

CAM  ADAIR

# Video Game Addiction Masterclass

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# What Will You Learn?

- What video game addiction is, and why it happens
- How to identify at-risk teenagers (including Screening Tool)
- How to communicate effectively about gaming
- What the practical solutions are to overcome it

# Who is Cam Adair?

- Addicted to video games for 10 years
- Became an escape from intense bullying, anxiety, and depression
- Dropped out of high school, pretended to have jobs, wrote a suicide note
- Founded [GameQuitters.com](http://GameQuitters.com) to help others, now serving 50,000 members each month in 91 countries
- Named one of Canada's Leaders in Mental Health by CAMH
- Published in Psychiatry Research with Dr. Daniel King

# Alarming Trends

- 13% of students grades 7-12 report symptoms of a video game problem, up 4% since 2007, with 10% of students who report gaming at least 5 hours/day (CAMH, OSDUHS 2015)
- National College Health Assessment survey found 20% of college students are depressed, anxious, or battling mental health issues, including 13% who seriously considered suicide in the past year (up 3.5% from 2013)
- 9% of students bring gaming problems to college in their first-year. (Gentile, 2011.)

# Esports

- Esports is a term for organized competition for video games
- Colleges in the U.S. are adding varsity Esports teams, and offering scholarships for Esports
- Currently 75 schools and growing. Last year: 17 schools.
- Partnership announced last week to bring eSports teams to 16,000 high schools in the U.S.
- Will cross \$1B in revenue next year

# Games Have Changed

- Back in the day: Atari, Pong, Pacman
- 1999-2003: Online First-Person Shooters (FPS)
- 2004-2008: Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG)
- 2012-2015: Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA)
- 2016: Overwatch (Hero Shooter)
- 2017: Battle Royale Gold Rush

# Games Have Changed

- Describe individual game types

# Gaming? Or Gambling?

- In-app purchases, micro transactions, loot boxes
- Blizzard generated \$4B in 2017 from in-game transactions
- Loot boxes: contents are not revealed until after purchase
- Netherlands, Belgium: Loot boxes are gambling, illegal
- California Bill: Entertainment Software Association (ESA) now adding warning labels to all games with in-game offers



# Gaming Addiction Myths

- **It's not common.** Truth: 2B people game worldwide. 1-3% of gamers are addicted.
- **It's a mental health problem.** Truth: Depression and anxiety are co-factors, but gaming is part of the problem.
- **Gaming is healthy.** It can be and is for most, many find a passion in gaming, but 1-3% struggle with addiction.

# Video Game Addiction is Real

- Official recognition in ICD-11 by World Health Organization
- ‘Gaming Disorder’ is characterized by a pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behaviour characterized by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.
- For gaming disorder to be diagnosed, the behaviour pattern must be of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months.

# Screening Tool

- The Internet Gaming Disorder Scale (Lemmens & Gentile, 2015)
- Psychological Assessment, empirically supported
- Published by the APA
- DSM-5: 5 criteria met in last 12 months
- Quiz for Gamers and Loved Ones on [gamequitters.com](http://gamequitters.com)

# Warning Signs

- Pre-occupation
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Tolerance
- Unsuccessful attempt to control
- Loss of interest in previous hobbies
- Continued use despite negative impact
- Deception
- Use of games to escape/relief negative mood
- Jeopardized or lost a lost significant relationship, job, education

# The Negative Impact

- School grades, college success
- Unemployment, calling in sick to work to “game”
- Marriage challenges, divorce, poor relationships
- Increased anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Loss of money, time

# The Negative Impact

- Employment rates of young men dropping sharper than any other group. 75% of the time they used to spend working is now spent gaming (Erik Hurst, University of Chicago)
- “We discovered our 14 year old son had been stealing money from our wallets & spent over \$3,000 buying objects for Clash of Clans.”
- “I quit university because I didn’t study, attend the classes, or the exams. Instead I sat in front of my computer the entire day.”
- “In my courses I’m now so far behind that it’s hopeless to catch up.”

# Demographics

- 90% Male, Average age: 23 years old
- 60% are college students
- 48% of Game Quitters met criteria for Moderate+ Depression
- Started gaming at 9 years old
- Play an average of 25 hours/week, with over 25 hours/week of other online activities (porn, youtube, and mindless browsing)
- Disenfranchised Male, MGTOW, Incels

# Why Gamers Play:

- Video games fulfill four specific needs: Temporary Escape, Social Connection, Constant Measurable Growth, and Purpose
- Games are intentionally designed to keep you hooked using state of the art behavioral psychology
- Games are fully immersive, and provide dopamine overload
- Overexposure causes structural changes to your brain: numbed pleasure response, hyper-reactivity, and willpower erosion
- Gaming and the digital world is a safe place to fail



# Gamers Are Defensive

- Society has shamed gamers for being gamers (lazy, wasting their potential, those are not your 'real friends')
- This has created an Us. vs. Them mentality
- Shame and stigma are barriers for people to ask for help

# Recovery Process

- Commit to the “90 day detox” to reset the brain, break attachments, create a contrast, and build new habits
- “Fill the void” with three types of activities: Mentally Engaging (new skill), Resting (at home), Social (new friends)
- Add structure with a daily agenda (weekends/school breaks)
- Create a system of accountability and support
- Research shows a 2x improvement to overall well-being

# Practical Tips

- Remove gaming devices from bedroom (centralize)
- Block access to games, apps, and problematic websites
- Stay firm and consistent in your boundaries
- Mix it up: less than two hours at a time, not every day
- Require exercise and homework to be complete first
- Find an alternative to YouTube/gaming after school before homework

# Expect the Following:

- Cravings and urges, compulsions to play
- Withdrawal symptoms, including boredom
- Loss of friends, conversation topics
- Loss of 'Gamer' identity, Nostalgia to play
- Struggles with Time Management

# Potential Triggers

- Twitch etc

# Additional Resources

- [GameQuitters.com](https://gamequitters.com)
- For Gamers: Respawn Program (\$47)
- For Parents: Reclaim Program (\$97)
- Masterclass for Therapists/Professionals coming soon
- Reddit Community: [reddit.com/r/stopgaming](https://reddit.com/r/stopgaming)

# In Their Words

- “My freshman class was the first to have more dropouts due to World of Warcraft than to drugs, and it wasn’t because drug use was down.”
- “Failing college pretty hard right now. I kept this to myself, but everyone knew I was taking too much time playing instead of doing real work, they just see this more as a failure than a real problem.”
- “I didn’t request or receive any help from the school. I remember going to the in-house psychiatrist once, and I was diagnosed with having trouble adapting to a new environment. They didn’t ask me if I was gaming excessively, and I didn’t tell them either.”
- “It affected my academic performances heavily in university. I didn’t show up to classes, procrastinated immensely to skip tests and homework, and used gaming as an escape. My teachers and professors weren’t aware of it, and didn’t even care. No one asked any questions.”

# Advice for Therapists

- “Games have no pause button, or end. There’s always something else to do.”
- “Gaming is omnipresent. There aren’t barriers like the cost of alcohol, hoops to jump through for drugs, or limited locations for gambling.” “I played Civilization IV for over 11 years, 1000s of hours played. Monetarily I only spent \$80 total.”
- “Gaming addicts are great BSers like any other addicts. Parents will think ‘at least my kids aren’t out there drinking or doing drugs’ without knowing how deep the spiral goes.”
- “That online games provide a sense of accomplishment, conquest and belonging in a group. It then numbs and diminishes the drive to achieve those things in the real world, which in turn contributes to cravings, because you want to return to the online world as soon as possible to experience those sensations again.”



# Advice for Therapists

- Games change one's understanding of value, work, and effort in the real world. Games are extremely explicit in their expectations and consistent in their rewards. Real life is murkier; actions and outcomes often have no linear relationship. To a gamer this inconsistency can be extremely demotivating — getting your life on track doesn't have an XP bar.”
- “You are up against an industry that made \$30.4b in the United States in 2016. They are terrifyingly good at what they do. A solid grounding in abusive game mechanics (e.g. Skinner boxes, free-to-play, micro transactions) is important, and the best practices to combat them.”
- “I love the competitive aspect, but I'm not great at sports due to physical problems. However with gaming if I play lots and try hard I get better and therefore a higher skill rank. It's rewarding and I use it as a competitive outlet, but it simply takes too much time.”

# Any Questions?

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# Contact

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cam@gamequitters.com | invite me to speak!

consulting, programs & resources: [gamequitters.com](http://gamequitters.com)

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