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INTERNET ADDICTION: SYMPTOMS, EVALUATION

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Computer addiction is a mental illness which causes the excessive use of computers to the extent that it interferes with daily life. Excessive use may explain problems in social interaction, mood, personality, work ethic, relationships, thought processes, or sleep deprivation.

Some people develop bad habits in their computer use that cause them significant problems in their lives. The types of behavior and negative consequences are similar to those of known addictive disorders. Excessive computer use may result in, or occur with:

- Lack of social interaction.
- Using the computer for pleasure, gratification, or relief from stress.
- Feeling irritable and out of control or depressed when not using it.
- Spending increasing amounts of time and money on hardware, software, magazines, and computer-related activities.
- Neglecting work, school, or family obligations.
- Lying about the amount of time spent on computer activities.
- Risking loss of career goals, educational objectives, and personal relationships.
- Failing at repeated efforts to control computer use.
- Never getting off the computer.

Computer addiction is a relatively new term used to describe a dependency on one's computer. It is not limited to personal computers, but covers video games and the Internet as well. This addiction has already been given a label by psychologists: Internet addiction disorder (IAD). Specific questions can be asked to assess whether or not someone may suffer from computer addiction. These questions include assessing how much time is spent on the PC or playing video games, sometimes relative to how much time is spent interacting with real people.

This form of addiction is said to be on the increase. More and more people are spending time in cyberspace in a virtual world of their own making. If not treated, this condition can lead to diminished social skills and deterioration in the addict's quality of life. Although it hasn't been given an "official" diagnosis, addiction-like behaviors with computer, video, and Internet gaming have noticeably increased among both teenagers and adults. Like any addictive behavior, there are signs to look for if you suspect your teen might have a gaming addiction. Your teen need only exhibit two or three of these symptoms for his behavior to be considered "addictive."

-Preoccupation

-Downplaying Computer Use

-Lack of Control

-Loss of Time

-Negative Impact on Other Areas of Life

-Hiding From Negative or Uncomfortable Feelings or Situations

-Defensiveness

-Misuse of Money

-Mixed Feelings