
ARE YOU "HOOKED" ON THE WEB? - Nancy Losinno

Computers, video games, and the internet have become entrenched features of our daily lives. While originally designed for work purposes, computers are now a major source of fun and entertainment for many people. While most integrate computer use into their lives in a balanced, healthy manner, for others, time spent on the computer is out of balance and has displaced friends, family, and an honest day's work.

Internet addiction is a rapidly growing problem in the workplace. Most companies and organizations, including BNL, have strict policies about their employees' online activities, especially regarding "objectionable" sites that contain pornographic material or facilitate online gambling. Companies and organizations, again including BNL, reinforce their policies by using tracking software to identify computer users that visit inappropriate sites. Knowing this, why would someone risk his or her job, reputation, and marriage by engaging in this kind of activity at work?

Most people who engage in forbidden online activity at work do so for a variety of reasons, including:

- They cannot do it at home; the behavior may have already caused problems in their marital relationships.
- These online activities are part of a larger marital infidelity problem.
- They feel independent and over-confident that they will not be caught and suffer any consequences while in the privacy of their own offices.
- They use "their" computers after hours, and feel that since they are "off the clock" that going to forbidden sites is acceptable.
- There may be an air of permissiveness in a particular work group that fosters more curiosity and more risk-taking behavior.
- Their computers at work are faster than the ones they have at home.
- They are depressed or bored and feel that these activities give them a "lift."
- They are sexually addicted and need professional help.

The addictions field uses the same symptoms for internet addiction as we do for other types of addiction: preoccupation with use; repeated, unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop internet use; loss of control and being online more than originally intended; increased use over time; and jeopardized or risked loss of significant relationships, job, or career opportunities because of internet use.

We see five specific sub-types of internet addiction:

1. Cybersexual addiction -- compulsive use of adult websites
2. Cyber-relational addiction -- over-involvement in online activities
3. Net compulsion -- obsessive online gambling, shopping, or online trading
4. Information addiction -- compulsive web surfing or database searches
5. Computer addiction -- obsessive computer-game playing

If you or someone you love is having any problem with the above behaviors, you have a variety of options:

- Access an addictions specialist through your health plan. These individuals are typically mental health therapists who are also credentialed alcoholism and substance abuse counselors.
- Tell a friend who will hold you accountable to get the help you need.
- Do not engage in online activities when you are alone.
- Contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for help. Appointments can be made at your convenience at Ext. 4567. Or, you can access an EAP provider in your community (one to three free visits). Call 1-877-622-4327 any time of the day or night.
- Ask for help from outside organizations. There are many 12-step programs, support groups, and other resources available.

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