

Internet Addiction and Digital Device Use

The rapidly developed Internet and related mobile technology allows us to accomplish different tasks anytime, anywhere. We are spending longer time online and the age of start using Internet is becoming younger. The resulting problems like parenting difficulties, excessive online gaming, lacking of real life communication warrant our concerns. Relevant government departments, non-governmental organisations and other institutions in Hong Kong have made efforts to create a supportive environment for healthy use of Internet and to tackle the health problems relating to its use.

In 2013, the Department of Health convened The Advisory Group on Health Effects of Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products which issued a report in 2014 providing recommendations on different areas of health impacts and health tips on using Internet and related products. The general principles “SAFE ACTS” to help parents and teachers to guide the kids has been recommended:

- **S**how children the right attitude
- **A**ware of the benefits and risks
- **F**acilitate a balanced life
- **E**mpower children to face challenges
- **A**gree with children on the rules of use
- **C**ommunicate openly
- **T**rust and respect children
- **S**eek help when needed

The World Health Organization held three meetings from 2014 to 2016 in response to global concerns about the impact of a range of Internet-based activities with focus on public health implications of excessive use of the Internet, smartphones and similar electronic devices; clinical descriptions, diagnostic guidelines and priorities for international research on the related disorders as well as policy and program responses. The main tasks in the coming future will include information sharing and cross-cultural collaboration; clarification of the public health impact of gaming disorder and other disorders associated with excessive use of the Internet and electronic devices; more research, including effectiveness of prevention programs, randomised control trials of treatment interventions and longitudinal studies exploring impact of excessive Internet use on psychosocial development and last but not least, to improve education, training and awareness of issues related to excessive gaming amongst educators, clinicians and general public.

More information is available at the designated website on Healthy Use of Internet & Electronic Screen Products. The relevant link and QR Code access are as follows:

http://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/internet/health_effects.html

