

Video Transcript: Problem Technology Use

Technology is entrenched in our daily lives. It can enhance our ability to work, socialize, and spend our leisure time.

However, when technology use is not balanced with other priorities in life, it can create problems that impact a person's physical and mental health.

Problem technology use is an emerging issue that many parents, teachers, and helping professionals are concerned about. This video discusses the prevalence of problem technology use, some of the common co-occurring issues, and evidence informed treatment approaches.

Currently no universal model or terminology for problem technology use exists. Many different versions are currently used in research and clinical practice, which can be confusing. Some commonly used terms are listed.

Problem technology use can include excessive behaviours related to many different online activities that can cause harm in a person's life. Throughout this section, however, we will be using problem technology use to mean excessive behaviours around gaming, social networking, streaming videos, browsing, reading, chatting or texting. Note that these activities can be done on computers, Smartphones, tablets, or gaming consoles.

Problem technology use in Ontario is increasing in prevalence. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's 2015 health survey, screen time, video gaming, and time spent on social media are climbing in both adults and youth. The number of people experiencing symptoms of problematic use, including trying to cut back, concerns expressed from family members, and urges to use are increasing as well.

Problem technology use can be associated with co-occurring mental health issues. Technology can provide an escape from difficult feelings, and a way to meet important psychological and social needs that are not being met off-line. In other cases, mental health concerns can arise from problem technology use.

Common mental health and neurodevelopment issues that can co-occur with problem technology use include depression, anxiety, learning difficulties or exceptionalities, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Obsessive-compulsive disorder.

It is not possible to avoid technology use today, but it is possible to stop or cut down unproductive behaviours that cause negative consequences.

When using a harm reduction approach, the client decides whether to stop or reduce the technology use that is causing negative consequences. Clinicians then work with the clients to reduce the harms in their lives.

In terms of treatments, there is some research to support the use of Cognitive-behavioural Therapy to manage problem technology use. In this treatment approach, people learn to shift the behaviours, thoughts, and emotions that are linked to problem technology use. Other treatment modalities that are being used include motivational interviewing, narrative therapy, mindfulness, and medications. Treatments may also address co-occurring mental health issues to support recovery.

Changes can also be made to limit access to technology. Here are just a few ways to reduce technology use if it has become problematic.

Since parents most often initiate treatment for their children and express concern about their technology use, it is important that they get support, even if their loved ones do not. If the person with problem technology use does come for treatment, regardless of his or her age, involvement of the family is integral.

Explore this section of learn.problemgambling.ca for more detailed information on problematic technology use, treatment, and relapse prevention.