

## **Gaming and Online Addiction**

Video game addiction or Gaming addiction is a newly identified process addiction marked by compulsive playing of computer and video games which interferes with the quality of an individual's life. The MMORPG games which mean "massively multiplayer online role-playing games" have been linked to incidences where the player becomes so obsessed with compulsively role-playing in cyberspace that they withdraw from their real lives and focus almost entirely on cyber relationships and in-game achievements rather than real life circumstances.

### **Defining Addiction**

While most people associate addiction with substances, such as drugs or alcohol, doctors recognize addictive behaviors as well. In a WebMD feature on the definition of addiction, psychiatrist Michael Brody, MD, set forth the following criteria:

1. The person needs more and more of a substance or behavior to keep him going.
2. If the person does not get more of the substance or behavior, he becomes irritable and miserable.

### **Comparison of Video Games and Drug Use**

When playing a video game, large amounts of dopamine are released and flood the brain in the same way that dopamine is released during the use of stimulants. Excessive amounts of dopamine in the brain regulate mood and cause a "high." Because of this reliance on the dopamine and the "high" some experts point out that video game addiction can be a chemical not just psychological addiction. The world's first Video Game Detox Center which opened in the Netherlands reports that actual physical withdrawal symptoms have been experienced by their patients.

### **Addiction Warning Signs**

Spending a lot of time gaming doesn't necessarily mean an individual is addicted. According to the Center for On-Line Addiction, warning signs for video game addiction include:

- Need to play for increasing amounts of time
- Persistent thoughts about gaming during other activities
- Gaming to escape from real-life problems, anxiety, or depression
- Lying to friends and family to conceal gaming
- Feeling irritable when trying to cut down on gaming
- Isolating and withdrawing from activities previously enjoyed
- Committing illegal acts to sustain activity
- Relying on others to finance activity

The above criteria demonstrate aspects of addiction which include preoccupation, tolerance, unmanageability, withdrawal and continuing to "use" video games despite negative consequences. These are the hallmark signs of addiction.

## **Video Game Addiction in Children and Teens**

The fast growing number of gamers and video game addicts is adolescents. Marriage and Family Therapist Angel Ann Holloway developed a short list of questions for parents to ask when wondering if their child has a problem with online gaming. The list can be found on [suite101.com](http://suite101.com). If parents can answer "yes" to even one of the following questions their may be an issue with gaming for their child. The more questions answered "yes" the greater the problem may be and more likely an intervention is likely needed.

- Does your child play almost every day?
- Does he or she play for extended periods (more than three or four hours at a time)?
- Does your child seem to lose all track of time when he or she plays?
- Does your child play for excitement?
- Is your child irritable if he or she can't play?
- Will your child sacrifice social and sporting activities to play?
- Are his or her grades suffering because of video game play?
- Have you tried to limit playing time, but in vain?

## **Video Game Addiction Treatment**

Video game addiction treatment is still a new field and research is currently being conducted in the initial stages. However as with other addictions, the most effective treatments appear to be psychotherapy or talk therapy and medication for if necessary for anxiety or depression. 12 step programs can also be very helpful for identifying triggers and new ways of relating to others.

Since gamers are exceptionally computer savvy, a non profit organization called On-line Gamers Anonymous was formed in 2002. It is a 12 step self help support organization for individuals suffering and recovering from the negative effects of compulsive and excessive computer game playing. They provide online support, message boards and other tools for healing.