

WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON?



6. Potential Signs of Digital Media Overuse

All teens engage in some degree of digital media use, so how do parents/caregivers know if their adolescent is struggling with digital media overuse or addiction? What are some common signs or symptoms that digital media use has become problematic or addictive? While there are many variables at play (and the signs alone are not sufficient for determining addiction), some common signs and symptoms of digital media overuse may include the following:

Mental Health Signs/Symptoms

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Obsessive compulsive behaviors
- Emotional dysregulation
- Self-harm
- Aggression
- Substance use
- Suicidal ideation
- Disordered eating
- Body image concerns

Physical Signs/Symptoms

- Poor personal hygiene
- Fatigue/sleep issues
- Headaches
- Eye strain
- Nutritional concerns
- Obesity
- Back and/or neck strain
- Joint pain or stiffness
- Withdrawal symptoms when not using digital media (e.g., irritability, restlessness, anxiety)

Interpersonal or Relational Signs/Symptoms

- Lying
- Stealing
- Isolation
- Opposition
- Avoidance
- Family conflict
- Loneliness

Cognitive and Behavioral Signs/Symptoms

- Procrastination
- Poor time management
- Forgetfulness
- Attentional issues
- Detrimental thoughts about self (low self-esteem/negative self-talk)
- Envy/comparison
- Loss of interest in other activities
- Neglecting commitments
- Mental preoccupation with digital media
- Escaping problems through digital media use

Academic Signs/Symptoms

- Poor or falling grades
- Attendance/tardiness issues
- Distraction
- Conflict with teachers
- Conflict with peers
- Behavioral issues at school
- Falling asleep in class

Occupational Signs/Symptoms

- Tardiness to work
- Missing shifts
- Distraction
- Performance issues
- Conflict with supervisors/employers
- Conflict with co-workers

Although this is not an exhaustive list, it is a helpful description of the potential signs and symptoms of digital media overuse or addiction. Parents/caregivers who recognize these signs can engage in conversations with their teens about their digital media use (discussed later in this Guide) and seek professional help if needed. When we consider digital media addiction, we must consider both the risk factors of the individual (e.g., genetic predisposition, early trauma, early childhood exposure, mental health concerns) and also the addictive nature of the digital media product itself.

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