

## WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON?



# 4. Prevalence of Digital Media Addiction

So how common is digital media addiction? Although the majority of individuals who use digital media will not meet criteria for a behavioral addiction (although they may have

problems with their use, and we discuss this later in the Guide), a subset of users will develop an addiction.

### For example:

In a meta-analysis, the prevalence of gaming addiction among adolescents across 33 countries was

**8.8%**<sup>1</sup>

Among students in 9th and 11th grade who engaged in any gambling in the previous year,

**1.76%**

screened positive for problem gambling and

**4%**

were at risk and in need of further assessment<sup>2</sup>

**52.6%**

of high school counselors said social media addiction was a major concern in their schools<sup>3</sup>

Among adolescents in one study,

**12%**

met criteria for compulsive sexual behavior<sup>4</sup>

So, the question is, *why do some youth demonstrate digital media addiction and others do not?* We know that certain risk factors increase a person's susceptibility to developing a behavioral addiction. Some of these **risk factors** include:

**Genetic predispositions** (Does addiction run in the family? Differences in one's genetic makeup from birth could predispose individuals to increased risk for addiction)

**Early exposure to addictive behaviors** (especially while the brain is still in the process of developing)

**A history of trauma** (there is a robust relationship between early trauma and later addictive behaviors)

**Co-occurring mental health concerns** (e.g., depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD])

When risk factors are present, there is a higher likelihood that an individual may develop a behavioral addiction. Importantly, every adolescent is different as they have their own unique characteristics and varying degrees of risk. This is why what is best for one teenager with regard to digital media use may be different than what is best for another teenager. It is important for parents/caregivers to assess their teen's constellation of

risk factors and potential susceptibility to addiction and make individualized decisions that are right for them, understanding there is a spectrum of engagement with digital media.

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## References

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