



# DIGITAL ADDICTION



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Digital addiction is a harmful dependence on digital media and technological devices such as computers, smartphones and videogames. Digital addiction happens when someone is not able to stop their use of technology even though it is causing them harm. This has been found to occur more among kids and teens who often do not have a sense of moderation. The compulsive usage of internet and digital devices for schooling, leisure, entertainment, shopping and other activities of teenagers makes them prone to this particular addiction.

It is difficult to assess the proportion of teenagers who are addicted to technology, but some research works have shed light on the depth of the emergency situation. For instance, according to a survey on digital addiction, 6 out of 10 persons want their family members to reduce their technology usage. Similar to this, another study carried out by IDC on the use of smartphones discovered that about eighty percent of smartphone owners check their devices as soon as they wake up.

Due to the similarities between the signs of digital technology abuse and substance abuse, it suggests that they have shared underlying mechanisms and could benefit from similar treatment methods.

Secondly, the two addictions can lead to tolerance and withdrawal symptoms. Tolerance happens when the brain becomes less responsive to the same level of digital stimulation or substance use over time, so people need more of the stimulus to achieve the same effect. Withdrawal symptoms can also occur when the brain does not receive the expected stimulation or substance, leading to physical and psychological distress.

Again, both types of addiction can interfere with a person's ability to function normally in daily life. Too much use of technology or substances can lead to problems with work, school, relationships and other important life areas for children and teenagers.

This is not to say that screen time is bad on its own but like the saying goes, too much of everything is bad. When a child or teenager spends too much time on the internet, they often lose touch with reality and it may become an escape route for them. They may likely use it to mask a lot of things like depression, anxiety, difficulty, negative experiences etc. So, digital addiction should be a big no for young people. It is a crisis that no young person should be allowed to experience.

Most psychologists says that digital technology abuse, including gaming addiction, has a similar pattern to substance abuse disorder due to several reasons.

First, both drugs and digital addictions involve the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that signals pleasure in the brain. Digital technology, including video games and smartphones, can trigger a chemical called dopamine to be released in the brain's reward system, leading to feelings of pleasure and satisfaction that users seek again and again. Similarly, drugs and alcohol can also cause a surge of dopamine in the brain, which is why people with substance abuse disorders often continue to use these substances despite its negative consequences.

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The similarities in the neurobiological, behavioural and functional aspects of digital technology abuse and substance abuse suggest that they may share common underlying mechanisms and may benefit from similar treatment approaches. Research has shown that a significant proportion of individuals who have digital addiction, experience other brain and mental health-related conditions.

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In fact, in 2018 during the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases, World Health Organization (WHO) added "Gaming Disorder" as an official mental health condition. They further defined it as a pattern of behaviour where gaming takes precedence over other important life interests and activities, leading to significant impairment in personal, social, academic, or occupational functioning.

The inclusion of Gaming Disorder in the ICD-11 was based on a growing body of evidence suggesting that excessive gaming can have negative effects on a person's mental and physical health, including problems with sleep, mood, cognition and addiction.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY A CHILD SUFFERING FROM DIGITAL ADDICTION

Digital addiction can manifest in children in various ways and it is essential for parents and caregivers to be aware of the signs and symptoms. Here are some common ways digital addiction can be manifested in children:

- Excessive use of digital devices: A child who is addicted to digital technology may spend an excessive amount of time on digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, or computers.
- Difficulty in controlling device use: The child may have trouble limiting their time on digital devices and may become agitated or irritable when asked to stop.
- Preoccupation with digital technology: The child may constantly think about or talk about digital devices and online activities..

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- Social isolation: The child may prefer to spend time alone with digital devices rather than socializing with peers or engaging in other activities.
- Negative impact on school performance: Digital addiction can lead to a decline in academic performance, including decreased motivation, lower grades, and poor attendance
- Behavioral changes: The child may become more irritable, anxious, or moody, or display other behavioral

changes such as lying, sneaking, or stealing to gain access to digital devices.

- Physical symptoms: Prolonged use of digital devices can cause physical symptoms such as eye strain, headaches, neck and back pain and disrupted sleep.

## HOW TO HELP KIDS WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH DIGITAL ADDICTION

It is important to note that the severity and presentation of digital addiction can vary widely among children and a professional evaluation is recommended to diagnose and treat digital addiction. As a parent or caregiver you should also take steps to limit the child's exposure to digital technology and encourage healthy alternatives such as physical activity, outdoor play, and other social interaction.

**You can take the following steps if your child is struggling with digital addiction.**

- Be loving and supportive. This is very important. Your child needs to know that you are acting out of love and not out of anger. Make it clear that your goal is to be sure that they are safe, happy and healthy. Start such conversation with a reminder or reassurance that you love them and care about their happiness and wellbeing.
- State the problem. Don't just mention the problem, tell them why they should stop. If you give them a reason, they are likely to have a rethink and make the necessary adjustment.
- React reasonably. Yelling at the child over this issue may heighten the situation and rarely has a successful outcome. Instead, you need to acknowledge that your child's technology use may be necessary and may even have some positive effects. Instead, set limits within reason and make it clear. For instance, you can designate specific corners or rooms in the house as internet zones. You can also set internet time each day during which they are allowed to use the internet.



- Understand how technology works. Yes, you need to get familiar with computer usage and some technical commands and shortcuts. It takes some computer know-how to check history folders and internet logs, learn about parental control software, and set filters. This will help your investigation should you want to find out where your youngster goes online.
- Do not Spy: Children especially teenagers detect intrusion. Instead of spying, show concern and care towards this habit. Highlight the effect it's having on them and how harmful it is. Make them understand that you truly care about them and do not intend to interfere with their lives.
- Get a professional assistant. You can get a therapist involved if that's the help they need. They are well trained and know how best to handle such situations. They can use talk, group or cognitive-behavioural therapy to address the issue. Medications may also be used to tackle mental illness and control intrusive thought patterns experienced online. But be available, loving and supportive throughout the entire process.

**As a parent or caregiver you should also take steps to limit the young people's exposure to digital technology and encourage healthy alternatives...**



## HOW DIGITAL ADDICTION IS MANIFESTED IN CHILDREN

*Digital abuse results in digital addiction.*

### 1. Internet Gaming Disorder:

According to the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), gaming disorder is the pattern of gaming behaviour (“digital-gaming” or “video-gaming”) characterised by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences. The issue of gaming disorder is currently both a national and international concern. It is a concern to the extent that it causes distress and affects daily life and functioning of its victims.

Some games are designed to be endlessly addictive. When you beat one level, another automatically unlocks and the satisfaction of reaching the next milestone keeps you hooked, thanks to the dopamine rush it provides. You keep climbing from level to level, unable to stop. This addiction can be compared to the consumption of sweets and chocolates, as children are often unable to set boundaries with these indulgences, leaving them susceptible to falling into a gaming addiction.

For gaming disorders to be diagnosed, the world health organization maintains that such

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According to the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), gaming disorder is the pattern of gaming behaviour (“digital-gaming” or “video-gaming”) characterised by impaired control over gaming,

behaviour patterns must be severe enough that it results in significant impairment to a person's functioning in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months. Others however believe that to be diagnosed, the gamer would have to exhibit at least five symptoms within a year.

This will mean that if as a parent, teacher or caregiver you have noticed this repeated pattern in your child or teenager for the above length of time, then it is enough to confirm your suspicion and high time you sought help.

Internet gaming disorder is known to negatively affect different aspects of a child's life, causing impairment or distress. Let's look at some symptoms of internet gaming disorder.

**If your child or teenager exhibits one or more of the following symptoms then you need to help them as soon as possible.**

**When a child or teenager spends too much time on the internet, they lose touch with reality.**

1.If they are preoccupied with internet gaming especially if the prolonged participation begins to result in physical symptoms such as eye strain, headaches, neck pain and back pain.

2. If they experience withdrawal whenever the internet gaming is taken away.

3. If they suddenly develop a tolerance for internet games.

4. If they are unable to regulate their engagement in online gaming

5. If they continue to engage in gaming even after knowing the problems it is causing them.

6. If they promote it and encourage their friends to get involved in gaming activity.

7. If they deceive others or lie about the extent of their online gaming.

8. If they lose interest in previous hobbies and fun activities as a result of gaming.

9. If they fail to carry out a task, school project or home chores or personal stuff as a result of gaming.

10. If they use internet games as an escape or relief of negative moods.

If you notice that your child is doing one or more of the above, then that's a red flag right there. A basic approach would be to establish duration for its use. Also, engaging them in some other activities can also help to distract them from the gadget. If that doesn't work, please get the help of a professional counselor.

### 2. Social Media Addiction:

This is another way that digital addiction is manifested.

It is a situation where one is extremely attached to social networking and its platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, Tiktok, Bigo and the rest. This attachment will have them investing most if not all of their time watching and scrolling through endless feeds on those platforms.

Social media addiction is actually the biggest fear of a lot of parents of Genzs and they don't seem to stop looking for a way out.

When a child or teenager spends too much time on the internet, they lose touch with reality. It becomes an escape route for them. They could use it to mask a lot of things. Depression, anxiety, difficulty.

Teenagers are likely to spend more time on social media than children. Children are likely to just consume YouTube video contents as a means of entertainment while teenagers can actively engage in 4-7 social media platforms daily, surfing and sharing their pictures, video, activities and locations. In fact, Gen Z constitutes the highest user base in internet usage.

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**Just the same way a drunk man does not recognise that he is under the influence of alcohol, such applies to a lot of teenagers who think that they are still in control without knowing that they have lost it long ago to social media. Many teenagers may be unaware that they have lost control of their social media use. Which is why parents should look out for their kids.**

A study revealed that when you take away a teenager's phone, they may likely fall asleep.

From building the confidence of teenagers, to inspiring millions of people, social media has impacted us in many ways. However, the platform has been reported to harm some teenager's self-esteem. Its addictive structure and content is a big threat and to think that most teenagers have 24 hour access to it, means that it can be a dangerous thing for young people.

Teenagers who spend a lot of time on social media tend to start unhealthy competition among their peers and have issues with sustaining their focus on healthy activities.

The irony is that teenagers hardly recognise that they have been caught in the web of addiction. Often they make excuses and explain away a situation that should call for an emergency approach. Just the same way a drunk man does not recognise that he is under the influence of

alcohol, such applies to a lot of teenagers who think that they are still in control without knowing that they have lost it long ago to social media. Many teenagers may be unaware that they have lost control of their social media use. Which is why parents should look out for their kids.

Internet addictions can affect a person's performance in many areas, including physical, psychological, occupational, relational, academic and social aspects.

## How Can I Help My Teenager Who Is Struggling With Social Media Addiction?

This is obviously a question that millions of concerned parents are asking on a daily basis.

Before we delve in, you will need to know that social media addiction can be a complex issue and it may take time and effort to address. You will need to be patient, loving, supportive and empathetic while working with your teenager to find a solution that works.

Social media addiction is a common problem among teenagers and as a parent, there are several things you can do to help out:

- Have an open and honest conversation. Talk to them about the negative impact of social media addiction. Explain the risks associated with excessive social media usage such as lack of sleep, anxiety and depression.
- Set limits: Set a time limit for social media use and enforce it. Encourage your teenager to take breaks and engage in other activities, such as biking, swimming, reading, painting and so on.
- Monitor their usage: Monitor your teen's social media usage and keep an eye out for any signs of problematic behaviour, like staying up late to use social media or becoming withdrawn.

- Be a good role model: As a parent, you need to lead by example and limit your own social media use. Encourage your daughter to spend time with family and friends.
- Seek professional help: If your child's media addiction is severe, you may want to consider seeking professional help from a therapist or counselor who can work with them to develop healthy habits and coping strategies.

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## *I'm A Teacher, How Can I Help?*

If you are a teacher there is definitely a way you can help.

Teachers can help students to break this addiction through special teaching and counseling sessions. This approach can prevent the addiction from prevailing or having a lasting negative impact on the lives of young people.

Considering the fact that some children come from broken homes where neither parent pays attention to them, teachers often become the most prominent adult figure in their lives. It's crucial not to let this opportunity slip away. If you notice any of the symptoms mentioned above, please make yourself available to guide and counsel them.

When they receive these interventions they may have a better understanding of digital technology and know how to avoid its risks while using it in productive ways.



When a teenager is unable to reduce the time they spend on their devices despite problems caused by it or feel depressed each time it is taken away from them or loses interest in offline activities that they previously enjoyed, then you can suspect addiction to their gadgets.

### 3. Gadget Addiction:

This is another way that digital addiction can be manifested. Lady Gaga during one of her interviews with Oprah Winfrey lamented that we live in a world where people are literally collapsing beside each other without anyone noticing, simply because we are glued to our phones and our devices. This is so true.

The fear of missing out, popularly known as FOMO, is driving a lot of young people crazy. They want to be the first to cover and share news, they want to identify with every trend, they want to know what's new, they want to have an opinion on every matter, and want to use all available comment sections. They constantly check their feeds and news to ensure they are not left behind. All these are expressions of FOMO. This can eventually lead to both social media and device addiction.

Though technology is a useful tool for learning, communication and entertainment, excessive use of electronic devices can have negative effects on teens' mental and physical health. For example, it can disrupt sleep patterns, increase stress, induce anxiety and contribute to feelings of social isolation and low self-esteem.

The most sensible thing to do about digital addiction is to reduce dependence on the Internet. Next to this is the idea of disconnecting completely from it. Such disconnection will create space and time for the victim to breathe and get back into control. This is called digital detox. Digital detox refers to the act of taking a break from using electronic devices such as smartphones, computers, tablets and any social media platform. It involves disconnecting from technology for a period of time. This could last for some hours, days, weeks, months as the case may be, to reduce stress, improve mental health and regain balance and control over one's life.

Parents can encourage their young ones to go through this process every once in a while. This may help them pay attention to more rewarding activities like meditation, reading, exercising, relaxation and spending quality time with family and friends.

Digital detox is almost inevitable for this generation because gadget and internet revolution and its negative impact. Many experts suggest that taking regular breaks from technology can help reduce stress, anxiety and depression, improve sleep quality and increase productivity and creativity. This can't be overemphasised. Encouraging and guiding young people to practice this regularly could be the best thing we can ever do for them.

By taking a break from technology and engaging in other activities, teens can improve their mental and physical health, increase their creativity and productivity, and develop healthier habits around technology use. It's important to note that digital detoxes don't have to be long periods of time, even taking short breaks from technology, such as turning off devices for an hour or two each day, can have positive benefits.

There has never been a time when our young people need our help like now. If you consider drug addiction as an emergency situation, you should quickly add digital addiction into the same box.



**The fear of missing out, popularly known as FOMO, is driving a lot of young people crazy.**

Gadget addiction is the use of gadgets to the point where it starts to negatively affect health and wellbeing. It is known to affect both children and teenagers the most. When a teenager is unable to reduce the time they spend on their devices despite problems caused by it or feel depressed each time it is taken away from them or loses interest in offline activities that they previously enjoyed, then you can suspect addiction to their gadgets.

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