

Internet Addiction

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In 1996 the subject of internet addiction as a new psychological disorder came up at a major conference of the American Psychological Association. The addiction to the internet consists of similar levels of dysfunction in academic social and occupational domains as the other major addictive disorders. More specifically, research has indicated that symptoms of internet addiction include academic failure, reduced work performance, marital discord, compulsive sexual behavior and overeating. Of all the disorders listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders (DSM-IV), the symptoms of pathological gambling give us the best idea as to how to assess for an addiction to the internet.

Much of my clinical work nowadays (not purposely) has involved dealing with frum people who suffer from internet addiction. I have counseled countless yeshiva bochrim and married couples who have subjected themselves to endless hours of internet usage. The vast majority of the individuals I have counseled have used internet pornography as their main vice. The addiction to pornography has led to excessive feelings of guilt, depression, anxiety, marital discord and divorce. I have referred many internet addicts to Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) groups in conjunction to their individual therapy. Attending SA groups has had mixed results from the frum community. While some state that they have made significant progress, others report that they have not made any progress and, in fact, their addiction worsened after the group work.

To illustrate the significance of this problem in the frum community, I would like to share a clinical vignette. All names have been changed and identifying features have been disguised to protect the identity of the individuals involved.

Questions that we should ask in order to ascertain whether a person is addicted to the internet include:

1. Have you ever tried to limit usage or completely stop using the internet but were unsuccessful?
2. Do you remain on-line longer than you intended?
3. Have you risked losing a significant job, relationship or career opportunity because of the internet?
4. Do you feel restless, moody, anxious or depressed when not using the internet?
5. Is going on the internet the first thing you do after Shabbos or when you come home from work or shul?
6. Have you lied to others about how much internet use you have engaged in?
7. Do you use the internet as a means of escaping other problems you may be experiencing in your life?
8. Do you feel that you need to be on the internet for longer periods of time to get that 'fix'?

For another survey developed by Dr. Kimberly Young that assesses internet addiction log onto:

http://www.netaddiction.com/resources/internet_addiction_test.htm