



Should You Be Worried About 'Gaming Disorder'?

Key Points

- **Gaming Disorder** has been classified as a mental health condition by the World Health Organisation
- The NHS has launched a service to tackle gaming disorder
- Gaming Disorder has multiple symptoms including irritation and lack of sleep
- Young people with pre-existing mental conditions may be more susceptible

There is nothing wrong with gaming in moderation, but if you are concerned that a young person in your care has problematic behaviours toward gaming, it's best to seek support.

As the lockdown continues, young people and adults alike have found gaming an effective way to stay entertained. So, it's important to pay attention to how much time young people in your care spend gaming.

What is Gaming Disorder?

Gaming disorder was designated as a **mental health condition** by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2019. They explain it as "pattern of gaming behaviours characterised by impaired control of gaming" characterised by giving priority to gaming over daily activities despite negative consequences.

In 2019, The NHS launched a **new service** that tackles behaviours associated with 'gaming disorders'. The 'Centre for Internet and Gaming Disorders' supports young people who are 'seriously addicted' to gaming.

According to WHO, 'gaming disorder' involves **patterns of behaviour** so severe that they result in a 'significant impairment' in education, social and family activities for at least 12 months.

The WHO has offered reassurance that 'gaming disorder' will only affect a small proportion of those who play games. Setting **positive boundaries** around game playing can support young people to develop **healthy gaming habits**.

Dr. Linda Papadopoulos a Psychologist and Internet Matters Ambassador gives the following advice:



*“Put parameters down when it comes to how long they’re allowed to play- **don’t allow them to have tech in their rooms after lights out** and ensure that they have **alternative activities** whether they be sports or clubs that **make them engage with their peers in the real world-** if you are still concerned then seek the help of a professional counsellor.”*

It’s important to note that young people with **existing mental health needs** incl. depression, anxiety, ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be **more susceptible** to ‘gaming disorder’.

What do you need to look out for?

Symptoms of ‘gaming disorder’ can be:

- Choosing to play games **rather than socialise** or do activities they previously enjoyed
- **Lying** about how the amount of time spent on gaming
- **Inability to concentrate** or focus on learning or participating in school or sports
- Feeling **irritable, impatient and restless** without access to games
- Excessive **desire to be alone** to play games
- Constant **tiredness, low mood** and an **inability to sleep**
- **Headaches, eye strain, neck pain** and **repetitive strain injury** caused by gaming

Where can I go for help?

You may want to **speak to your GP** in the first instance or a parent’s advice line.

Support

For **confidential parenting and family support**, you can contact Family Lives on their website or on **0808 800 2222**.