can take on alternative personalities, be people they never dare to be. For a child who is experiencing difficulties in the real world, why would they want to stop being immersed in a world where they can be who they want to be, where they can leave their worries behind them?

The gaming companies are very clever. By creating games which have no ultimate goal or finish point they ensure that players will continue playing. Think of when you have started a box set. Despite having other days and nights to watch the next episode, how often have people stayed up late to watch the next episode, and the next...and the next, until suddenly it's 2am in the morning and you have to get up at 6.30am?

“I received a text from my son to ensure I could be at home to upload the new fortnite pack as if it wasn't uploaded within a certain timeframe he missed out on certain rewards”

Often with a new game, companies start off with simple play to receive rewards quicker, as a player moves up the levels it becomes harder to achieve the new levels as quickly so it reinforces continued play. For addicts they know that if they continue to play for long enough they will receive the reward. As the brain requires more of the reward to generate and maintain the adrenaline rush, the player will continue playing in search of that high.

“My child rushes out of the school gates to get home as quick as they can so they are guaranteed to get on-line and on their group as there are 6 people wanting to play but only 4 people able to at a time”

Mainly associated with social media, the gaming world can also create FOMO, the fear of missing out. The virtual world is continuously evolving, even when the players are not on-line. Reports of players racing home to ensure that they have downloaded the new version to ensure immediate play with their friends.

Gaming provides endless play opportunities, with new games or versions regularly released to keep players tempted. To help prevent addiction we can look at the following factors;

- Reduce the amount of time your child spends playing.
- Help them to recognise the behaviours they display when playing on-line
- Recognise the triggers that can occur which can cause continuous play
- Understand the harm addiction can cause themselves and others.

By understanding the way our children respond to gaming can help us to look at how they feel when they play on-line and identify alternative off-line activities which can generate the same response. On-line play can generate many positives as we have looked at here; the key is to find a healthy balance between the amount of time they spend on-line and off-line.

For ideas on activities please click on the link <http://parents.ygam.org/activities/>

If you are worried your child is displaying signs of addiction and want further support, please see <http://parents.ygam.org/gaming-support-primary/>

Sources; Internet Matters, Perspective Training, UK Treatment Centre