

# Tips for Service Providers: Child and Youth Problematic Use of Digital Technology

## What is Problematic Use of Digital Technology?

Problematic use of digital technology is defined as any digital activity which causes significant distress and negatively impacts physical, social and mental well-being. Individuals who struggle with problem use of technology may experience a variety of difficulties including: family and social relationship problems, financial stressors, legal issues, educational challenges and employment difficulties. Some mental health concerns have been linked to problematic use of digital technology such as: depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, personality disorders and substance use problems (particularly cannabis and alcohol).

## Examples of Digital Technology Use

Gaming, social networking sites, chatting/texting/sexting, online gambling, browsing internet sites, cybersex/pornography, shopping or reading online, streaming videos.

## What approach may be helpful?

- Digital technology is embedded in our lives. An all or nothing approach like abstinence is less likely to work.
- Find out what benefits the client may feel they are getting from their digital technology use. Try to remain curious, open and non-judgmental when learning more about their technology use.
- Consider focusing on what the person misses about their life before their use of digital technology became problematic.
- Help the client and their family establish new priorities: incorporating daily exercise, improving self-care, spending time with loved ones, eating a family meal together, initiating and completing a task, meeting an important deadline; these are all examples of ways in which a person can improve their functioning in major life areas.
- Although more research is needed, some formal interventions have been helpful and include: cognitive behavioural therapy, motivational interviewing, narrative therapy, mindfulness practices, and psychotropic medications. Consider arranging a referral for counselling: Alberta Health Services Youth Addiction Services at 1-866-332-2322 (toll free within Alberta).

## What questions might be helpful to my client or their family?

- Are things out of balance - because of digital technology use - in your major life areas such as family and peer relationships, school, employment, finances and health (sleep/exercise/diet)?
- Have you experienced increased conflict in relationships because of problematic digital technology use?
- Have you ever felt you or your family member needed to cut down on digital technology use?
- What have you done in the past that has helped your family to be healthier?