



Internet addiction

Last week I spoke about the digital divide that can exist between parents and young people, and while it is easy to see why they love spending many hours communicating with friends online as well as finding information, pursuing their interests and gaming, there is also a risk that they can become so absorbed in their online world that their usage could become problematic and be seen as an internet addiction.

Internet addiction also referred to as Internet overuse or problematic computer use is when a person spends excessive amounts of time online at the expense of and to the detriment of other aspects of their lives.

But how much is too much Internet usage?

Each person's Internet use is different. Some people may use it a lot for work, while others depend on it for keeping in touch with friends. Spending time online only becomes a problem when it absorbs too much of your time, resulting in you neglecting other important things in your life. Researchers in Taiwan have argued that more than 20 hours per week constitutes Internet addiction and this figure has been seen in the research conducted in America and Europe. However there are other indicators of problematic Internet use, some of those include:

- Preoccupation with the Internet - Rearranging daily routines and neglecting studies or other activities and responsibilities to spend more time online
- Relationships with friends and family can be affected
- Drop in school results and rationalising that what they learn online is superior to school
- Craving more and more time on the internet
- Lying about the amount of time spent online
- Skipping meals and losing sleep
- Suffering withdrawal symptoms when without access or when reducing Internet use – these symptoms include anxiety, restlessness, depression, even trembling hands.
- There are also physical problems associated with bad diet and lack of exercise

There are things a parent can do if they are concerned that their child is spending too much time online:

- Do not keep the computer in the child's room but in a common area



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

- Find out how much time your child is spending online. Ask yourself if your child's Internet use is affecting his or her school performance, health, and relationships with family and friends.
- Don't ban the Internet - it is an important part of their social lives. Instead, establish reasonable limits about their usage and stick to them.
- Talk to your child about why they are spending so much time online, with the view to encouraging and supporting their participation in other activities
- If your child is demonstrating strong signs of Internet addiction, consider seeking professional advice.

Clare Crowley Collier, Therapist, Educator & Facilitator for Teenagers and Parents