Part of our Gaming & Gambling Series

NOS
Gaming & Gambling

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What you need to know about...
GAMING DISORDER

What is it?

'Gaming Disorder'

In 2018, the World Health Organisation included gaming disorder as part of its International Classification of Diseases. Those with the disorder are categorised as having impaired control over gaming, increased priority given to gaming over other activities, and continuing to game despite the occurrences of negative consequences. Naturally, a gaming disorder can affect a person of any age, with children as much at risk as anybody of developing symptoms if left unchecked. While some or all of the symptoms may appear, they must be consistently prevalent for a period of at least 12 months to be considered an Internet Gaming Disease or IGD, but that time may be decreased if symptoms are severe.

Know the Risks

Impact mental health

Becoming addicted to video games at a young age can have a serious impact on social and mental wellbeing. Video games use a lot of techniques to make them more appealing to the subconscious. Bright lights, pleasing sounds and rewarding, repetitive gameplay trigger feel good chemicals that can be hard to walk away from.

Lead to injuries

Excessive gaming (especially using a mouse and keyboard at a desk) can cause problematic physical injuries. Back pain, eye strain and carpal tunnel syndrome can all manifest during lengthy gaming sessions.

Increase isolation

Playing video games can be quite an isolating experience. The need to play them can often outweigh the need to do other daily tasks like exercising, socialising with friends or even eating, to the point where little or no enjoyment is gained from doing anything but gaming.

Induce stress

Stress can be extremely damaging to adults and children. It is a known contributing factor to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and mental health conditions. Too much time playing high-octane video games can leave untold stresses on the body as well as still developing young minds.

Spot the Signs

Excessive play

Children might be dedicating an excessive amount of free time to playing games or disrupting sleep patterns or social interactions in order to get an extra game here and there. A few extra hours a week is normal, but if it becomes a regular, daily pursuit, it could be a problem.

Social disinterest

Spending time with family and friends or engaging in other activities and hobbies will fall by the wayside with gaming disorder. Life and fulfilment begins to orbit around playing video games, where the same enjoyment just can't be found in other pursuits or social activities.

Mood changes

Getting angry or defensive when asked to stop gaming or becoming irritable when not playing are both warning signs of a gaming disorder. There's a difference between being upset when losing (which is quite normal) and being angry to the point of physical aggression.

Gambling problems

Online gambling may become a problem with young ones or teenagers who might have access to their own money. Many games contain features called loot boxes or microtransaction that have been likened to gambling. Because they can be so addictive, children could be pouring huge amounts of money into games without even realising, or they may be too ashamed to admit it.

Action and Support

Talk to other parents

It can be difficult to gauge just how much gaming time is too much. To understand what is normal, talk to other parents about their children's gaming habits. This should give a more robust idea of what is healthy and what might be a cause for concern.

Encourage other activities

It is important for you to encourage other activities. Engaging in real life sports or social activities and clubs, are excellent ways for kids to spend time with their friends and peers away from video games. Learning instruments or new languages are also a great long-term project.

Establish routines

An established routine can encourage regularity and moderation if you think a child might be gaming too much. Allow an hour or two in the evening when their friends are online and once everything else like meals, homework and housework have already been done. Try to set consoles up in family rooms and keep mobile phones and tablets out of bedrooms at night.

Seek support

If you need to get help for your child, there may be specialist organisations or clinics who can help to treat gaming disorder and provide the necessary advice and support However, this should only be considered as a last resort in cases of long term and persistent problems.

Our Expert
Mark Foster

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.