

Motivation, goals and the function of gaming

Why is gaming a problem?

Not able to
control or stop
gaming

Considering
gaming as **more**
important than
anything else

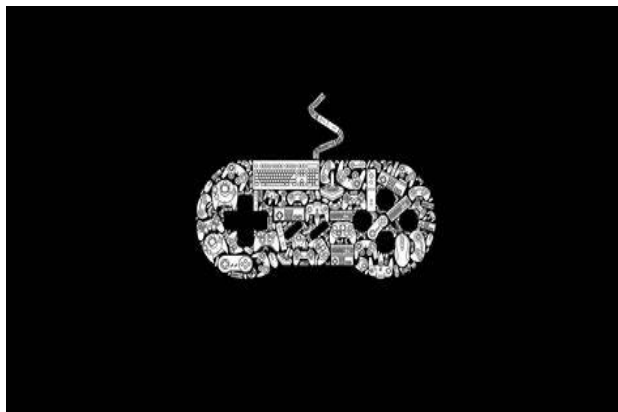
Still gaming
despite
negative
consequences

For someone who is gaming excessively, there will be a number of concerning patterns of gaming behaviours. Although time spent gaming is relevant, this alone is not indication of an addiction or gaming disorder. To be considered an addiction or disorder, the behaviour patterns described above must be severe to the extent that they *“cause significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months”*.

If you or others around you think you are playing excessively or to a problematic level there might be a need for some form of support and intervention.

This manual is set up to help you learn to understand your gaming behaviours more, to give you skills in managing everyday difficult emotions and situations and to hopefully give you more choices in regards to your actions and behaviours.

What Makes a Game Addictive?



Physiology

Many researchers believe that there is a physiological component related to addictive video games, similar to the physiological state induced in those addicted to drugs and alcohol. Studies have found that **dopamine** (a feel-good hormone in the brain) levels doubled when people were playing video games, which means that addictive games are chemically addictive as well. The same neural pathways in the brain that reinforce dependence on substances can reinforce compulsive technology behaviours that are just as addictive and potentially destructive.

Technology

Another way in which games may provoke an addiction-like cycle is through the development of technology: as manufacturers and developers create more powerful equipment and deliver better graphics, gamers take part in more **immersive and novel experiences**, mirroring—intentionally or not—people who use drugs, seeking stronger and stronger substances. Therefore the simplest formula to making an addictive game is to make it **challenging, interesting, and rewarding**. Any game can elicit a feel-good sensation for a short amount of time, but the games that can be called addictive, are those that you routinely go back to that keep you feeling good all the time! The gaming industry calculates the amount, timing and percentage of rewards in games to allow maximum compulsion and addiction. They stretch our ability to concentrate by using these systems, which allows us to play for such long periods of time.

Human Behaviour

As humans we have an evolutionary drive to **problem solve**. This drive is also activated during most gaming processes and is exactly what keeps us hooked on gaming. It is the core of what drives us as human beings. In addition to this innate drive system we also get hooked by the **uncertainty** that occurs as part of every game at different points and stages. This uncertainty, in the same way as it does in gaming, actually **increases our levels of dopamine and therefore pushes our compulsion**. As part of gaming we are constantly exposed to positive **feedback and rewards** and this is another part of the drive system which means that the pull to continue is increased and our feelings build.

Community and Social connection

- Social distinction
- Social connection
- Safe communication
- Competition
- Team work

Online communities formed by Role Playing Games (RPGs) such as the World of Warcraft provide valuable communities for their players. Online games give anyone the opportunity to forge new identities and engage in activities in imaginary lands that will not judge them like the real world may.

Furthermore, Massively Multi Player Online Roleplay Games (MMPORGs) and other multiplayer games host large communities of players where many people feel welcome, appreciated, and useful (something they may not feel often in the real world). An MMPORG player can join clans, help other players, make friends, and develop a status. Although the setting is virtual, the relationships are real. For the player, the sense of being part of something and having a role to play can be important and meaningful, especially if the player does not experience social gratification in real life. For many people with a video game addiction, playing the game is not just “for fun” It is their social life and a pillar of their self-esteem.

Skill and Reward

- Achievement
- Challenge and advancement
- Constant measurable growth
- Physical, mental, tactical skill and challenge

Many games can “feed the ego”. Successful games are therefore a strong system of toil and reward and boost the player’s ego to the extent that he or she wants to keep playing in order to get that feeling. It’s especially notable that many players who do not get rewarded or do not receive this sort of self-esteem boost outside of the gaming world are the ones who will come back for more because it is in the game world that they get this type of satisfaction. Many games build up levels of complexity. The players acquire novel skills that they must apply to other situations in the game. Upon learning these skills, the game becomes even more complex, causing the player to want to complete increasingly difficult challenges, effectively hooking them onto the game.

Escapism

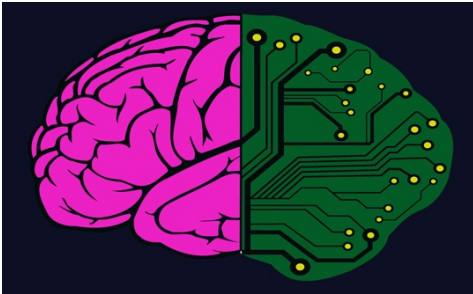
- Role creation/play
- Role avoidance

Video games can be used in a similar way to how people use drugs and alcohol, and can lead to dependency. For example, people may use alcohol to reduce anxiety in a social situation to enable a social interaction. People want an escape. Massively Multiplayer Online games, (MMOs), are one of the more common instances for this, the reason being that, for many, they can attain a level of interaction that would have made them anxious in real life.

Role-playing games, (RPGs) are about more than the game mechanics, they are about allowing people who play them to role-play another life entirely. They can be the person that they want to be without the fear of rejection or failure, with few real consequences. It also gives people the option to portray themselves in any way they choose to.

Studies show that most people who are struggling with the symptoms of video game addiction are playing multiplayer games on the Internet. MMPORGs are especially addictive because they offer an endless adventure inside a fantasy world where players can essentially live a different life as a new person. They provide an opportunity to escape reality and leave behind problems of the real world.

What's happening in your brain in gaming?



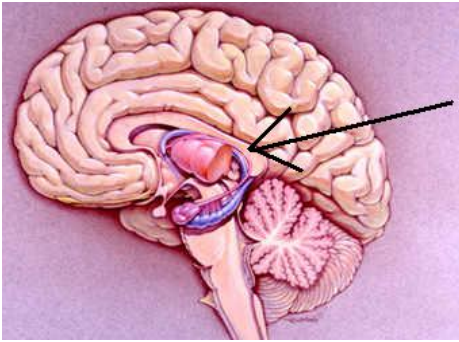
The brain has some older structures deep within it that are essential for life. The key system that we want to think about with **cravings** is the **Limbic System**.

The limbic system is involved in the type of automatic processes that we discuss within gaming. When the individual is presented with a gaming stimulus (reminder) parts of the limbic system start operating. Any reminder of gaming will cause an automatic, habitual response in your limbic system.

It will begin producing the **hormone dopamine, which is associated with pleasure, and stimulate a part of the brain associated with reward**. The most basic thing to understand about dopamine is that it feels nice. It is a marker to the brain that something good is happening and it motivates the brain to do that thing again. **Dopamine is associated with reward**. Rewards are a sign that we are doing the right things. When you were rewarded as a child for doing something right dopamine would have been produced and the brain would have learned to complete that behaviour again.

At the same time, **dopamine exposure causes changes in other brain areas and this can lead to a boost in negative emotions**, such as fear and stress in the absence of gaming, leaving people who have an addiction to gaming seeking gaming simply to **escape the distress of withdrawal**.

Repeatedly activating these circuits changes neural connections until these circuits respond to the mere anticipation of the reward—as in Pavlovian **conditioning**—and produces the classic symptom of **craving**. With video games, the **intermittency of the reward only heightens its conditioning power**. You don't know when you will be able to kill the enemy or find the treasure that the video game is offering—but there is that moment when you do and that becomes reinforced. Because it's actually something that you did well, dopamine goes up and it keeps you going.



The problem is that the brain has become accustomed to getting nice feelings via dopamine through gaming and anything that stimulates that memory will kick off the dopamine system. The brain, having had a small taste, wants more of the same and it thinks gaming will be a way to get more dopamine. But, you may not want to game; rationally and consciously you know that you don't want to be doing this behaviour any more. This puts you into a bit of conflict with your brain. Your **brain's response will first be to try and find reasons why it is rational and sensible** to complete the behaviour – it looks for excuses, or **permission giving thoughts** as they are sometimes known. We always want to do things that are rational and reasonable so the brain needs reasons why it should act against other competing thoughts about not gaming.

A second strategy that the brain uses explains why you may feel a bit edgy or agitated when you try and stop yourself. **When you try to stop gaming you are going against what the brain wants you to do. To attempt to further motivate you the brain may produce some other hormones to make you feel uncomfortable.** It is playing 'good cop bad cop' with you – if you game, you get dopamine, **if you stop yourself you get hormones like adrenaline, which you make you feel anxious.** If you complete the behaviour, and game, then the brain shuts off the adrenaline, or it is perceived as being part of the 'thrill' or 'rush' that people describe.

Problem behaviours

Problem behaviours – things we do to cope with distress

Behaviours

- Avoiding
- Compulsion
- Obsession
- Impulsive
- Controlling
- Immediacy
- Immersion
- Fighting

What do I do when distressed?

What kinds of situations make me distressed? (in your home, in your relationships, at school/work etc)

What are my goals of therapy

Magic Wand question

Suppose I have a magic wand, and I wave it right now, and magic happens, so that all these difficult thoughts and feelings you've been struggling with are now like water off a duck's back; they no longer hold you back, bring you down, push you around; they lose all their impact and influence over you. Then

What would you stop doing or start doing, do more of or less of?

How would you treat yourself, others, life, the world, differently?

What goals would you pursue?

What activities would you start or resume?

What people, places, events, activities, challenges, would you approach, start, resume or contact - rather than avoid or withdraw?

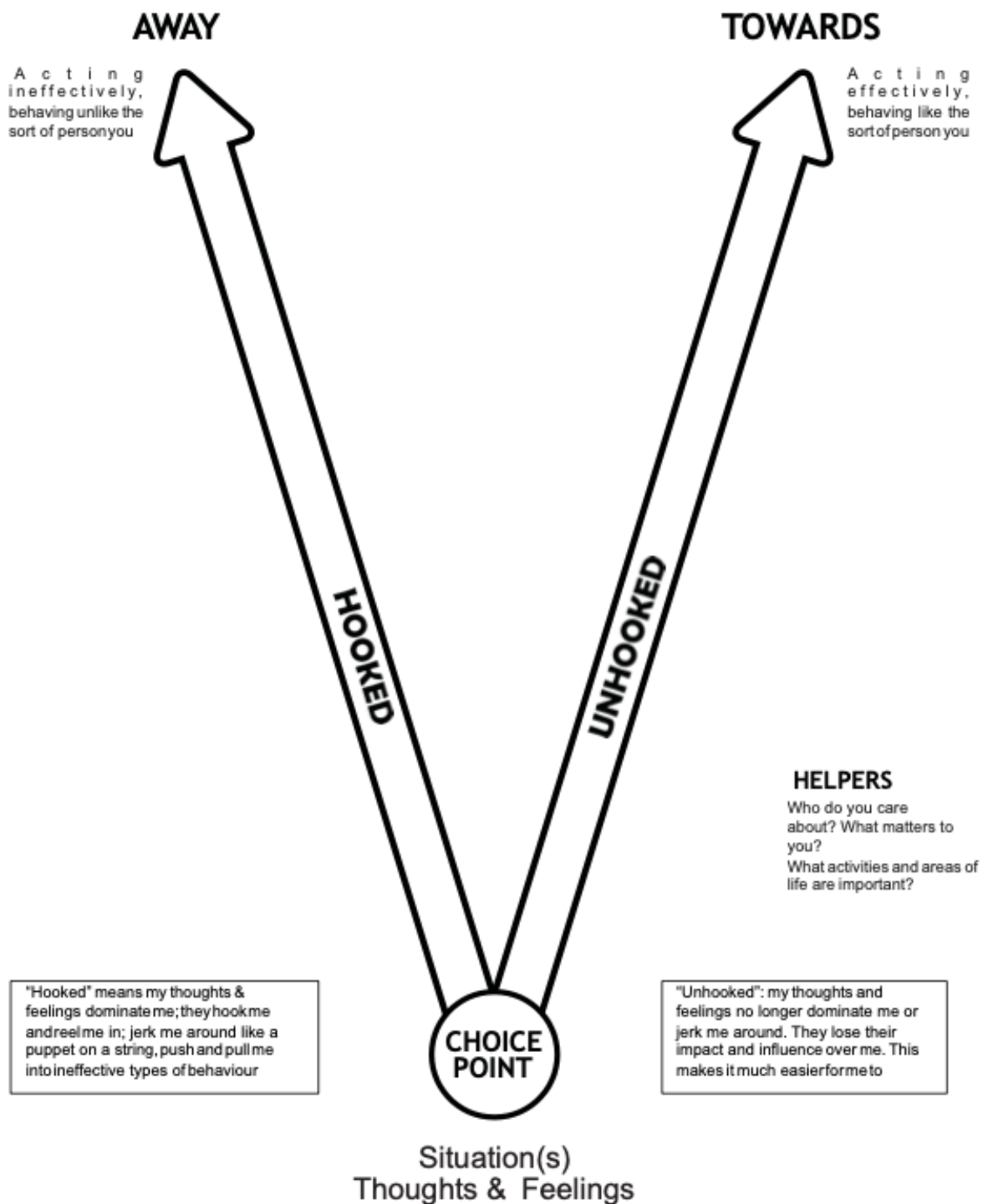
“If our work here today could make a positive difference in just one important area of life – which would you pick: work, education, relationships, health, leisure, or something else? How would this area of life improve? What will you be doing differently in this area of life if our work here is successful?”

What is most important to me

Values...

Who do you care about? Who matters to you?
 What role do you play in the life/lives of that person/those people?
 How do you like them to treat you? How do you like to treat them?
 Who do you like to hang out with? What do you like to do when hanging out? What matters to you?
 What gets you fired up? What inspires you? What infuriates you?
 What makes you sad? Happy? Angry? Scared?
 What do you enjoy? What “floats your boat”?
 What would you hate to lose, miss out on, give up, or have to stop doing?
 When do you feel grateful or appreciative? For what?
 When do you feel like you’re living life your way? Doing what?
 What gives you a sense of pride, achievement, doing it well, doing it the way you want to?
 Do you ever like the way you do things/treat the people you care about? When, where, doing what?
 Do you ever like the way you are? When, where, doing what, with whom?

“So can I just check in with you that we have the same aim here? One aim is to get you doing more of this (therapist points to and reads out aloud the towards moves) so you can live life your way, be the sort of person you want to be. And another aim is to learn some unhooking skills to unhook from these thoughts and feelings, so ... they lose their impact – they lose their power over you – they no longer push you around, hold you back, bring you down, get in the way of you doing all this stuff (therapist points to towards moves). Does that sound right to you?”



Values worksheet

Accumulate positive emotions in the long term to build a “life worth living.”

That is, make changes in your life so that positive events will occur in the future.

Step 1. Avoid avoiding.

Start now to do what is needed to build the life you want. If you are not sure about what to do, follow the steps below.

Step 2. Identify values that are important to you.

ASK: What values are really important to me in my life?

Examples: Be productive; be part of a group; treat others well; be physically fit.

Step 3. Identify one value to work on now.

ASK: What is really important to me, right now, to work on in my life? *Example:* Be productive.

Step 4. Identify a few goals related to this value.

ASK: What specific goals can I work on that will make this value part of my life? *Examples:* Get a job where I can do something useful.

Be more active keeping up with important tasks at home. Find a volunteer job that will use skills I already have.

Step 5. Choose one goal to work on now.

Do pros and cons, if necessary, to select a goal to work on now. *Example:* Get a job where I can do something useful.

Step 6. Identify small action steps toward your goal.

ASK: What small steps can I take to get to my goal?

Examples: Visit places and look for job openings on the Internet in my area.

Submit applications for jobs at places I want to work. Write résumé.

Check out benefits at places I might want to work.

Step 7. Take one action step now. Example: Go on Internet and check for jobs in my area.

Homework for this session:

Complete the diary (*date/time/situation* and *time on games*)

What pattern of behaviours do I do when I am distressed?

What are your main goals for treatment?

What do I value most in life?