

## HOW TO IDENTIFY GAMING DISORDERS

A group of international experts from Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Australasia collaborated to discuss and achieve consensus about how to assess internet gaming disorder as defined within DSM-5. A set of criteria was set to detect whether someone has a gaming disorder or problem gaming issue.

The nine criteria are outlined on the following pages. If 4 or more of these criteria are met within a one year period, you can conclude that gaming is having a considerable negative impact on your life.

### PLEASE NOTE!

This list and questionnaire is only to be used as a guide. If you are concerned and recognise some of these criteria in your child's behaviour, we strongly recommend you seek professional help. Please read 'where to get help' and 'links and referrals' sections of this chapter to find out more.

## THE NINE CRITERIA

### ***Preoccupation or obsession with Internet games.***

Pre-occupation relates to spending substantial amounts of time thinking about an activity. For this criterion to be met, your child must be thinking about games not only while playing but also during times of non-play, with excessive thoughts about gaming occurring throughout the day.

### ***Withdrawal symptoms when not playing Internet games.***

Withdrawal refers to symptoms that emerge when one is unable to engage in a behaviour or is attempting to reduce or stop it. Withdrawal symptoms associated with gaming must be distinguished from emotions that arise in response to an external force preventing or stopping a gaming episode. If a parent abruptly disconnects the internet during a game, a child is likely to express extreme emotions. These abrupt emotional responses, however, are not withdrawal. Withdrawal refers to symptoms that arise when one is unable to initiate gaming and/or when one is purposefully trying to stop gaming.

### ***A build-up of tolerance - more time needs to be spent playing the games.***

Tolerance is characterised by an increasing amount of time spent in an activity to feel its desired effects. For gaming, desired effects usually relate to excitement. Tolerance refers to feeling the need to play games for longer periods of time to experience excitement; it may also involve the need for more exciting games or more powerful media equipment.

### ***The person has tried to stop or curb playing Internet games, but has failed to do so.***

Inquiries about this criterion should focus not only on attempts to stop but also attempts to cut down or reduce gaming. Similarly, desiring to cease or cut back on a behaviour, but being unable to do so, would reflect the criterion, because such desires presume that play has risen to a problematic level.

### ***The person has had a loss of interest in other life activities, such as hobbies.***

This usually looks like the gamer expressing less interest in the hobbies or activities they were involved in. This may end up with the person quitting their other hobbies or activities or, at least, attempting to reduce their involvement.

***A person has had continued overuse of Internet games even with the knowledge of how much they impact a person's life.***

The individual continues to play even though he is aware of significant negative consequences of this behaviour, which are more likely to be psychosocial than physical in nature. Some negative consequences are: being late to school/work, spending too much money, having arguments, or neglecting important duties due to gaming.

Gaming may adversely influence health (e.g., losing too much sleep), although implicit in the criterion is that the problems are persistent and significant. To fulfil the criterion, negative consequences must involve central areas of functioning, and effects of little clinical relevance should not be considered (e.g. neglecting household chores that do not cause difficulties). Social and developmental aspects should be considered because dysfunction will manifest differentially based on age (e.g. school, work, parents, and partners).

***The person lied to others about his or her Internet game usage.***

Typically, deceit is directed towards family members, friends, or other important people. The social environment should be considered in assessing this criterion. Adults living on their own may be less likely to lie about or hide gaming than a child living with parents. Nevertheless, gaming that has risen to a level such that the individual is hiding it from others implies that it has become problematic.

***The person uses Internet games to relieve anxiety or guilt – it's a way to escape.***

Problem gaming becomes a method to modify moods or cope with difficulties. This criterion can relate to playing games to escape from or forget about real-life problems or relieve negative emotional states.

***The person has lost or put at risk and opportunity or relationship because of internet games.***

This criterion is intended to reflect more substantial issues than neglecting a homework assignment or being late for school or work due to gaming, behaviour more consistent with criterion 6. Arguments with parents about gaming usually do not rise to a level in which relationships are severed, but if a relationship is jeopardised due to gaming (e.g., arguments involving physical force or leaving home) then, this criterion would be met. Similarly, if neglecting studies in order to game occurs to the extent that a much worse than usual overall course grade is achieved, courses are failed or the person drops out of school, then this criterion would be met.

**If four or more of these criteria are met within a one year period, you can conclude that gaming is having a considerable negative impact on your child's life. We strongly recommend you seek professional help immediately.**

**If you're not sure about these criteria or how to identify these criteria but feel your child is showing signs of an ongoing gaming issue, please seek professional help.**

# GAMING DISORDER QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was developed by the DSM-5 international working group on gaming disorder. The questions relate directly to the nine proposed criteria of Gaming Disorder in the DSM-5.

To identify a Gaming Disorder one needs a minimum of four symptoms over a one year period.

## **Questions**

1. Do you spend a lot of time thinking about games even when you are not playing or planning when you can play next?
2. Do you feel restless, irritable, moody, angry, anxious or sad when attempting to cut down or stop gaming or when you are unable to play?
3. Do you feel the need to play for increasing amounts of time, play more exciting games, or use more powerful equipment to get the same amount of excitement you used to get?
4. Do you feel that you should play less, but are unable to cut back on the amount of time you spend playing games?
5. Do you lose interest in or reduce participation in other recreational activities (hobbies, meetings with friends) due to gaming?
6. Do you continue to play games even though you are aware of negative consequences, such as not getting enough sleep, being late to school/work, spending too much money, having arguments with others, or neglecting important duties?
7. Do you lie to family, friends or others about how much you game, or try to keep your family or friends from knowing how much you game?
8. Do you game to escape from or forget about personal problems, or to relieve uncomfortable feelings such as guilt, anxiety, helplessness or depression?
9. Do you risk or lose significant relationships, or job, educational or career opportunities because of gaming?

## WHERE TO GET HELP?

So, you've looked at the criteria and now feel that there may be some cause for concern. What can you do?

We recommend contacting a professional early. It never hurts to have your situation looked at by someone whose seen these issues before and is experienced on how to deal with them.

Parenting isn't easy. Neither is asking for help.

Getting some advice or ideas/tips on how to deal with these kinds of behavioural issues can really help. The professional will definitely be able to advise if there is any cause for concern. Even if there is no cause for concern, the professional will be able to discuss with you many different ways that you can continue monitoring your family's gaming behaviour.

So, how do you find a counsellor that can deal with your issues?  
Ideally you find a counsellor who:

- ☛ Understands addiction
- ☛ Understands and is comfortable with technology
- ☛ Specialises in working with children and young people
- ☛ Understands the positives and negatives about video game playing
- ☛ Takes a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approach

## WHAT IF YOUR CHILD DOESN'T WANT ANY HELP?

Young people, who game compulsively, are often shy and introverted. This is why the virtual world, with its limited and basic human interaction, works for them in the first place. So seeing a counsellor is often scary for them.

Telling your child to go see a counsellor is a big step in any case. You want to avoid your child feeling as if they're 'not good enough' or crazy. This means you will have to approach it very carefully. A few tips:

- Avoid conflicts about gaming
- Develop a supportive and positive relationship with your child around the gaming
- Make sure that 9 out of 10 conversations about gaming are positive. The 10th one can then be about the negative impacts on your child and your concerns

This will obviously be a challenge. You want your child to stop playing games all the time, so being positive about gaming is not going to come easy. However if you have gaming causes conflicts between you and your child, s/he may not accept any advice or guidance from you about gaming related issues.

## LINKS & REFERRALS (AUSTRALIA)

### **Emergency Assistance**

If you need emergency assistance, please phone 000 now.

### **Crisis Support Lines**

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) – A crisis support and suicide prevention line for all Australians

Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800 or [www.kidshelpline.com](http://www.kidshelpline.com) – A counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25.

### **Counselling and Support**

Your Local GP: Please visit your regular GP as a first point of contact. Discuss your personal situation and your GP should be able to give you a referral to the most suitable, local support service.

Headspace: 1800 650 890 or [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au) – Visit the website to find your closest Headspace Centre. Headspace provides mental and health wellbeing support information and services to young people aged 12 to 25 years and their families. A range of youth friendly health professionals can help you with general health; mental health and counselling; education, employment, and other services.

Reachout.com: [au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com) is the leading online youth mental health service, providing help, information and support.

BeyondBlue: 1300 22 4636 or [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) – Beyondblue works to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders in Australia. Support is available 24/7.

Your local government youth service: Contact your local government to receive information about local services that provide support and counselling to young people.