

# What is Process Addiction?

Behavioural or process addiction refers to behavioural problems that involve a lessening of control, persistent seeking, and significant harm even though no addictive substance is involved [1].

A process addiction is characterized by the compulsive nature of the behaviour. Examples include sex, shopping, gambling, gaming, and surfing the internet.

For example, although people who use digital technology excessively may not experience any physical symptoms of use, abuse or addiction, they may face negative consequences when a behaviour impedes their daily functioning [2].

As is the case with substance addictions, people with process addictions cannot control their use, which can result in significant psychological and social challenges [3]. These can include difficulty managing stress and performing day-to-day activities, as well as increased feelings of loneliness and isolation [4]. Process addiction may elicit a reward sensation in the moment, followed by feelings of guilt and remorse [5].

Research shows process addictions mirror substance use addictions in their comorbidity, symptom presentation, neurobiological mechanism and response to treatment [6].

Process addictions include the following three features:

1. The individual fails to resist a particular temptation to perform an act that may be potentially harmful to the person or others.
2. Each process addiction has a specific essential feature that characterizes it.
3. Repetitively engaging in the behavioral addiction interferes with the individual's functioning individual or causes them significant distress [7].

People with addictions do not process rewards in the same way as those who do not struggle with addictions. Research shows that for some people, the neurological response to playing video games is the same as it is to addictive substances. Digital technology can activate the reward centre in the brain, releasing excess dopamine and leading to addiction. Using technology too much can also cause changes in the brain, which has negative effects on the cognitive, social, and emotional area of individuals. For example, children may experience lack of memory because they are not paying attention to other stimuli [7].

More research is needed to determine the fine line between healthy and problematic or excessive use of digital technology in children and youth.

### References

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