



## About Internet Addiction

The Internet has revolutionized how we communicate, learn, and work.

With so much information available, how much is too much Internet use? When a person feels more comfortable with his or her online friends than real ones, or they can't stop themselves from playing games, gambling, or compulsively surfing, then they may be using the Internet too much.

Internet use has exploded in recent years, providing a constant, ever-changing source of information and entertainment.

News headlines are updated by the minute, not just

daily. You can connect with literally hundreds of people on social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter. Email, online chat and message boards allow for both public and anonymous communication about almost any topic imaginable.

We all enjoy the benefits of the Internet, and for many it is an indispensable tool for work, as well. So how much is too much Internet usage?

The concept of compulsive Internet use is relatively new and is not yet formally recognized as a psychological disorder, although research is underway in this area.

However, there is increasing evidence that for some people, compulsive Internet use interferes with daily life, work and relationships.

The increased use of the Internet puts children and teens at special risk. Sexual predators, under anonymity of the Internet, can spend hours developing a relationship with a child or teen in a chat room, where meeting them initially in real life would prove very difficult.

Children or teens having a hard time fitting in or with problems at home are especially susceptible. These predators can eventually lure unsuspecting children or teens to meet them. If you suspect that a sexual predator has contacted your child, call the police right away.

So what is healthy and what is unhealthy Internet use? There's no easy answer because each person's Internet use is so different. You might need to use



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the Internet extensively for your work, for example, or you might rely heavily on social networking sites to keep in touch with faraway family and friends.

Spending a lot of time online isn't necessarily a problem. But if you're neglecting your relationships, your work, or other important things in your life, then you may have a problem with Internet addiction. Regardless of the name — Internet addiction, compulsive Internet use, problematic or unhealthy computer use — if your online activities are getting in the way of your "offline" life, it's time to strike a new balance.

What is a parent to do? If you severely limit a child or teen's Internet use, they might rebel and go to excess. But you can and should model appropriate computer use, supervise computer activity and get your child help if he or she needs it. If your child or teen is showing signs of Internet addiction, there are many things that you as a parent can do to help:

- Encourage other interests and social activities. Get your child out from behind the computer screen. Expose kids to other hobbies and activities, such as team sports, Boy or Girl Scouts, and afterschool clubs.
- Monitor computer use and set clear limits. Make sure the computer is in a common area of the house, where you can keep an eye on your child's online



activity, and limit time online, waiting until homework and chores are done. This will be most effective if you as parents follow suit. If you can't stay offline, chances are your children won't either.

- Talk to your child about underlying issues. Compulsive computer use can be the sign of deeper problems. Is your child having problems fitting in? Has there been a recent major change, like a move or divorce, which is causing stress? Don't be afraid to seek professional counseling if you are concerned about your child.

### **How to Modify your child's Internet use step by step:**

1. To help you see problem areas, keep a log of how much your child uses the Internet. You might find this challenging if you interweave recreational Internet use with school work, but try to get a clear idea of when the Internet is used. Are there times of day that it is used more than others? Are there triggers in your child's life that make him/her stay online for hours at a time when he/she had planned for five minutes?
2. Set goals for when your child can use the Internet. For example, you might try setting a timer for usage, scheduling use for certain times of day, or making a commitment to turn off the computer at the same time each night.
3. Replace your child's Internet usage with healthy activities. If they are bored and lonely, resisting the urge to get back online will be very difficult. Have a plan for other ways to fill the time, such as going to a friend's house, inviting the friend over, or reading a book or a magazine.

# **New Resource for Parents.**

## **[notinmyhouse.drugfree.org](http://notinmyhouse.drugfree.org)**

*The Partnership at Drugfree.org has launched a new web portal designed to help parents deal with the fastest growing addiction problem facing today's youth, prescription drug abuse. The following information was provided by the new portal and is accessible at [notinmyhouse.drugfree.org](http://notinmyhouse.drugfree.org)*

Every day, 2,500 teenagers use a prescription drug to get high for the first time. They're accessing these drugs in the comfort of home; it can be as easy as opening a cupboard, drawer, or medicine cabinet. The good news - there are steps a parent can take to help protect their kids from prescription drug abuse: monitor, secure and dispose.

### **Monitor**

Parents are in an influential position to immediately help reduce teen access to prescription drugs, because these drugs are found in the home. But how aware are you? Think about this: would you know if some of your pills were missing? From this day forward, make sure you can honestly answer, 'yes.'

- Start by taking note of how many pills are in each of your prescription bottles or pill packets.



- Keep track of your refills. This goes for your own medication, as well as for your teens and other members of the household. If you find you need to refill your medication more often than expected, that could indicate a problem.
- If your teen has been prescribed a drug, be sure you control the medication, and monitor dosages and refills.
- Make sure your friends and relatives—especially grandparents—are also aware of the risks. Encourage them to regularly monitor their own medicine cabinets.
- If there are other households your teen has access to, talk to those families as well about the importance of helping safeguard medications.

### **Secure**

Teens abuse prescription drugs because they are easily accessible, and either free or inexpensive. In fact, 64 percent of kids age 12 to 17 who have abused pain relievers say they got them from their friends or relatives, typically without their knowledge. Approach securing your prescriptions the same way you would other valuables in your home, like jewelry or cash. There's no shame in helping protect those items. The same holds true for your medications.

- Take prescription medications out of the medicine cabinet and hide them in a place only you know about.
- If possible, keep all medicines, both prescription and over-the-counter, in a safe place, such as a locked cabinet your teen cannot access.
- Tell relatives, especially grandparents, to lock their medications or keep them in a safe place.

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- Talk to the parents of your teenager's friends. Encourage them to secure their prescriptions.

## Dispose

Safely disposing of expired or unused prescription medications is a critical step in helping protect your teens. Here's how to help safeguard your family and home, and decrease the opportunity for your teens or their friends to abuse your medications.

- Take an inventory of all of the prescription drugs in your home. Start by discarding expired or unused prescription drugs, when your teens are not home.
- Unbelievable though it may seem, teenagers will retrieve discarded prescription drugs from the trash. To help prevent this from happening, mix the medication with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter. Put the mixture into an empty can or bag and discard.
- Unless the directions on the packaging say otherwise, do not flush medication down the drain or toilet.
- To help prevent unauthorized refills and protect your and your family's privacy, remove any personal, identifiable information from prescription bottles or pill packages before you throw them away.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

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