

## INSIGHT

### What's the difference between liking gaming and over-use?

Most young people spend a lot of time with their devices. The overwhelming majority of these young people also do their homework, keep up their responsibilities, and have other interests. Yet adults and young people alike report feeling increasingly concerned that technology takes up too much time and attention in their lives.

Does this mean that young people are at risk of being addicted? It depends upon whom you ask. There is significant disagreement among clinicians and researchers about whether video game addiction warrants a clinical diagnosis. In 2013 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) did decide that internet gaming disorder warranted further research and study while the World Health Organization recently included "gaming disorder" in the International Classification of Diseases.

### Is video game addiction real?

Researchers studying the issue have come up with a variety of terms for the problem including pathological play, compulsive internet use, or problematic internet use, among others. It has also been hard to pin down the scale and scope of video game addiction. One [review of studies](#) focusing on American adolescents and college students found a range from zero to 26% for problematic Internet use reflecting a range of definitions, measures, and samples.

We won't go into the challenges that make drawing conclusions about internet addiction complicated. However, while researchers continue to learn more and debate the diagnostic approach, it is clear that a small percentage of young people do need help. These are not just young people who really like playing video games or going online. These are young people for whom the Internet or gaming has interfered with their ability to function and thrive.

### More Accurate Language: Problematic Interactive Media Use

As opposed to talking about video game addiction, Dr. Michael Rich at the Center for Media and Child Health prefers to talk with families and adolescents about [Problematic Interactive Media Use](#) (PIMU). He argues that it is less stigmatizing and opens up important conversations not only about gaming but about information seeking, online pornography, and social media as well.

If you are worried that tech has taken over your child's daily life, look for the symptoms on the final page of this download to see if you might have reason for concern.

### If you are worried

There is no need to panic that your child is becoming addicted just because they spend a lot of time online or you have power struggles over games. On the other hand, don't ignore signs of a real problem if you see them. On the next page you will find your I'd Rather Inventory for Digital Wellbeing. While this is not a diagnostic tool, it is a helpful "first pass" to help you determine whether or not gaming or Internet use is becoming a problem.

# "I'd Rather" Inventory

David Walsh, Ph.D.

Check each statement you agree with. Feel free to replace video games with phone, Internet, or social media in the statements below.

- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than be with my friends.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than play sports or go to school clubs.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than spend time with my family.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than eat.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than sleep.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than talk on the phone or text.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than go to school or work.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than go to a movie.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than watch TV.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than use the Internet.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than listen to music.
- \_\_\_\_ I'd rather play video games than move my body.

List the things you'd rather do than play video games:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

If your child has trouble thinking of anything they would rather do than play video games (or go online, etc) or it is taking priority over important life functions, it may be a sign of problematic over-use. This is not a diagnostic tool but a simple and helpful "first pass" to see how important gaming or the Internet has become in a child's life. Internet or gaming over-use often occurs alongside other diagnoses so be sure to follow up with a **trusted professional** to learn more about what might be going on for your child and make a specific plan that works for your family. We've also created the checklist on the next page that you can run through to see if you think your child might need extra support.

If you don't think your child needs professional help but your family wants to get tech back in balance, use your **Family Media Priorities Plan** in the course wrap up to get started.