

SOLON COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM

PARENT TIP SHEET #4

IS IT INTERNET MISUSE, VIRTUAL ADDICTION, OR SIMPLY CYBER-SURFING?

A Cleveland man is arrested by Federal authorities. He is accused of using the Internet to entice teenagers to make sex videos and forward them to him. Several teens and preteens honored his request and sent explicit material. Online, this man allegedly claimed he was 15 years old. When caught, his identity revealed he was 47 years old.

Do You Know?

- ?? 45 million computers accessed the Internet regularly during the early part of 1998. (An increase of 143% over the previous two years)!
- ?? 34 million email messages are generated a day.
- ?? At peak times, 19,000 chat rooms are visited.
- ?? Three years ago there were 30 Internet gambling sites. Today, there are over 700!

Understanding Internet Addiction

- ?? Due to the advent of computers in homes, businesses, schools, and cyber cafés, Internet addiction has become one of the fastest growing problems in our country.
- ?? Internet abuse is a major problem in our *workforce* costing companies thousands of dollars in lost productivity. Pornographic sites are generally visited between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.!

Children in the twenty-first century are “*multimedia responsive*”. They can gain access to the information highway by “surfing” endless destinations of the world via cyber flirting, viewing X-rated adult pictures and videos, and even securing recipes for homemade drugs and bombs. Interactive computer games such as Multiple User Digital Domains (MUDDING) can be played among children interactively in different parts of the world. Many of these games have strong tendencies toward *violence* and are very time consuming. It is not unlikely for a user to lose “sense of time” and become angry and agitated if asked to exit before he/she is ready. This can be a breeding ground for family conflict.

Risk for Internet Addiction:

- ?? People *at risk* for Internet addiction usually are those suffering from other mental and emotional problems such as depression, loneliness, feeling like an outcast, social isolation, avoidant personality, low self-worth, other addictions such as food, sex, spending, & gambling.
- ?? Many recent studies report heavy Internet use increases **depression** and **social isolation**. The seductive nature of the Internet often is used as a substitution for real-life interpersonal relationships.
- ?? Children and teens use the Net as an equivalent to going to the shopping mall. It is a place to talk, hang out, and ask questions normally too embarrassed to ask elsewhere.
- ?? *About 20% of the general Internet user population makes contact or meets someone they converse with online.*

Warning Signs of Internet Addiction: If you, or someone you know, can answer yes to the majority of the following questions, they may already meet the criteria for Internet abuse or addiction. Many of these questions are the same ones used for assessing addiction to alcohol, drugs, and/or gambling.

- ?? Do you spend most of your time alone with a computer?
- ?? Are more of your emotional needs being met when you are *online* than off?
- ?? Do others ask you to cut down or stop your Internet use?
- ?? Do you feel powerless and unable to stop or cut down Internet use?
- ?? Do you experience behavior change when unable to connect online?
- ?? Have you experienced negative consequences as a result of Internet use in any of the following areas – financial, family, friends, work, school, spiritual, or legal?

What is Cybersex? Cybersex is consensual sex practiced by typing descriptions of seductive and sexual acts and exchanging verbal dialogue via email. Often, masturbation is practiced while the sexual exchange is taking place (Greenfield, 1999).

It should be noted that only 6% of Internet Users actually become addicted. But, 31% of Internet Addicts have had a real-time sexual experience with someone they met online.

As parents, we always need to be one step ahead by protecting our children from sexual predators and unsolicited emails disguised as links to adult sites. On the other hand, as parents we need to be available to help our children take advantage of all the benefits the Internet can offer (e.g. current events, news, research, medical information, travel, sports, hobbies, etc.).

Additional Resources:

Greenfield, David, Ph.D. (1999). Virtual Addiction. CA: New Harbinger Publishing Co.

Hughs, Donna Rice. (1998). Kids online: protecting your children in cyberspace.

Revell/Baker book House.

Young, Kimberly S., (1998). Caught in the net. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

The Center for On-Line Addiction - www.netaddiction.com

Prepared by: Ronna G. Posta, LPCC, NCC, CCDC III-E -- For additional information on Internet Addiction contact Ronna Posta at: 216-524-7772

For information on CAT & Tip Sheets contact: Jackie Robertson, President, 440-248-7467

8/2001