

Online Gaming: Case Study

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

The following clinical description is fictional. Any resemblance to real cases is purely coincidental.

Scenario

As a service provider, a parent asks you to see their 13-year-old son. The parent says he is dropping social activities he used to enjoy, has no hobbies, is not sleeping well, and is more interested in playing video games alone than joining his family and friends for activities.

Practice question 1:

What information should you collect to get a broader picture of this situation?

Possible answer:

Go over the warning signs of problematic gaming and the description of gaming disorder in the online gaming section of the toolkit. See if the client has indications of problematic gaming, any mental and physical health concerns, and gauge the client's interest in changing his gaming behaviour. It is important to know if there are any underlying mental, physical, familial concerns or problems at school. Using a family-centred care approach might help in determining some of the issues that the youth and his family may be experiencing. Some youth may use technology as a way to cope with mental health problems or other stressors. For example, youth who feel isolated, have challenging relationships, or are dealing with family disruption may escape their problems by immersing themselves in online communities. The internet can become a place for an individual to fulfill their needs for socialization, connection, and wellbeing; therefore, individuals who are involved in problematic internet use should be considered as clients for treatment related to addictive behavior.

Practice Question 2:

What interventions do you think would be most helpful for this client and his family?

Practice Direction & Recommendations

Service providers:

- Where possible, obtain information from family, school, and the community in general.
- Apply assessment tools and analyze results. See the gaming section of the Growing Up Online Toolkit for screening and assessment tools.

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- Provide treatment for any presenting mental health concerns. Based on your knowledge and training, this could include modalities such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), motivational interviewing, addiction counselling, relapse prevention, self-regulation/coping skills, attachment-based therapy, trauma-informed care or a referral to a mental health specialist.
- Provide information on alternative activities such as finding healthy hobbies, physical activities, and positive social interaction.
- Sleep hygiene coaching: develop routines to reduce nighttime screen use and improve rest.
- Provide the family with the resources and encourage active participation in any treatment plans.
- Encourage gradual reduction in gaming time rather than abrupt abstinence to reduce resistance.
- Include youth in decision-making to enhance autonomy and motivation.
- Monitor progress and revisit the treatment plan regularly, adjusting as needed.

Support for the family:

- **Psychoeducation:** Offer information on:
Problematic gaming behavior and healthy screen time guidelines
The role of gaming in youth development and emotional coping
Recognizing triggers and signs of digital overuse
- **Family-based interventions:**
Develop a Family Digital Use Agreement with clear expectations, co-created rules, and consequences
Establish technology-free times/zones (e.g., no screens during meals or before bed)
Strengthen routines that foster offline bonding and improve emotional connection
- **Parent coaching:**
Support caregivers in setting boundaries, using consistent communication, and avoiding overly punitive responses. Address any guilt, burnout, or helplessness they may feel.
- **Referral if needed:**
If there are signs of significant family stress, unresolved trauma, or mental health concerns, refer the family or youth for additional services, such as:
 - Family therapy
 - Psychiatric consultation
 - Specialized youth addiction programs

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