

## **ADDICTED TO WOW OR OTHER COMPUTER GAMES?**

*This pamphlet has been produced by Clyst Vale Community College's Counselling Service and is intended to provide useful information to a young person experiencing an addiction to WOW or other online games.*

*It is not a definitive guide.*

**Can't make enough gold?**

**Can't wait to level up?**

**Yearning for a flying mount?**

Playing online games can be great fun and can lead to new online friendships. However, some of the games are so exciting and gripping they can eat away at your day without you even noticing. Huge chunks of your time can be spent questing, raiding or mining. In fact it's easy to lose track of time altogether when you play.

So, how can you tell if you are addicted to the game?

### **Symptoms of addiction**

If you are unsure here's a simple test:

Don't play the game for two days in a row. How easy was it to do this? Did you feel twitchy, restless, irritable, lost, perhaps even a feeling of loss and even trouble sleeping? These are all symptoms of an addiction, what people feel when they can't do what they're addicted to.

### **What addiction means**

An addiction, in this case to an activity, means something we feel we can't do without but isn't really necessary for our survival.

### **What happens if we are addicted?**

Typically addicted players tend to prioritise sitting at the computer playing WOW. This means that really important things like getting enough good quality sleep are not considered as important. They can become very angry if they can't play.

Deadlines for homework can get missed, or instead of producing good work, an addicted player might leave it to the last minute and do a bad job, preferring to spend their time online.

### **Consequences**

An addicted player might ignore their body clock and play WOW right into the small hours of the morning. This can have serious consequences. If human beings don't get enough unbroken quality sleep they can struggle to get through a normal day. They might feel very tired, have difficulty concentrating during lessons and be very irritable. Some studies suggest that too much time spent online can have serious effects on social skill development. This means that players can lose out practising important skills of communicating, making and keeping friends in the real world. Some specialists also think that language development can be affected.

### **What you can do**

If you think you may be addicted to playing WOW, or other games, come and speak with one of the counsellors.

### **Managing your play**

Start by logging how much time you spend on the computer, make a note of when you start and when you finish. This is a measure of where you are, at the moment. You need to prioritise getting enough sleep at the times your body clock wants you to be resting. Typically this will mean going to bed and sleeping so you can have at least 7 – 10 hours quality sleep before you get up for school. Decide what you need to get done, like homework, getting your bag ready for school, perhaps some sport or exercise. Don't allow yourself to play online until you have achieved your goals.

If you choose to play online, limit yourself to just one hour and stick to the plan, no matter what is happening in the game world. Some games provide a countdown clock on screen as you play. Make sure if you play that you end your online time at least two hours before you are due to go to bed. Experts believe the brain can become very excited during a game and needs time to 'come down' before you can sleep.

### **Cold turkey**

Going 'cold turkey' is an expression used when a person tries to give up whatever they are addicted to altogether. If you find you cannot limit yourself to no more than an hour's play a day and at a time when it fits in with your real life priorities such as sleeping and being alert for school, you may need to stop playing the game altogether.

This option can be very difficult, so do please speak to the counsellors for their support.

### **What to expect**

Experts say giving up a habit takes about three weeks to adjust to. Giving up an addiction takes longer. You may not be able to conquer your addiction over night, so be prepared – you will need all your willpower, and probably some new distractions like a sport or joining a club.

If you've been a heavy WOW player, spending lots of time online late at night, your sleeping pattern will probably be affected. Try to adopt a healthier sleeping pattern, exercise can really help here. It will take a few days for you to develop a new sleeping pattern. Try not to worry about it. You may find yourself feeling bored, unable to concentrate and irritable. Let your family know what you are trying to do so they can support you.

Find something more productive to do with all that freed-up time you now have! Think of new interests and hobbies. Try to choose ones that will keep your mind off playing WOW. Perhaps start collecting and learning about something new, like fossils, geology (rocks), or get into crosswords or sudoku, or learn how to cook? How about helping out with gardening, learning about a new subject, like astronomy, or taking up a new musical instrument? The choice is yours!

Remember, just because you have slipped into an addiction does not mean it has to always be this way. You have a choice.

**The counsellors are here to offer you help and support.**