How to Address Adolescent Process Addictions

Margo Bristow, MA, LPC, CADC, PCGC, CAMSI

Youth Development Pointers (Bell*)

How we look at youth affects all of our educational/emotional/behavioral options.

Engaging and Working with Teens
- Be willing to make mistakes. Be willing to let them make mistakes
- Reverse power relationships
- Do not thrust young people into leadership without training and practice
- Always RESPECT all young persons – at all ages
- Have high expectations of their potentials
- Do not dump our distress on them
- Give real information on how the world works…be real… NEVER LIE
- Be patient with ourselves when we slip into adult habits

Expect Everyone:
- To treat each other with nothing less that complete respect
- To think and not react
- To do the thing that will improve the situation
- To care about each other
- To struggle with everything which keeps us in conflict with ourselves

John Bell, Youth Development Project (PYD), Youth Build USA (2003)

Why do teens isolate?

- Not fitting in
- Feeling as if their skills do not match peers
- Physical discomfort – acne, growth spurt, not having the right wardrobe
- Peer rejection
- Family issues
- Not involved in clubs/activities/social events
- Drug or alcohol involvement

- Does not excel at anything special (in their eyes)
- Not part of the peer group early in life
- New transfer to the area – does not know how to self include
- Shy
- Part of a group that is not considered desirable

How we communicate
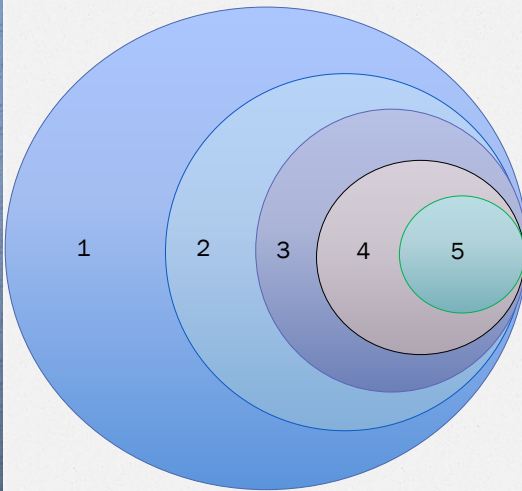
1. **What I think**
2. **What I can put into words**
3. **What I say to other people**
4. **What people actually understand**
5. **How other people tell me they understand**

1   2   3   4   5

Communication has changed

- Teens text and prefer not to talk on the phone, or even in person. Texting when sitting next to friends.
- "The Screen World" offers immediate response from friends and "frenemys" alike.
- Twitter, Snap Chat and Instagram, short but sweet.
- Teens hang out on line, in chat rooms, on games with a headset on talking and playing with their friends.
- Parents do not see the multiple tabs open or the in-homework games.

- Schools are now adopting social media formats for homework work groups, submitting homework on line, social media formats where they will develop an avatar for the class.
- Instructors are adding students as friends on Social Media – is there a line being crossed?
- Parents cannot keep up with their child's expertise within the online world.

Play

Play is an innate human drive that begins in very early childhood (Caillois, 1961). Today, much game play has been transferred from the real (i.e., the embodied world) to the online world and is verified by software sales (Kuss and Griffiths 2011)

When Problems Arise

- New game acquisition
  - Spending greater amount of time playing and achieving new levels, tools, coins/money/prizes
  - Using computer to find "cheats"
  - Dissociation – losing track of time and place
  - Playing or texting late into the evening
  - Avoidance of everyday tasks to be connected
    - Chores, homework, sports, self care
  - Meets the needs of instant gratification and immediate reward. Games are developed to be just difficult enough to challenge the player but not too difficult to make the player stop.

Gone in 60 Seconds...
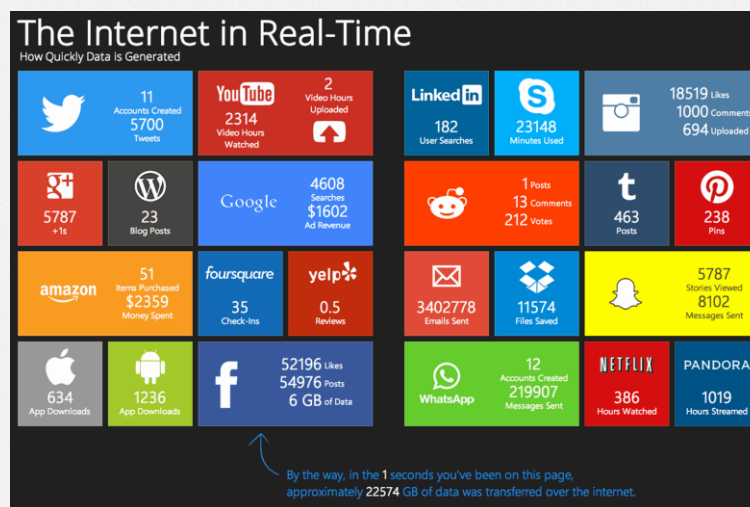
- *Internet overuse can interact with and exacerbate existing mental health problems, such as social anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, secondary and post-secondary school failure, and failure to negotiate crucial developmental stages which normally lead to competence and independence.* Young adults with mental health vulnerabilities are more at risk for problematic engagement in online activity. (Dr. Bruce Ballon, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, personal communication)
- Longitudinal research by Gentile (2011) found that higher rates of impulsivity, lower social competence and empathy and poorer emotional regulation skills are risk factors for development of problematic levels of gaming.
- Bischof-Kastner et al. (2014) found that adolescents engaged in high-risk levels of internet use endorsed coping motives for this activity at significantly higher levels than low-risk users.

Problem Video Gaming and Internet Overuse
A review intended to support future funding requests for treatment and prevention
Developed for the International Think Tank on Gambling Research, Policy and Practice
Nina Littman-Sharp, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto
Andrew Kim, University of Calgary
Tony Clarkson, Gamblers Help Southern

Impacts on Youth and Family

- Problematic use of video games and the internet starts at an early age.
- Gentile (2009) studied children from aged 8 to 18, and found that the younger age groups were playing video games more frequently than the 15 to 18-year olds.
- Korea: screening for problem video gaming starts in kindergarten, and children as young as 8 are in treatment (Sungbyuk Kim, Ministry of Gender Equality & Family, Division of Youth Protection Environment; personal communication).
- At the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, groups for parents of problem gaming youth aged 13 to 17 are regularly filled.

Email from a Mother

o "Just wanted to keep you update(d) on .... The results of our last meeting hit him pretty hard. He had two conversations with (his Dad) where he ended up crying himself to sleep. The comment that haunts me was *'telling me that I can't have my computer for the summer is like telling me my best friend and all the people I know (or something very similar) just died.'* he has absolutely no ideas (sic) of what to do with himself if he can't be on the computer."

Through technology
A new normal

Communication through texting. The barrier is always present even when in the same room or next to each other.

How old were they when they first started texting?

When they received their first phone?

How do we reach them?

- *O* Through media
- *O* Texting – in U.S.A. HippaBridge
- *O* Video connecting
- *O* Scheduling through text
- *O* Meet at coffee house, park, school…
- *O* Focus on the distress it is causing family and school
- *O* Look at a harm reduction approach

Experience increased isolation

- *O* Due to the utilization of devices for communication.
- *O* Normal social development is initiated and maintained through texting, Instagramming, Snapchatting, and Facebook.
- *O* Often expresses that they "don't fit in or feel normal.
  - *O* Social norming has changed and if not utilizing technology is not kept abreast of what is happening with peer group.
    - *O* One of the more effective parenting tools is the threat of limiting or disconnecting social media access.
    - *O* Common reactions are immediate fear and fear of peer non-acceptance.

Netflix-ing, Amazon Prime-ing, Video Streaming

What makes video gaming/gambling so attractive?

- O Reward systems
  - O General rewards – psychological in nature, in game coins or points
  - O Punishment features – can save progress but have to restart level or "reload", XP, or items
  - O Meta-game rewards – Achievement and trophies, designed to keep the player involved even if the game is completed
  - O Intermittent – variable and fixed ratio reinforcement
    - O This plays into the irrational logic related to superstitions about reward schedules, "It will hit soon, I feel it." These schedules reinforce and sustain the player's motivation for long periods.

Attractive?

- O Negative Rewards
  - O Injury in a game and decreased health
  - O Searching for items to increase health over time reinforces a sense relief for the player and decrease of tension or pressure
- O Near miss
  - O Slot players are constantly "nearly winning" (Griffiths 1990)
- O Event frequency
  - O How often a player is able to play a game in a given time period
  - O Lose track of their video game playing
  - O Experiencing feelings of escape, immersion and dissociation
    - O Valued by players. Often happens when a new game is released.
- O <u>Event duration</u>
  - O Times are variable
  - O Players may not be able to restrict their playing time

And more...

- O Payout interval features
  - O Rapid frequent and short duration increases gaming behavior because the loss period is so brief that the player has so little time to reflect on the loss before a new round or game begins
- O Video games are structurally similar to slot machines
  - O Payout interval enables the player to reinvest the rewards to continue to excess game playing.
   King D, Delfabbro P, Griffiths M, Int J Ment Health Addiction , 2010

Why Youth are Attracted to Remote Gambling/Gaming

O Live in the moment internet – cell phone accessible
O Technologically literate
O Risk taking and high probability of chance
O Poor control measures on monitoring (Bellringer, 2006)
O Domination without physical strength, beauty, acceptance
  O Skill or success is all important

When the Internet or Games Become Violent

O Can create sleep disturbances
O Connect with familiar people or sites to comfort them
O May think that the violence is normative in nature and not part of the "fantasy" of cyber world
O Use "eye bleach" to soothe the trauma

HE ISN'T GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP AND IS ALWAYS EXHAUSTED
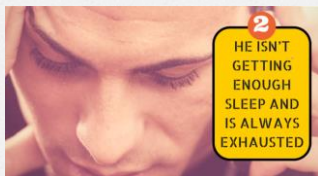
Interestingly

"Internet is attractive often for gamers who have an initial propensity towards distracting beliefs, or could serve to engender or perpetuate distortions around control in internet gaming environments."

- Luck and skill correlated higher in teens -- direct influence in their wish fulfillment.
- Internet gamers have a higher problem severity than those who play single player games.
- Problem gaming rate among internet gamers was 10.5% compared to non-internet gamers.

MacKay, TL., Hodgins, D. Cognitive Distortions as a problem gambling risk factor in Internet Gambling. International Journal of Gambling Studies (V12, 2) August 2012, 163-176

Non-Monetary forms of Gambling in Gaming Environs

- Reinforce the positive view of gambling in the teen
- Games incorporate games of chance and gambling situations
  - Wagering coins, strength, in-game money, even power over others gains more acclaim
- Presented as skill based though gaming experience is all chance
- All games have thresholds they maintain
  - When achieved the game becomes easier, player feels immediate success

- King, Delfabbro, & Griffiths 2010

Video Games

"...virtual worlds that are worlds unto themselves...'persistent games,' or probable more accurately, 'synthetic worlds.'"

These worlds "begin with three interconnecting roots: *available computer power has expanded, internet and broadband access has expanded, and the creation of server-based mega programs*."

Champion & Rose Gaming Law in a nutshell, 2011

How does it work?

○ GTP – Game Transfer Phenomena
  ○ "immersion in the video game environment can influence the player during the game and afterwords (including fantasies, thoughts, and actions)"
  ○ Two main categories:
    ○ **Involuntary:** automatic and without premeditation
    ○ **Intentional:** integration of video games into players daily interactions

Ortiz de Gortari, A., Arronson, K., and Griffiths, M. Game Transfer Phenomena in Video Game   Playing: A Qualitative Interview Study

Game and Text Involvement

- Behavioral Engagement
  - Repetitive patters of behavior over a period of time, frequency, quantity are habitual
- Emotional Engagement
  - Personal investment and active participation lead to physical arousal – changes affective expression
- Perceptual Engagement
  - Dissociative experiences, telepresence, losing sense of time

Ortiz de Gortari, A., Arronson, K., and Griffiths, M. Game Transfer Phenomena in Video Game Playing: A Qualitative Interview Study

How does it work?

Involuntary

- Dreams
- Automatic thoughts
  - Resolving real life issues using video game elements
  - Thoughts with visual imagination
  - Thoughts with reflexes or movements
  - Sensory perception
    - Perception effects
    - Hypnagogic experiences
    - Sensations in real life
    - Automatic behaviors

Intentional

- Intentional integration of video games
  - Using video games/texting as interacting mediums or tools
  - Modeling game character and game events
  - Daydreaming about responding to others or interacting in video games

Ortiz de Gortari, A., Arronson, K., and Griffiths, M. Game Transfer Phenomena in Video Game Playing: A Qualitative Interview Study

Can we talk to them about this?

o Some Young Adults report that the GTP would disappear but that they had felt scared or concerned due to the in-game/in texting experiences and they did not want to discuss with anyone.

  o "...Urges and/or impulses and found themselves incapable of controlling their behavior, and actually did something without intending to do so."

  o "Automatic muscular reaction do to ... the 'priming movement'" of pushing buttons – ideo-motor reflex.'"

  Ortiz de Gortari, A., Arronson, K., and Griffiths, M. Game Transfer Phenomena in Video Game Playing: A Qualitative Interview Study

Engaging

o Use media as a form of communication.

  o Texting regarding sessions and appointments

  o Reminders of meeting times

  o Video conferencing (must ensure confidentiality) as a normal means of communication

    o Facetime and Skyping (business platform only)

  o Contracting and Agenda Mapping to increase compliance

What works?

1. Assess perceived normal usage
2. Have them set parameters on usage
   - Log how much/how long they are engaged
3. Ask parents not to penalize but to make the consequences natural and logical to establish a new normal
4. Keep technology in common areas, not in their room; check in phone at the end of the evening
5. Monitor text messaging

How adults restrict access to care

- "Ageism"
- Technologically savvy teens
- Increased burden for intellectual prowess has been placed on teens
- Extended adolescence (up to 27 years old)
- Parenting in isolation
- Treatment is not teen friendly nor accessible

Working with Teens

- *O* Listen, really listen, in particular listen to their thinking, and to their experiences. What it is like for them to be young?
- *O* Ask questions about everything.
- *O* Lay back. Curb your inclination to take over.
- *O* Be willing to make mistakes. Be willing to let them make mistakes.
- *O* Validate their thinking. Welcome their ideas.

Working with Teens

- Reverse power relationships.
- Do not thrust young people into leadership without training and practice.
- Always RESPECT young persons – at all ages.
- Have high expectations of their potentials.
- Do not dump our distress on them.
- Give real information on how the world works, be real. *NEVER LIE.*
- Be patient with ourselves when we slip into adult habits.

Current Thoughts

- *O* "I can't have a problem with ..." – only adults screw up.
- *O* Treatment is NOT for me.
- *O* No one understands me or wants to deal with me as a teen. Example: only gaming when I am doing homework; I don't have a drug problem.
- *O* Social media, texting, gaming, and normal teen issues are overlapped.

Current Thoughts

- *O* Teens outgrow addictive behavior – spontaneous remission – may not seek treatment.
- *O* BAIL OUTS! Mom can you call my teacher? Can I stay home from school today?
- *O* Negative consequences may be attributed to other behaviors.
- *O* How much do we really tell?
  - *O* Questionnaires are not reliable.
  - *O* Teens may not understand the questionnaires.

Current Thoughts

- Screening tools are not necessarily valid for teens.
  - Possibly being used incorrectly/based on adult models.
- Research exaggerates the problem.
- Teens do not seek treatment in general – their parents, school, legal system usually initiate the process.
- Teens seek treatment for co-morbid disorders.

Current Thoughts

- Treatment of other issues may decrease or cease related behaviors.
- Treatment is stigmatizing.

  Suicide may occur before treatment and blamed on other issues.

Teens do everything in excess and may change too quickly to warrant treatment.

(adapted from Griffiths, 2002, Chevalier & Griffiths, 2004)

Current thoughts - maybe

O Addictive behaviors are normalized in the community and family.

O Other forms of treatment relate poor retention rates and have difficulty recruiting teen participation.

O Treatment is too often based off of an adult model.

Some things to think about

O Technology is perfect for engaging and communicating with adolescents.

O It is often misconstrued and misinterpreted.

O Adolescents developing brains are not capable of controlling time or access.

O Be patient with yourself and the youth when there are setbacks and missed opportunities.

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Contact information

Margo Bristow, MA

LPC, CADC, PCGC, CAMSI, ICCGC

mb@margobristow.com

011-847-791-1651

Private Practice

1142 W. Chicago Ave, Suite 2W, Oak Park, Illinois U.S.A. 60302

Member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers

Board Member, Illinois Council on Problem Gambling (ICPG)