



# Helping Hand

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## Internet Addiction Affects Students, Parents, and Teachers

We all realize that the Internet is an invaluable tool. Teachers, parents, and students alike go online for a variety of reasons. We can post students' grades online; do research for reports, shop, and even chat. But how do we know if our "normal" online behavior has turned into an addiction?

Though it may seem hard to believe, in today's ultra-connected society, more and more people are suffering from a high-tech malady known simply as Internet addiction. The addiction takes many forms, but here are some ways in which the problem manifests:

**Net Compulsions** — Addictions to online gaming, online gambling, and eBay are fast becoming new behavioral health issues in the post-Internet era. With the instant access to virtual casinos, interactive games, and eBay, addicts lose excessive amounts of money and even disrupt other job-related duties or significant relationships.

**Information Overload** — The wealth of data available on the World Wide Web has created a new type of compulsive behavior regarding excessive web surfing and database searches. Individuals will spend greater amounts of time searching and collecting data from the web and organizing information. Obsessive-compulsive tendencies and reduced work productivity are typically associated with this behavior.

**Gaming Addiction** — In the '80s, computer games such as Solitaire and Minesweeper were programmed into computers, and researchers found that obsessive computer game playing became problematic in organizational settings, as employees spent most days playing rather than working. These games are not interactive nor played online. Internet addiction can cause serious life problems. If you think you or someone you know might be suffering from Internet addiction, it's important you find help right away. Visit a counselor, student assistance professional or other expert for more advice.

## Working Together to Prevent Truancy

Every day, thousands of youth are absent from school; many are absent without an excuse and deemed truant. Truancy can be the first sign that a student is in trouble; the first indicator that a young person is giving up and losing his or her way.

When young people start skipping school, they are telling their parents, school officials and the community that they are in trouble and need our help if they are to keep moving forward in life.

Here are ten things a school can do to improve attendance provided by the National Center for School Engagement:

1. Make students and parents/guardians feel welcome.
2. Create an environment that enables students to feel successful—no matter how small it may seem.
3. When a student is absent, immediately talk to the parent or guardian — not their answering machine or voice mail.
4. When a student is absent, immediately talk with them about why they were gone—let them know you are aware.
5. Create relationships with local businesses where youth may congregate when truant—encourage them to keep students in school during school hours.
6. Build a relationship with local law enforcement—make them your allies in showing the community, families, and students that school is the place to be.
7. Don't provide the temptation for youth to be truant. Close your campuses during breaks and lunch.
8. Empower and expect classroom teachers to take action when they think a student may be truant.
9. Reward and recognize good attendance—not just perfect attendance.
10. Make your school a place where students feel safe and respected.

## Helping Students with Depression

Children and adolescents who are at risk for depression can be helped by consistent nurturing from trusted adults. Create caring one-on-one relationships with students so they will feel comfortable approaching adults such as members of the student assistance staff in order to prevent suicide and to confront depression head-on.

The student assistance program (SAP) or counseling program can help facilitate in-service training to help all staff understand and respond appropriately to mental health issues; signs and symptoms of depression; as well as promote awareness about stress related to traumatic events and the impact of chronic negative experiences on children. Do not minimize the effects of these events; respond with concern and support.

Administration should be sure there is a procedure established for school personnel to follow to obtain immediate professional help for students exhibiting symptoms, especially if the student mentions suicidal thoughts. **Remember, always take suicidal comments seriously!**

To the extent possible, every school professional should learn how to respond to students' requests for help and also how to react if other warning signs are noticed. No one teacher, nurse or other school professional should be responsible for deciding how to proceed with a potentially suicidal student. In addition, every school system and every school should have a crisis protocol, a crisis team, and community resources available to deal with these situations.

A suggestion includes implementing a primary prevention program that recognizes the signs and symptoms of depression. *Research shows that school assemblies and direct focus on suicide can exacerbate students who are already contemplating suicide.*

Staff members as well as SAP team members should always avoid displaying shock or disapproval if someone discloses suicidal thoughts. Do not assume that a child is just trying to gain attention through suicidal talk or gestures. **Tell the individual that suicidal intents or thoughts cannot be kept confidential, and that you must report them to the appropriate person immediately.** Remind the student that they deserve help with the situation. Keep the student informed at every step of the way, so he/she knows what to expect. Do not leave a student alone if the risk of suicide is high. Take him/her with you to get help, or call or send someone else for help.

## Tips To Improve Self Esteem (For Students and Staff)

1. When you make a mistake, it is best to own up to it and correct it, rather than ignore it and pretend it didn't happen. Self-respect and power come from admitting your mistakes, learning from them and taking corrective action.
2. When you look at yourself in the mirror, embrace your beauty rather than pointing out your flaws. Embracing your own beauty and uniqueness leads to true self-acceptance.
3. Take responsibility for your own results instead of blaming others for your problems. Taking responsibility for your thoughts, words, and actions will set you free from the pain of blame and guilt.
4. You have the right to express your wants, needs, and self-worth and have them treated with respect by others. Claim your needs as important and respectfully assert yourself.

5. You are capable of creating anything when your life has purpose, focus and direction. You have the potential to be so much more than you might imagine; the most important thing is that your life has meaning for you.

6. Honor your commitments to yourself and others. By keeping your commitments you demonstrate integrity, credibility, and earn respect.

7. Positive self-talk empowers you, makes you stronger, and builds confidence. To eliminate negative self-talk: (1) recognize it;(2) interrupt it; and (3) replace it with a positive message.

8. By trusting yourself, you can keep others' words in perspective without becoming defensive. Your strong sense of self-worth allows you to maintain your power and still hear what others have to say without feeling bad about yourself.

9. Direct eye contact can help create rapport and demonstrate your sense of self-worth. When you're interacting with others it's important to create a sense of connection. Your direct, "easy" eye contact is a great way to help others feel connected and form a good impression of you at the same time.

(Source: National Association for Self-Esteem)

## How To Deal with An Emergency or Illness at School

- Assess the situation. Be sure the situation is safe for you to approach. The following dangers will require caution: live electrical wires, gas leaks, building damage, fire or smoke, traffic, and/or violence.
- A responsible adult should stay at the scene and give help until the person designated to handle emergencies arrives.
- Send word to the person designated to handle emergencies. This person will take charge of the emergency, render any further **first aid** needed and call for additional resources as required.
- DO NOT give medications unless there has been prior approval by the parent or guardian. Follow school district medication policy.
- DO NOT move a severely injured or ill student or staff unless absolutely necessary for immediate safety. If moving is necessary, follow guidelines for "NECK AND BACK INJURIES."
- **Under no circumstances should a sick or injured student be sent home without the knowledge and permission of the parent or legal guardian.**

- In the presence of a life threatening emergency, call 911 or local emergency number. The responsible school authority or a designated employee should then notify the parent or legal guardian of the emergency as soon as possible to determine the appropriate course of action.
- If the parent or legal guardian cannot be reached, notify a parent or legal guardian substitute and call either the physician or the hospital designated on the **STUDENT EMERGENCY/ MEDICAL INFORMATION CARD**, so they will know to expect the injured student. If necessary arrange for transportation of the injured student by Emergency Medical Services (EMS).
- A responsible individual should stay with the injured student.
- Fill out a report for all incidents requiring above procedures as required by school policy.

## Understanding Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are disorders that affect the ability to understand or use spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements, or direct attention. Although learning disabilities occur in very young children, the disorders are usually not recognized until the child reaches school age.

Specially trained educators may perform a diagnostic educational evaluation assessing the child's academic and intellectual potential and level of academic performance. Once the evaluation is complete, the basic approach is to teach learning skills by building on the child's abilities and strengths while correcting and compensating for disabilities and weaknesses.

Other professionals such as speech and language therapists also may be involved. Some medications may be effective in helping the child learn by enhancing attention and concentration. Psychological therapies may also be used. Learning disabilities can be lifelong conditions. In some people, several overlapping learning disabilities may be apparent. Other people may have a single, isolated learning problem that has little impact on their lives.

### **Resources to Help Students with Learning Disabilities Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**

<http://www.chadd.org> Tel: 301-306-7070 800-233-4050

### **Learning Disabilities Association of America**

[info@ldaamerica.org](mailto:info@ldaamerica.org) <http://www.ldaamerica.org> Tel: 412-341-1515

### **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)**

<http://www.nichd.nih.gov> Tel: 301-496-5133

**International Dyslexia Association**

info@interdys.org http://www.interdys.org Tel: 410-296-0232 800-ABCD123

**National Center for Learning Disabilities**

http://www.ld.org Tel: 212-545-7510 888-575-7373

## How Do You Get Students Involved?

Student clubs, societies, sports teams and other extra-curricular groups are great for many reasons. They allow students to work together toward common goals and provide a fun way for socialization outside of class. But what if your students at your school or district seem apathetic about getting involved? Maybe it's time to rethink your extracurricular offerings.

Sometimes, students feel alienated or isolated from more traditional activities, because they are not from the same social group as others in the activity. Try and involve students from all different social groups, not just the popular cliques. Entice students from other groups by creating activities that appeal to wider audiences. Start a sci-fi club or reading group or start a health-related activity like yoga or pilates along with traditional sports teams. Reward students for their participation in activities and make it fun for everyone!

**For more information regarding these or other topics, contact:**

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