

Gaming: Intervention & Treatment

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

Gaming disorder is a relatively new research area. Academics and service providers are still learning about the core issues of online gaming pathology so they can develop and evaluate for effective treatments [1, 2, 3]. Most interventions for gaming disorder are adapted from substance use treatment approaches. Best practices emphasize addressing both addiction and underlying mental health concerns, strengthening positive parent-child relationships, and implementing strategies to improve life areas affected by gaming [1, 2, 3, 4]. Including an associated parent/caregiver psychoeducation group in treatment may reduce youth dropout rates [3, 5].

Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of interventions and prevention strategies, particularly as gaming technologies evolve. A culturally responsive, trauma-informed approach will help ensure that interventions meet the diverse needs of youth and families affected by gaming disorder.

Most current treatment models are adapted from substance use frameworks. Best practices emphasize the need to:

- Address both addictive behavior and co-occurring mental health concerns.
- Strengthen the parent/caregiver child/youth relationship.

Intervention & Treatment

Inpatient residential treatment centres for youth gaming addiction have been expanding globally particularly in regions such as Asia and Europe, where concerns over excessive gaming have led to policy-level interventions. The use of two other treatment methods in treating gaming addiction may also be promising:

1. **Mindfulness-Based Interventions:** Youth are taught to focus their thoughts on the present moment instead of being distracted by gaming. Mindfulness-based approaches may enhance awareness of gaming behaviors and promote enjoyment in offline activities, thereby reducing problematic gaming habits [6].
2. **The six-module PIPATIC program** (Programa Individualizado Psicoterapéutico para la Adicción a las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación). This structured model for treating gaming disorder in youth ages 12 - 18 consists of:
 - Psychoeducational (individual and family motivational interviewing and setting goals).

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- Standard interventions (stimulus control, coping, cognitive restructuring, and problem solving).
- Intrapersonal (identity, self-esteem, self-control, emotional intelligence, and anxiety control).
- Interpersonal skills (communication and assertiveness).
- Family focus (limits, affect, and communication).
- New lifestyle (alternative activities and relapse prevention) [7].

Emerging research also suggests that integrating digital detox strategies, exercise-based interventions, and peer support programs can be beneficial in reducing compulsive gaming behaviors.

Prevention

Treatment approaches for gaming disorder can be significantly strengthened when paired with effective prevention strategies. Gaming disorder is a relatively new and evolving area of research. Academics and service providers are still working to understand the core mechanisms of problematic gaming behavior to develop and evaluate evidence-based interventions [1, 2, 3].

Implement practical strategies to restore functioning in life areas impacted by gaming. Preventing unhealthy gaming patterns in youth, which may serve as precursors to gaming disorders, requires a multi-faceted approach involving schools, families, and public policy.

School-Based Education

- Training educators on healthy internet use and responsible gaming habits.
- Supporting youth in developing critical thinking skills regarding digital content consumption.
- Implementing safe gaming practices, including setting time limits and recognizing the signs of problematic use [4,8].

Parental & Caregiver Involvement

- Encouraging open, non-judgmental conversations about gaming habits and potential risks.
- Teaching parents how to set healthy, realistic and flexible screen time boundaries without being overly restrictive.
- Using family-based digital contracts that outline gaming rules and consequences [10, 11].

Policy & Public Health Recommendations

- Aligning gaming guidelines with screen time recommendations from organizations such as the Canadian Paediatric Society and the World Health Organization (WHO) [11].
- Promoting public education campaigns and gaming literacy programs that focus on understanding gaming motives and reinforcing social skill development to reduce reliance on gaming for social connection [12].

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