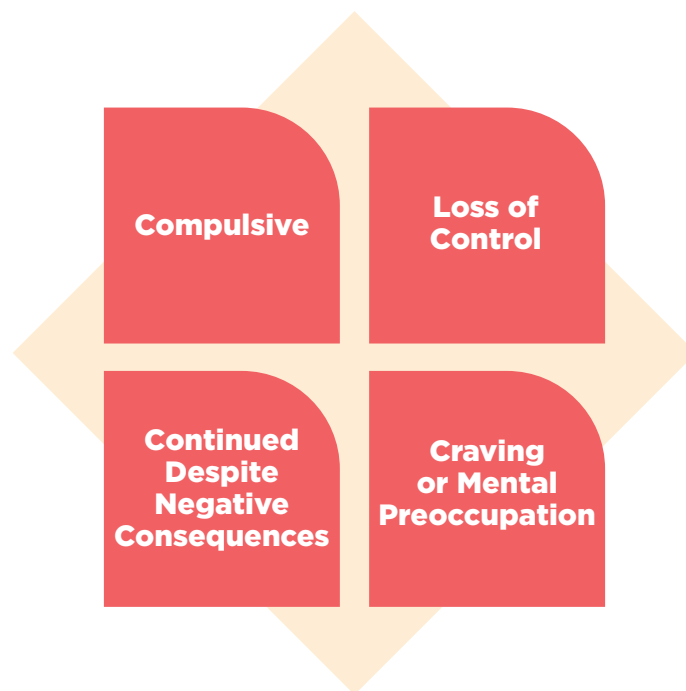


WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON?

2. What is a Behavioral Addiction?



One common question among parents/caregivers is, “Is my child addicted to their phone?” It is important to consider what addiction entails and how to know if someone you love is demonstrating the signs of addiction.

When we hear the term “addiction” many of us think about using drugs of abuse like alcohol, nicotine, and cannabis. But certain rewarding behaviors have addiction potential as well (e.g., gambling, pornography use, gaming) and can lead to compulsive, out-of-control engagement in the behavior despite negative consequences. We call these *behavioral addictions*.

Importantly, only a subset of individuals who engage in potentially addictive behaviors will develop a behavioral addiction (although anyone can experience problems from

engaging in a potentially addictive behavior). Thus, it is important to differentiate between high involvement in a behavior and addiction—how can we tell the difference? For example, what distinguishes an adolescent who enjoys gaming from an adolescent with gaming disorder?

The Four Cs Model details the hallmarks of behavioral addictions and can be helpful in distinguishing between high involvement and addiction. Each component of the Four Cs Model is described below. If an adolescent demonstrates the Four Cs with regard to their use of digital media, it may be helpful for them to see a mental health professional who can utilize formal assessment measures to determine whether or not they meet the criteria for addiction.

The Four Cs Model of Behavioral Addictions

The Behavior is Compulsive

- Unplanned engagement in the behavior
- Unintentional engagement, not deliberate or well thought-out
- Engage in the behavior based on an urge or felt need (in response to a feeling rather than cognitive reasoning)
- Engage in the behavior at inappropriate or inopportune times (e.g., at school, at work, during important activities, instead of engaging in other responsibilities, in risky situations)

There is a Loss of Control

- Unsuccessful attempts to stop or reduce engagement in the behavior
- Engaging in the behavior for longer than intended
- Engaging in the behavior more frequently than intended
- Breaking one's own limits or restrictions for engaging in the behavior

The Individual Continues to Engage in the Behavior Despite Negative Consequences

- Detrimental outcomes resulting from engagement in the behavior do not reduce or stop engagement; problems are not enough to deter engagement
- Experiencing negative consequences in the realms of: physical health, finances, legal issues, employment, education, psychological health, spirituality, relationships, friendships, family atmosphere, personal goals, or personal values

When Not Engaging, the Individual Experiences Cravings or Mental Preoccupation

- Overwhelming desire to engage in behavior when not engaging (particularly when triggered)
- Ruminating on behavior when not engaging
- Difficulty being in the present moment because thoughts are consumed by the behavior (thinking about the last time one engaged, fantasizing about the next time one will engage)
- Behavior becomes the most salient aspect of life

If the Four Cs are present (compulsive, loss of control, continued engagement despite negative consequences, and cravings or mental preoccupation), it could mean that the individual is struggling with a behavioral addiction. Working with a professional counselor (discussed later in this Guide) could be a helpful way to determine the exact nature of an

adolescents' relationship with digital media and construct an appropriate treatment plan.

Scan for full Guide and resources



References The Four Cs model is based on criteria for and definitions of addiction from the following sources:

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