

# Internet Gaming and Youth: Addiction or Affection?

Handout  
By Ofer Zur, Ph.D.



ZUR INSTITUTE, LLC  
[www.zurinstitute.com](http://www.zurinstitute.com)

Email: [info@zurinstitute.com](mailto:info@zurinstitute.com)

# What is Internet Addiction Disorder?

Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) is excessive computer use that interferes with daily life. It can cause the user to go days without showering or eating, cause the breakdown of relationships, and the degeneration of school and work obligation fulfillment.

There are two models with which to understand IAD.

## **The first is the self-correcting, or Phasic Model:**

Use → Overuse/Imbalance → Correction/Balance

In this model, the user becomes excited by the newness of a game, the Internet, or other object of interest. This excitement turns to over-use and imbalance; then, the user-becomes disenchanted and uninterested in the object. This part is often characterized by a lack of interest in the object, and followed by healthy, balanced use.

## **The second is the more common Addiction Model:**

Use → Overuse → Abuse → Addiction

This model describes an escalation that must be intervened upon in order to stop. Here, the user does not self-correct, but instead becomes more and more interested in the game, becoming more and more obsessed and unbalanced until intervention and treatment.

After much debate, IAD will *not* be added to DSM-V. Much about this disorder – including whether it is, in fact, a disorder – is still unknown. and a sentence that a lot is still unknown. The term “Internet Addict” is often used by parents and spouses as a heated term to mean “you spend too much time on the computer” “I am worried about your Internet use” or “I miss you when you play the game all day”

In children, teens and adults, the most common use of Internet time is gaming. If we can find a way to incorporate gaming into education, and help users have a healthy relationship with the parts about gaming that work for them, we’ll be helping people with IAD find balance and make use of their interest.



# Digital Immigrants And Digital Natives

People born Generation X and before (younger) are Digital Natives, relatively fluent in the language of the digital era. Baby Boomers and older are Digital Immigrants – they may be tech friendly, but they will always be adopters of the language rather than natives.

Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants often clash in their approaches to work, school and relationship to technology:

Digital Natives	Digital Immigrants
Communication comfort zone is online, via text, chat, email, Facebook	Communication comfort zone is on the phone, in person, by letter
Prefer to communicate online in the workplace, find in-person meetings inefficient and unnecessary	Accustomed to the structure of in-person meetings, see value in spending face-to-face time together
Use the digital age abbreviations: ttys, f2f, thx, lol	Often find digital abbreviations to be juvenile, unprofessional
Many find our current educational model unengaging and outdated – prefer to play games	See value in the “old ways” – see computer games as a waste of time
Learn intuitively, by experimenting	Use manuals and protocols, follow directions to do a project
Multitask by Facebooking, doing homework, listening to music, IMing and texting	Multitask by driving and talking on the phone
Image-based: Like their images before their text	Text-based: Like their text before images

# Effects of the Digital Age on the Brain

*“Although the vast majority of today’s educators and teachers grew up with the understanding that the human brain doesn’t physically change based on stimulation it receives from the outside—especially after the age of 3— it turns out that that view is, in fact, incorrect.*

*“The brain constantly reorganizes itself all our child and adult lives, a phenomenon technically known as neuroplasticity.*

*“One of the earliest pioneers in this field of neurological research found that rats in enriched environments showed brain changes compared with those in impoverished environments after as little as two weeks. Sensory areas of their brains were thicker, other layers heavier. Changes showed consistent overall growth, leading to the conclusion that the brain maintains its plasticity for life.”*

This means we continue to grow and change – in many ways, including our brains.



Source:

Prensky, M. (2001). *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part II*

# Multitasking and Hopping

Most of us multitask – we drink coffee while talking on the phone and driving to work. But for the younger generations, multitasking just is what it means to live in this day and age.

They do homework, listen to music, have a couple g-chats going, and text intermittently. They Facebook, watch a video on YouTube, comment on it, IM a friend and return to doing math problems.

Young people growing up in the digital era thrive on constant stimulation and fast rewards. Gadgets are perfect for this – friends are just a click away, and at all hours of the night, someone somewhere is commenting on a Facebook post, available to chat online, etc.

In this way, multitasking and a close relationship to gadgets gives a sense of continual connection and engagement for young people.

For simple tasks, people really can focus on more than one thing at a time – for instance, listening to music and drive. However, more complex tasks require “hopping” – the brain “hops” from one activity to another, adjusting quickly. When people describe multitasking, the tasks are often not being executed at the same time.

Instead, we simply adjust as fast as we can to which gadget or project we’d like to attend to. Some people enjoy this greatly – the sense of constant stimulation and variety. For others, it can seem like a frenzied nightmare.



# Online Gaming - Appeal

Children, teens and adults who love online gaming, do so for good reason: It's challenging, social and fun. The virtual reality game Second Life allow for personalized avatars, the purchase of space, and the execution of projects such as therapy or putting on a play.

This venue is an incredible outlet for creativity and sociality. Players can hear each other or type to converse, and end up forming relationships, having children and exploring parts of their personality which may not have an outlet elsewhere.

Another example of a popular role-playing game is World of Warcraft. With 10 Million players, this game incorporates principles of collaboration and warfare to engage players for hours and years.

*What do players like about games?*

- **Fun**
- **Engaging**
- **Collaborative**
- **Opportunity to build community**
- **Challenging**
- **Can play any time**
- **Meet new people – all at one's fingertips**
- **Work in hierarchy**
- **Opportunity to be imaginative**
- **Opportunity to create – build games**

While many games are educational, challenging and cooperative, there is concern that violent games may increase violent behavior. While we have research on the effect of watching violent acts and copying them (BoBo doll experiment), we do not have conclusive research about the effect of violent video games. Furthermore – addiction aside - some games have a mental dulling effect when played for too long.

# Internet & Gaming Addiction: Assessment

*Are these warning signs present?*

1. A preoccupation with gaming (or the Internet)
2. Lying or hiding gaming use
3. Disobedience to time limits
4. Diminished interest in other activities
5. Social withdrawal from family and friends
6. Psychological withdrawal from the game (when player stops)
7. Using gaming as a psychological escape
8. Continuing to game despite its negative consequences



# Internet & Gaming Addiction: Treatment

Numerous treatment options are available for Internet and Gaming addicts. The best one will depend on the age and temperament of the person afflicted, the resources available and severity of the addiction. Ultimately, the answer is healthy use of technology and balance among online and offline parts of life.

## Here are the options:

Behavioral Modification – *Develop a schedule for less use of technology, set boundaries, use a log to track time spent gaming or surfing, change the inner through new habits*

<http://www.crisiscounseling.com/articles/internetaddiction.htm>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavior\\_modification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behavior_modification)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) – *Thoughts cause feelings that trigger behavior. Change thought patterns*

<http://www.nacbt.org/whatiscbt.htm>

12 Step (AA) Model – *Admit powerlessness over addiction, seek the help of a higher power, use group support in person and online*

<http://www.netaddictionanon.org/>

Harm Reduction Model – *Technology is here to stay! Minimize negative effects, such as gaming just six hours daily instead of ten*

<http://www.harmreduction.org/section.php?id=62>

Treatment Centers – *More expensive, residential programs for those severely afflicted. Patients learn to engage socially offline and get into their bodies*

<http://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/>

Outward Bound – *Shares principles of regular residential programs, but completely without technology. Patients overcome fear through conscious exploration of physical risk, such as camping, rafting, hiking in edgy terrain*

<http://www.outwardbound.org/>

Online Gamers Support group – *Meets Internet and Gaming addicts right where they already are. Allows for anonymity, which may be important where there is shame (such as porn addicts)*

<http://www.olganon.org/>

<http://alcoholism.about.com/library/weekly/aa990830.htm>



# Internet & Gaming Addiction: Prevention

The best way to address addiction is through conscious training of health and balance. Cyber-Wellness is a program started in Singapore which teaches kids from kindergarden onwards, through every grade at every school in the country, how to deal responsibly with technology and with each other online.

Lessons taught include how to handle “falling in love” online; how to respond when one’s friends are downloading music illegally; whether to send a nasty text or picture sext after a breakup.

Communicating through technology has upsides and downs – the anonymity and physical distance allow for freedom to express, or freedom to abuse. Learning how to use technology as a helpful tool for self-understanding and connection, rather than distancing and hurting, is vital for our digital society.

As the nation’s adults, the most helpful we can be is to take an interest in healthy use of technology. Like in other areas, aversion and compulsion are equally unhealthy.

Parents, educators, therapists – show digital natives that online and offline lives are both important. Value what they like online, AND take them out to see a baseball game, , encourage them to go dancing, go to lunch with their friends, etc.

We can live in balance – it will be a team effort.

## **Healthy living relates to finding balance in our lives between:**

high speed and low speed  
acceleration and stillness  
acceptance of what "is" and desire to change, transform, and transcend  
watching online trading and watching sunsets  
reading blogs and e-mails and reading novels, poetry, or sacred texts  
attending to everyday, mundane 'stuff' and attending to spiritual matters  
attending to our own individual needs and to community or world needs  
spending time with people and embracing solitude  
engaging in virtual and face to face communication  
surfing the Internet and surfing the Inner-net.

# Online Resources

**Zur Institute:** [www.zurinstitute.com](http://www.zurinstitute.com)

- Digital Natives & Digital Immigrants:  
<http://www.zurinstitute.com/internetaddiction.html>
- Educational Games: <http://www.zurinstitute.com/onlinegaming.html>
- Online courses and CE Certification in Internet Addiction and Gaming:  
<http://www.zurinstitute.com/internetwebcert12course.html>
- Free articles digital ethics <http://www.zurinstitute.com/articles.html>

**Net Addiction** – Dr. Kimberly Young: Assessment and Treatment Resources:  
[www.netaddiction.com](http://www.netaddiction.com)

reSTART Recovery Center – Internet Addiction Treatment Center in Washington  
<http://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/>

Beard & Wolf's Criteria for Maladaptive Internet Use:  
<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2005/08/21/beard-and-wolfs-2001-criteria-for-maladaptive-internet-use/>

Jennifer Carrier Dorman: Engaging Digital Natives  
<http://www.slideshare.net/cliotech/engaging-digital-natives>

Marc Prensky: Do They Really Think Differently?  
[http://www.zurinstitute.com/online/int\\_game6.pdf](http://www.zurinstitute.com/online/int_game6.pdf)

Marc Prensky - Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants:  
<http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part2.pdf>

James Paul Gee: Good Video Games and Good Learning  
[http://www.academiccolab.org/resources/documents/Good\\_Learning.pdf](http://www.academiccolab.org/resources/documents/Good_Learning.pdf)

Stanford University: Media Multitaskers Pay Mental Price  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zuDXzVYZ68>

John Suler: Cyberspace as Psychological Space <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/psychspace.html>

**Ofer Zur, Ph.D - [www.zurinstitute.com](http://www.zurinstitute.com)**

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