

Caught in the Web?

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For most of us it's almost impossible to imagine our world without the **INTERNET**. Anonymous and accessible, the Internet can be educational, entertaining and even social. It offers whatever we want – information, goods, connections... even sex. But its appeal can also lure you away from the real world; can cause difficulty in your life, interfering with work, home or relationships.

How would you know if your use of the Internet is problematic?

Reflect on the following questions:

- Do you spend an excessive amount of time online?
- Are you preoccupied with the Internet (i.e., thinking about the Internet offline)?
- Is it hard for you to control your Internet use (i.e., feel restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or to stop Internet use)?
- Do other people think you might have a problem?
- Do you experience intense intimacy while online?
- Do you use the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or of altering your mood (i.e., anxiety, depression, boredom, loneliness, helplessness, or guilt)?

These can all be signs of problematic or addictive use of the Internet.

What can you do about Internet addiction if you feel you have it?

- Admit it to yourself and then to other people in your life that you trust. It is the first step in breaking the pattern of addiction.
- Monitor your emotions/moods and observe when you tend to use or abuse the Internet.
- Consider strictly limiting access to the Internet to necessary tasks that have to be done. Try to stay off-line for extended periods of time. Try to create a computer-free day and gradually extend this to include larger periods of time. Make small changes and be patient with yourself.
- Consider joining a support group for Internet abuse and addiction.
- Find other interests and develop new relationships and friendships.
- If you are addicted to online sex and your family, relationships or career are in jeopardy, it is recommended that you consult a psychologist or psychotherapist to assist you identify your options.