What is Internet addiction?

Internet addiction is described as an impulse control disorder, which does not involve use of an intoxicating drug and is very similar to pathological gambling. Some Internet users may develop an emotional attachment to on-line friends and activities they create on their computer screens. Internet users may enjoy aspects of the Internet that allow them to meet, socialize, and exchange ideas through the use of chat rooms, social networking websites, or "virtual communities." Other Internet users spend endless hours researching topics of interest online or blogging.

Similar to other addictions, those suffering from Internet addiction use the virtual fantasy world to connect with real people through the Internet as a substitute for real-life human connection that they have difficulties in achieving normally.

What are the warning signs of Internet addiction?

- Preoccupation with the Internet. (Thoughts about previous on-line activity or anticipation of the next on-line session.)
- Use of the Internet in increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction.
- Repeated, unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop Internet use.
- Feelings of restlessness, moodiness, depression, or irritability when attempting to cut down use of the Internet.
- On-line longer than originally intended.

- Jeopardized or risked loss of significant relationships, job, educational or career opportunities because of Internet use.
- Lies to family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet.
- Use of the Internet is a way to escape from problems or to relieve a dysphoric mood. (e.g. Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, anxiety, depression.)

What are the effects?

Internet addiction results in personal, family, academic, financial, and occupational problems that are characteristic of other addictions. Impairments of real life relationships are disrupted as a result of excessive use of the Internet. Individuals suffering from Internet addiction spend more time in solitary seclusion, spend less time with real people in their lives, and are often viewed as socially awkward. Arguments may result due to the volume of time spent on-line. Those suffering from Internet addiction may attempt to conceal the amount of time spent on-line, which results in distrust and the disturbance of quality in once stable relationships.

Some suffering from Internet addiction may create on-line personas or profiles where they are able to alter their identities and pretend to be someone other than himself or herself. Those at highest risk for creation of a secret life are those who suffer from low-self esteem feelings of inadequacy, and fear of disapproval. Such negative self-

concepts lead to clinical problems of depression and anxiety.

Many persons who attempt to quit their Internet use experience withdrawal including: anger, depression, relief, mood swings, anxiety, fear, irritability, sadness, loneliness, boredom, restlessness, procrastination, and upset stomach. Being addicted to the Internet can also cause physical discomfort or medical problems such as: Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, dry eyes, backaches, severe headaches, eating irregularities, (such as skipping meals), failure to attend to personal hygiene, and sleep disturbance.

Source: Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery, www.addictionrecov.org/Addictions/index.aspx?AID=43