

VIDEO GAME ADDICTION IN ADOLESCENTS

Video games are designed to be addicting in the layman's sense of the term; video game designers want gamers to keep coming back for the next scene, the next mission. Most people are able to keep video games as a leisure activity that doesn't interfere with the rest of their lives, but some people develop a dependence on gaming. For a person who is already experiencing an emotional struggle, the feeling of accomplishing game tasks, combined with the social connection some games provide, can become addicting in a very real sense.

In some ways, teens are especially prone to this type of addiction. For the teen who is struggling socially, having trouble adapting to life changes, or feeling stressed about friends, school, or family, video games provide an enticing release: modern games are fully immersive and often never-ending, allowing teens to escape into a safe world with constant rewards. However, as time goes on, the initial feelings of happiness and relaxation associated with the game fade, and the addict starts to play more and more in an attempt to get the same positive feeling. Eventually, this leads to a feeling of helplessness over and dependency on gaming.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Teens with video game addiction often display:

- Playing video games several hours every day
- Marathon gaming sessions of 12+ hours
- Falling away from normal social activities and extracurricular activities
- A drop in grades
- Lying about gaming
- Acting irritable, distracted, or upset when unable to play

- Headaches, eye strain, or backache
- Weight gain or loss
- Poor sleep schedule

These signs are particularly worrisome if the teen is also displaying signs of depression, anxiety, or other psychological disorders, which often accompany video game addiction. Teens with autism or ADHD also develop Internet addiction at higher rates.

TREATMENT

A comprehensive treatment plan should focus on interrupting the process of addiction, changing the addict's attitudes towards video games, and developing new coping skills. Depending on the patient's personality and the severity of the condition, this can be accomplished with:

- Wilderness therapy
- In-patient treatment
- Medication
- Individual counseling
- Family counseling
- Group therapy
- Lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise
- Boundaries and rewards set by parents

Wilderness therapy takes a uniquely comprehensive and holistic approach, combining psychological and pharmaceutical treatments with an enriching environment focused on whole-self healing. At Pacific Quest, our Wilderness Therapy program includes a focus on Rites of Passage, Horticultural Therapy, and helping the individual find their place within the community. This approach helps prepare patients for a healthy, confident reintegration into their normal lives.

If you are concerned about your teen's video game usage and would like to learn more, please click below to download *A Parent's Guide to Video Game Addiction in Teens and Young Adults*, or feel free to contact Pacific Quest today at 808-937-5806.

VIDEO GAME ADDICTION IN YOUNG ADULTS

Young adulthood can be a turbulent time. Young adults are just beginning to realize their potential, and are thrust into a world with more freedom and opportunities than ever before. Although this is often joyous and exciting, it can also cause some trouble adjusting, sometimes manifesting in serious psychological or behavioral issues.

Video game addiction is relatively common among young adults, a fact which is gaining more and more recognition. Video games offer constant reinforcement in the form of successful missions and "leveling up." They also provide an immersive world away from the stressors of everyday life. For young adults with social problems, video games can offer a level of acceptance and connection they don't find in "real life."

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

There are a number of signs and symptoms of video game addiction. The most obvious is excessive gaming. Addicts often play for several hours every day, and may engage in marathon gaming sessions, playing all day or even through the night, or sometimes even several days straight. When they are not able to play games, addicts feel irritable or guilty. Video game addicts often try to stop playing but are unsuccessful, leading to a feeling of powerlessness.

You may also observe other behavioral changes if your child develops video game addiction. For example, addictive gaming usually comes with dramatic changes in the way the addict approaches other leisure activities, their social life, and their school and work obligations. Often, physical health and all other activities are eschewed in favor of gaming. Addicts may also display signs of depression or anxiety, which tend to accompany video game addiction.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Since playing video games is rarely a necessity, video game addiction can be treated using a cold-turkey approach if desired. However, since access to gaming is so easy on computers and other devices, video game addicts do need to learn to avoid the temptation to play, or at least the temptation to play excessively. Treatment should focus on helping patients achieve that goal by addressing both the behaviors associated with addiction and the underlying emotional causes. Options include:

- Group therapy
- Individual therapy
- In-patient treatment
- Wilderness therapy

Wilderness therapy is one of the most comprehensive options. At Pacific Quest we have seen great success with this model. Wilderness therapy combines the benefits of individual and group therapy with the structured, detoxifying environment provided by in-patient treatment. The process occurs in an enriching natural environment focused on real-life achievements and holistic growth.