

game OVER



Toolkit 2 For Educators

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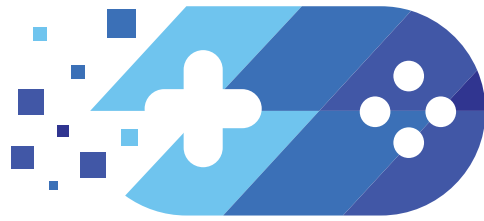
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Table of Contents

1. FOREWORD	4
2. ABOUT THE GAMEOVER PROJECT	5
The Early Detection Instrument (EDI): Purpose and Structure.....	6
Student Questionnaire: Purpose and Goals	6
Teacher Questionnaire: Purpose and Goals.....	7
Combined Use of Both Questionnaires.....	7
3. HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT	8
4. UNDERSTANDING PROBLEMATIC ONLINE GAMING	9
5. ADOLESCENCE, BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL VULNERABILITY	10
6. RESEARCH INSIGHTS FROM THE GAMEOVER PROJECT	11
6.1 Development of the Early Detection Instrument (EDI).....	11
6.2 Student Perspectives: Patterns and Motivations	11
6.3 Teacher Observations and Systemic Challenges	12
6.4 Quantitative Associations and Risk Factors	12
7. EARLY IDENTIFICATION IN SCHOOL SETTINGS	13
7.1 Principles of Early Identification	13
7.2 Core Domains of Observation	13
7.3 Structured School Procedure	14
7.4 Risk Profiles as Heuristic Guidance	14
7.5 Ethical Considerations	14
8. RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS	15
9. UNIVERSAL PREVENTION FRAMEWORK	17
10. CLASSROOM PREVENTION STRATEGIES	18
10.1 Establishing Clear and Consistent Digital Boundaries.....	18
10.2 Promoting Reflective Dialogue About Gaming	19
10.3 Integrating Digital Balance into Curriculum	19
10.4 Strengthening Attention and Self-Regulation Skills	20
10.5 Supporting Emotional Regulation.....	20
10.6 Encouraging Alternative Sources of Competence	20
10.7 Structuring Break Times	21
10.8 Addressing Sleep Awareness	21
10.9 Responding to Early Warning Signs in Class	21
10.10 Maintaining Professional Consistency	22
10.11 Creating a Classroom Culture of Balance	22

11. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTEGRATION	23
11.1 Emotional Awareness as a Protective Factor	23
11.2 Developing Self-Regulation Skills.....	23
11.3 Coping Strategies Beyond Digital Escape	24
11.4 Building Peer Connection and Belonging.....	24
11.5 Managing Academic Stress	24
11.6 Embedding SEL in Daily Practice.....	24
12. DIGITAL BALANCE CURRICULUM INTEGRATION	25
12.1 Language and Literature.....	25
12.2 Social Studies and Civic Education	25
12.3 Mathematics and Data Literacy	25
12.4 Health and Physical Education	25
12.5 Ethics and Philosophy	26
12.6 Project-Based Learning	26
12.7 Sustaining Consistency Across Subjects.....	26
13. WORKING WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES.....	27
13.1 Establishing a Collaborative Tone.....	27
13.2 Raising Awareness Without Alarmism.....	27
13.3 Practical Family Strategies	27
13.4 Supporting Families Facing Structural Challenges	28
13.5 When to Escalate Support.....	28
14. WHOLE-SCHOOL POLICY AND STRUCTURAL RECOMMENDATIONS	29
14.1 Developing Clear Digital Use Policies	29
14.2 Establishing Structured Monitoring Systems.....	29
14.3 Strengthening Interdisciplinary Collaboration	30
14.4 Professional Development for Staff.....	30
14.5 Promoting a School Culture of Balance.....	30
14.6 Integrating Prevention into Strategic Planning.....	30
14.7 Ensuring Proportionality and Ethics.....	31
ETHICAL DISCLAIMER	31
FINAL MESSAGE	31
References	32



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Switch Off Addiction

Power Up Life

1. FOREWORD

Digital environments are no longer optional in students' lives. Gaming is part of youth culture across Europe. The educational challenge is not to eliminate gaming, but to ensure it remains balanced and does not interfere with development, wellbeing, and learning.

The GameOver project was developed to provide schools with structured tools to respond constructively to problematic gaming tendencies.

This toolkit translates international research into practical, classroom-ready solutions.

2. ABOUT THE GAMEOVER PROJECT

GameOver is an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership addressing problematic online gaming among students aged 12–16. The project responds to growing concerns within European schools regarding the impact of excessive gaming on academic performance, emotional wellbeing and social functioning.

The project pursued several interconnected objectives. It conducted cross-national research across Lithuania, Bulgaria, Greece and Spain in order to better understand behavioural patterns, risk factors and protective elements associated with problematic online gaming. Based on this research, the partnership developed a structured Early Detection Instrument (EDI) designed for educational settings. The project also created dedicated toolkits for educators, students and parents, alongside an online professional training programme aimed at strengthening school capacity for prevention and early intervention. A central goal of the initiative has been to reinforce preventive school culture and promote balanced digital habits.

The Early Detection Instrument (EDI) constitutes one of the core outcomes of the project. It includes both a student self-report questionnaire and a teacher observation questionnaire, enabling a multi-perspective assessment framework within schools. The EDI resources and implementation guidance are publicly available through the official project website.

Student and teacher EDI questionnaires can be accessed at:

<https://gameover-project.eu/edi/>

The full project information, resources and updates are available at:

<https://gameover-project.eu/>

The partnership includes organisations from Lithuania, Bulgaria, Greece and Spain, ensuring cross-cultural applicability and relevance across diverse educational systems.

Below is the expanded version of the section, explaining the EDI questionnaires clearly and professionally, suitable for inclusion in your Toolkit.



The Early Detection Instrument (EDI): Purpose and Structure



A central outcome of the GameOver project is the development of the Early Detection Instrument (EDI), a structured assessment framework designed specifically for school environments. The EDI supports early identification of problematic online gaming tendencies through a multi-informant approach that combines student self-report and teacher observation.

The instrument does not provide clinical diagnosis. Its purpose is educational and preventive: to identify early warning signs, support proportionate intervention and guide structured school responses before difficulties escalate.

The EDI is publicly accessible through the official project platform:

<https://gameover-project.eu/edi/>

Student Questionnaire: Purpose and Goals



The student questionnaire is a self-report instrument designed to assess gaming behaviours, emotional responses and functional impact in a structured and standardised manner.

It is based on internationally recognised diagnostic criteria for Internet Gaming Disorder (DSM-5) and Gaming Disorder (ICD-11), translated into age-appropriate educational language. The questionnaire explores areas such as:

- preoccupation with gaming,
- difficulty controlling gaming time,
- emotional dependence on gaming,
- withdrawal symptoms when unable to play,
- impact on school performance,
- conflicts with family or peers,
- gaming as a coping strategy for stress or negative mood.

The primary goals of the student questionnaire are:

1. To provide insight into students' own perceptions of their gaming behaviour.
2. To detect early behavioural and emotional patterns associated with risk.
3. To quantify risk levels using a structured scoring system.
4. To support dialogue between students and school staff.
5. To inform preventive or supportive actions where needed.

Importantly, the questionnaire encourages self-reflection. It is not designed to label students, but to help identify patterns that may benefit from support.



Teacher Questionnaire: Purpose and Goals

The teacher questionnaire complements the student self-report by providing structured observation from an educational perspective.

Teachers are often the first to observe behavioural changes linked to sleep disruption, concentration difficulties or emotional instability. The teacher instrument focuses on observable patterns within the school environment, including:

- attention and concentration problems,
- reduced academic engagement,
- frequent discussion of gaming during lessons,
- fatigue and sleepiness,
- irritability when device use is restricted,
- withdrawal from peer interaction,
- declining academic performance,
- behavioural dysregulation.

The goals of the teacher questionnaire are:

1. To systematise professional observation rather than rely on informal impressions.
2. To identify patterns across behavioural, emotional and academic domains.
3. To triangulate data with student self-report results.
4. To support structured school-level decision-making.
5. To initiate proportionate intervention pathways when needed.

The teacher questionnaire does not aim to replace professional judgement. Instead, it strengthens it by providing a consistent observational framework.

Combined Use of Both Questionnaires

The strength of the EDI lies in its dual-perspective design. Student self-perception and teacher observation may converge or differ. When both sources indicate elevated risk, schools can act with greater confidence. When results diverge, the discrepancy itself can guide further conversation and contextual understanding.

The EDI supports a stepwise response model:

1. Observation and documentation
2. Student questionnaire administration
3. Teacher questionnaire completion
4. Family communication
5. Referral to counselling if necessary

This structured approach ensures proportionality and prevents overreaction to isolated behaviours.

3. HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit may be used:

- As a structured prevention guide
- During staff training
- For classroom implementation
- As support material during parent meetings
- As a school policy reference

It is modular. Schools may implement sections gradually.



4. UNDERSTANDING PROBLEMATIC ONLINE GAMING

Online gaming is one of the most widespread leisure activities among adolescents across Europe. For many young people, gaming provides entertainment, social interaction, creativity and a sense of achievement. It can support strategic thinking, cooperation and digital competence. Within balanced limits, gaming is not inherently harmful and may form part of a healthy recreational routine.

Concerns arise when gaming gradually shifts from a hobby to a pattern that interferes with daily functioning. Problematic Online Gaming (POG) refers to gaming behaviour that becomes difficult to regulate and begins to negatively affect important areas of life. In educational contexts, this interference most often appears in academic performance, emotional stability, sleep routines and peer relationships.

The defining feature of problematic gaming is not simply the number of hours spent playing. Rather, it is the loss of balance and reduced control over gaming behaviour. A student who plays frequently but can stop when necessary, maintain school responsibilities and regulate emotions does not demonstrate the same level of risk as a student who repeatedly fails to disengage, neglects responsibilities and continues gaming despite clear negative consequences.

In school settings, problematic gaming does not present itself as a diagnosis but as observable patterns. Teachers may notice declining grades, incomplete assignments, reduced participation in class, irritability when digital access is restricted, chronic fatigue due to disrupted sleep, or increasing social withdrawal. These patterns, particularly when they persist over time and appear across multiple domains, suggest the need for structured support.

Problematic gaming is often closely connected to emotional regulation. Many adolescents report using gaming as a way to relieve stress, cope with frustration, escape responsibilities or enhance self-esteem. When gaming becomes the primary coping strategy for managing negative emotions, reliance may increase. Over time, this may create a cycle in which emotional distress leads to gaming, and excessive gaming contributes to further stress through academic decline or family conflict.

Sleep disruption represents one of the most visible educational consequences of problematic gaming. Late-night gaming sessions may reduce total sleep time and impair sleep quality. Sleep deprivation directly affects attention, working memory, impulse control and emotional stability. Teachers frequently observe daytime fatigue and reduced concentration before understanding the underlying cause.

It is important to avoid oversimplification. Not all gaming is problematic, and not all academic difficulties are caused by gaming. Problematic online gaming develops gradually through the interaction of individual vulnerabilities, environmental influences and gaming design features. Effective prevention therefore requires balanced understanding rather than alarmist reactions.

The educational objective is not to eliminate gaming from students' lives but to restore and maintain balance. When schools focus on early identification, structured dialogue and skill development, they create opportunities to address emerging risks before they escalate into more serious difficulties.



5. ADOLESCENCE, BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL VULNERABILITY

Adolescence is a period of significant biological, psychological and social transformation. Understanding this developmental context is essential when addressing problematic online gaming in schools. Many behaviours that concern adults are closely linked to normal processes of maturation.

During adolescence, the brain undergoes substantial restructuring. Two systems develop at different speeds. The reward system, which is responsible for motivation, excitement and response to pleasurable stimuli, becomes highly active during early and mid-adolescence. At the same time, the prefrontal cortex, which supports impulse control, long-term planning and decision-making, continues to mature into early adulthood. This imbalance creates a developmental vulnerability in which sensitivity to reward is strong while regulatory capacity is still evolving.

Online games are particularly effective at activating reward mechanisms. They provide immediate feedback, progressive challenges, competitive ranking systems and social reinforcement. For adolescents whose motivational systems are highly responsive, disengaging from these structured reward environments can be difficult. This difficulty is not simply a matter of discipline; it reflects developmental processes.

Impulse control and delayed gratification develop gradually during adolescence. Students aged twelve to sixteen may understand that homework must be completed or that sleep is important, yet still struggle to stop a rewarding activity. The gap between knowledge and behaviour is characteristic of this stage of development. Without guidance and structured routines, repeated difficulty in disengagement may contribute to problematic patterns.

Emotional development also plays a significant role. Adolescence is marked by heightened emotional intensity, increased stress sensitivity and strong need for social belonging. Gaming environments often offer predictable rules, clear goals and social connection. For students experiencing academic frustration, anxiety or social insecurity, gaming can provide a sense of competence and stability. When such reliance becomes excessive, it may limit the development of alternative coping strategies.

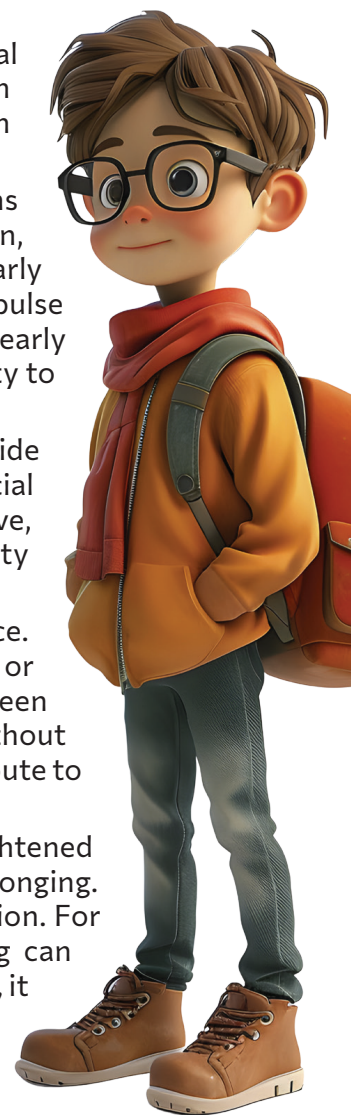
Sleep patterns shift naturally during adolescence, with many young people experiencing later sleep onset. Combined with stimulating digital activities and online interaction during evening hours, this shift may result in chronic sleep reduction. Sleep deprivation affects cognitive functioning, mood regulation and academic performance, reinforcing the visible consequences observed in school settings.

Peer influence is another central element of adolescent development. Gaming communities provide social identity, cooperation and recognition. While these features can be positive, exclusive reliance on online interaction may reduce participation in face-to-face relationships and extracurricular engagement. For some students, online environments become safer or more rewarding than offline contexts.

Socioeconomic and environmental factors further shape vulnerability. Limited access to structured extracurricular activities, reduced parental supervision due to work demands and high levels of academic pressure may increase reliance on digital leisure. Individual differences, including temperament and personality traits such as impulsivity or low conscientiousness, may also influence susceptibility.

Understanding adolescence as a period of developmental imbalance between reward sensitivity and regulatory control allows educators to approach problematic gaming with empathy and proportionate response. Students are not fully developed adults; they are navigating identity formation, emotional growth and neurological maturation. Educational interventions that strengthen self-regulation, emotional awareness and structured routines align with developmental needs rather than oppose them.

Recognising digital vulnerability within this broader developmental framework helps schools move beyond blame and toward supportive, preventive practice.



6. RESEARCH INSIGHTS FROM THE GAMEOVER PROJECT

The GameOver project is grounded in a comprehensive research phase that informed the development of the Early Detection Instrument (EDI) and all subsequent project results. The research combined qualitative and quantitative methods across four countries—Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania and Spain—allowing the partnership to examine problematic online gaming (POG) as a multidimensional phenomenon within educational settings.

The quantitative student sample consisted of 148 respondents, while 95 teachers participated in the teacher survey. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with more than 40 students and more than 50 teachers, including school psychologists and special education professionals. This mixed-method approach ensured that statistical findings were enriched by contextual insights from school environments.

6.1 Development of the Early Detection Instrument (EDI)



The student questionnaire forming the core of the EDI was constructed in alignment with the diagnostic criteria for Internet Gaming Disorder (DSM-V) and Gaming Disorder (ICD-11). The instrument consists of 18 items grouped into nine conceptual categories reflecting internationally recognised clinical dimensions: preoccupation with gaming, withdrawal symptoms, tolerance, unsuccessful attempts to control gaming, loss of interest in previous hobbies, continued use despite negative consequences, deception regarding gaming time, use of gaming to escape negative mood, and jeopardising social or educational opportunities.

Exploratory factor analysis confirmed that all 18 items load onto a single underlying construct representing problematic online gaming. The internal consistency of the scale was exceptionally high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.966, indicating strong reliability of the measurement tool. These results demonstrate that the EDI is not a collection of loosely related questions, but a coherent and psychometrically validated instrument suitable for structured use in educational contexts.



6.2 Student Perspectives: Patterns and Motivations

The qualitative interviews with students revealed patterns that help explain how problematic gaming behaviours gradually develop. A recurring finding was the tendency toward “binge gaming” during weekends, when parental supervision was reduced and daily routines were less structured. During weekdays, some students limited their gaming time; however, those who engaged in heavier use often did so late at night, directly affecting sleep quality and next-day functioning in school.

Students expressed strong preference for multiplayer games, highlighting the importance of social interaction within gaming environments. Many described gaming as a way to relax, relieve stress, escape responsibilities, or increase self-esteem. These motivations illustrate that gaming is often used as an emotional regulation strategy. While such use may initially appear adaptive, reliance on gaming as a primary coping mechanism can create a reinforcement cycle in which negative emotions increase gaming time, and excessive gaming then contributes to further stress or academic difficulty.

Importantly, many students acknowledged that gaming had at times interfered with homework, family relationships, or sleep routines. Nevertheless, awareness of the potential long-term consequences was generally limited. This gap between behaviour and risk perception highlights the need for preventive education rather than reactive intervention.

6.3 Teacher Observations and Systemic Challenges



The teacher interviews and surveys confirmed that educators frequently observe early warning signs associated with problematic gaming. Teachers reported that gaming occupies a significant place in students' daily conversations and identities. The most commonly observed patterns included difficulty concentrating, emotional instability, irritability when access to gaming is restricted, chronic fatigue due to disrupted sleep, and decline in academic performance.

In addition to student behaviours, teachers identified systemic barriers to effective response. These included limited parental cooperation, lack of clear school-level protocols, and insufficient access to mental health professionals. The absence of structured procedures often leaves teachers to respond individually and inconsistently, which can reduce the effectiveness of preventive efforts.

The teacher survey further revealed that a large majority of educators perceive problematic online gaming as a serious and growing issue within schools. Approximately 72% reported that students who show signs of problematic gaming typically spend more than two hours daily on video games. Teachers also associated problematic gaming with academic decline, emotional fluctuation, and social withdrawal.

These findings reinforce the importance of equipping educators with structured tools and consistent response models.

6.4 Quantitative Associations and Risk Factors

The statistical analysis of student responses revealed significant associations between problematic online gaming and several demographic and psychosocial variables.

Gender differences were statistically significant, with boys scoring on average 10 points higher on the POG scale and reporting approximately six to seven additional weekly hours of gaming compared to girls. These results were highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and align with previous research indicating higher prevalence of problematic gaming among boys.

Academic performance was inversely correlated with POG scores ($R = -0.47, p < 0.001$) (p. 12), indicating that students with lower grades were more likely to exhibit problematic patterns. Family income was also negatively correlated with POG ($R = -0.384, p < 0.001$), suggesting greater vulnerability among students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Age showed a negative correlation ($R = -0.368, p < 0.001$), meaning younger students were more likely to demonstrate higher POG scores. This supports the developmental perspective discussed earlier: younger adolescents have less mature impulse control and emotional regulation capacities.

Personality analysis revealed positive association between POG and neuroticism ($R = 0.285$) and negative associations with openness and conscientiousness. Conscientiousness, characterised by self-discipline and goal orientation, appears to function as a protective factor.

Overall, the research confirms that problematic online gaming is influenced by an interaction of behavioural, emotional, academic, socioeconomic and personality factors.

7. EARLY IDENTIFICATION IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

The Early Detection Instrument (EDI) provides schools with a structured approach to identifying students who may be at risk of problematic online gaming. It combines student self-report data with teacher observations to create a multi-source assessment framework.



7.1 Principles of Early Identification

Early identification in schools is not equivalent to clinical diagnosis. Its purpose is to recognise behavioural patterns that may indicate emerging risk and to intervene before more serious consequences develop.

The EDI approach is built on triangulation. It integrates:

- the student's self-reported experience of gaming behaviour,
- the teacher's structured observation of classroom patterns,
- contextual information gathered through communication with families.

This layered approach increases accuracy and reduces reliance on single-source interpretation.

7.2 Core Domains of Observation

Based on the EDI findings, early identification in school settings should focus on patterns across behavioural, emotional, academic and social domains.

Behaviourally, teachers may observe excessive preoccupation with gaming, difficulty disengaging from digital content, and repeated attempts to access devices during inappropriate times. Emotionally, students may display irritability, anxiety, or mood instability, particularly when gaming access is limited. Academically, declining grades, homework neglect and reduced participation may emerge.

Socially, withdrawal from peer activities and increased conflict with family members are commonly reported.

When these indicators appear across multiple domains and persist over time, structured response becomes appropriate.

7.3 Structured School Procedure

The EDI document outlines a clear action procedure. The process begins with systematic observation and documentation by teachers. If concerns persist, the student POG questionnaire may be administered alongside the teacher questionnaire to gather structured data. This is followed by a family interview to contextualise findings and determine whether school-based measures are sufficient or referral to counselling services is warranted.

This procedure ensures proportionality. Not all elevated scores require external referral. Many cases can be addressed through structured classroom strategies and parent collaboration.

7.4 Risk Profiles as Heuristic Guidance

The EDI identifies five heuristic risk profiles: boys, younger students, students with lower academic performance, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and students with certain personality characteristics (e.g., high neuroticism or low conscientiousness).

The document emphasises that these profiles should not be treated as diagnostic categories. They serve as practical guidance to help educators focus monitoring efforts where vulnerability may be higher.

7.5 Ethical Considerations

The EDI explicitly states that belonging to a risk profile does not equal problematic gaming. Ethical implementation requires caution, transparency, and avoidance of stigmatisation.

Early identification should always prioritise support. The purpose is to protect learning and wellbeing, not to label students.



8. RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Problematic online gaming develops through the interaction of multiple influences rather than a single cause. It reflects a dynamic relationship between individual characteristics, developmental stage, family environment, school context and social factors. Recognising these elements allows educators to move from reactive responses toward structured and preventive action.

The GameOver research identified several variables associated with higher levels of problematic online gaming. Gender differences were statistically significant, with boys reporting higher average gaming scores and spending more time gaming than girls. This finding does not imply that girls are unaffected; rather, it suggests that certain gaming patterns may be more prevalent among boys and that prevention strategies should remain attentive to gender-related behavioural tendencies.

Age was negatively associated with problematic gaming, indicating that younger students appear more vulnerable. This aligns with developmental research showing that impulse control and emotional regulation continue to mature during adolescence. Younger adolescents may struggle more with self-limitation and may find it more difficult to disengage from highly stimulating digital environments.

Academic performance showed a strong inverse relationship with problematic gaming. Students with lower grades were more likely to report higher levels of problematic gaming behaviour. The relationship is complex and potentially bidirectional. Academic frustration may increase reliance on gaming as an emotional escape, while excessive gaming may reduce time and cognitive resources available for schoolwork. Over time, these dynamics may reinforce each other.

Family income was also negatively associated with problematic gaming. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may have fewer opportunities to participate in structured extracurricular activities and may experience lower levels of parental supervision due to work demands. In such contexts, digital entertainment may become the most accessible leisure activity. Socioeconomic stress can further increase emotional vulnerability, indirectly strengthening reliance on gaming as a coping mechanism.



Personality traits also demonstrated significant associations. Higher levels of neuroticism were linked to higher problematic gaming scores, suggesting that students prone to anxiety, mood instability or emotional distress may be more likely to use gaming as a means of emotional regulation. Conscientiousness emerged as a protective factor. Students with higher self-discipline, organisational capacity and goal orientation were less likely to develop problematic patterns. Openness to experience also showed a negative association, suggesting that broader interests and diverse activities may distribute engagement more evenly across domains rather than concentrating excessively on gaming. Qualitative findings provide additional insight into contextual factors. Students frequently described gaming as a way to relieve stress, reduce boredom, connect socially or escape responsibilities. Teachers reported observing emotional instability, fatigue and reduced academic engagement among students exhibiting problematic gaming behaviours. These observations reinforce the idea that problematic gaming often reflects unmet emotional or social needs rather than simple disobedience.

Protective factors operate alongside risk factors. Stable family routines, consistent boundaries, open communication, positive school belonging and meaningful extracurricular involvement reduce vulnerability. Emotional awareness and self-regulation skills further strengthen resilience. When students experience competence, recognition and belonging in offline contexts, gaming is less likely to become central to identity and coping.

Importantly, risk factors indicate increased probability rather than inevitability. Belonging to a statistical risk group does not determine outcome. Prevention therefore requires attentiveness without stigmatisation. Educators should use risk awareness to guide support, not to label students.

Understanding risk and protective factors shifts the focus from punishment to strengthening resilience. By reinforcing protective environments and addressing vulnerabilities early, schools can reduce the likelihood that gaming patterns develop into more persistent difficulties.



9. UNIVERSAL PREVENTION FRAMEWORK

Effective prevention of problematic online gaming requires a structured, school-wide approach. The GameOver project adopts a three-level prevention framework that integrates universal, selective and indicated measures within educational practice.

Universal prevention addresses all students, regardless of current behaviour. Its purpose is to promote balanced digital habits, strengthen emotional awareness and encourage critical reflection about gaming. Universal prevention avoids portraying gaming as inherently negative. Instead, it supports students in understanding moderation, sleep hygiene, time management and the importance of maintaining diverse interests. When these topics are integrated into classroom discussions and curriculum activities, prevention becomes part of everyday learning rather than an exceptional intervention.

Selective prevention targets groups who may be more vulnerable based on identified risk patterns. Younger students, those experiencing academic difficulties, or those demonstrating emotional instability may benefit from additional mentoring or structured support. Selective prevention does not imply that these students have a problem; it recognises increased vulnerability and reinforces protective skills before difficulties escalate.

Indicated prevention applies to students who are already showing consistent warning signs across behavioural, emotional and academic domains. At this stage, structured observation, supportive conversation and collaboration with families become central. The EDI outlines a stepwise process that includes systematic monitoring, use of the student and teacher questionnaires, family communication and referral to counselling when necessary. Indicated prevention remains educational in orientation and only moves toward specialised services if school-based measures are insufficient.

Across all levels, dialogue is essential. Student interviews revealed that many adolescents recognise the potential downsides of excessive gaming but struggle with regulation. Moralising or fear-based messaging may reduce openness, whereas reflective discussion encourages ownership of behaviour. Prevention is most effective when students are engaged as partners in understanding balance rather than recipients of prohibition.

Family cooperation plays a crucial role. Teachers frequently report that inconsistent rules or limited parental awareness complicate intervention efforts. Schools therefore contribute not only by supporting students directly but also by strengthening communication with families. Providing practical guidance, encouraging shared routines and modelling balanced digital habits create consistency across environments.

A universal prevention framework also depends on institutional coherence. Clear device policies, shared expectations among staff and structured referral pathways ensure consistency. When schools respond collectively rather than individually, prevention efforts gain credibility and sustainability.

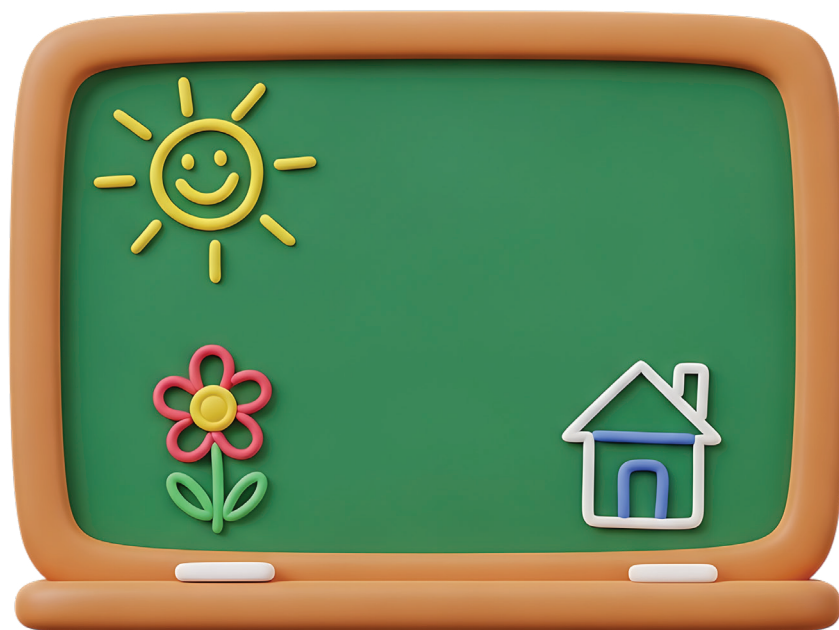
Prevention is not a one-time campaign but an ongoing process. It requires consistent reinforcement of routines, reflective discussion and monitoring of behavioural patterns. By combining research-informed awareness with empathetic educational practice, schools can foster digital balance while respecting the developmental realities of adolescence.



10. CLASSROOM PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Classroom prevention strategies translate research findings into daily educational practice. While school-wide policies create structure, the classroom remains the primary space where behavioural norms, emotional regulation and digital habits are shaped. Effective prevention does not rely on prohibition alone; it combines clear boundaries, reflective dialogue, structured routines and skill development.

The following strategies are designed to be realistic for everyday classroom implementation and adaptable across different educational systems.



10.1 Establishing Clear and Consistent Digital Boundaries

One of the most important preventive measures is clarity. Students function best when expectations are predictable and consistently applied. Ambiguity around device use increases negotiation, conflict and rule-testing.

A structured classroom device policy should include:

- clearly defined moments when devices are allowed and when they are not,
- visible and consistent enforcement,
- a neutral tone that frames structure as support rather than punishment.

Many schools successfully implement a “phone parking” system. In this model, students place devices in a designated space at the beginning of the lesson. The system should be introduced collaboratively, allowing students to understand its purpose: reducing distraction and supporting concentration. When students perceive the structure as fair and consistent, compliance improves.

Consistency across teachers significantly increases effectiveness. If rules vary widely between classrooms, students may perceive restrictions as arbitrary and resist them more strongly.

10.2 Promoting Reflective Dialogue About Gaming

Prevention is most effective when students are invited to think critically about their own habits. Reflective dialogue reduces defensiveness and promotes ownership.

Structured classroom discussions may explore questions such as:

- What makes games engaging?
- How does gaming affect sleep?
- What happens to concentration after long gaming sessions?
- How do we know when something becomes “too much”?

The aim is not to shame or accuse, but to stimulate metacognition. Students often recognise patterns in themselves once space for reflection is created.

Short reflective activities may include:

- anonymous surveys about daily screen time,
- journaling about weekend routines,
- small-group discussions about balance and priorities.

These exercises normalise conversation about digital habits and reduce stigma.

10.3 Integrating Digital Balance into Curriculum

Digital balance should not be isolated as a separate topic but embedded within existing subjects.

In language classes, students may write essays reflecting on a day without digital devices or explore themes of moderation and responsibility in literature.

In social studies or civics, discussions can address autonomy, self-control and the societal impact of digital technologies.

In mathematics, students may calculate weekly screen time and convert it into monthly or yearly figures, encouraging quantitative reflection on habits.

In health or ethics education, lessons may address sleep hygiene, emotional coping strategies and stress management.

Integration ensures that digital balance becomes part of educational culture rather than an occasional awareness campaign.



10.4 Strengthening Attention and Self-Regulation Skills

Because problematic gaming often relates to impulse control and attention regulation, classroom practices that strengthen these capacities function as indirect prevention.

Teachers may implement short focus-building exercises at the beginning of lessons. These may include:

- two-minute breathing practices,
- silent reading periods,
- structured goal-setting for the lesson,
- brief reflection on what students aim to complete.

Time-management scaffolding is also beneficial. Breaking tasks into smaller steps with clear time frames reduces cognitive overload and frustration, which may otherwise drive escape into digital environments.

Providing structured transitions between activities helps students practice shifting attention – a skill essential for digital self-regulation.

10.5 Supporting Emotional Regulation

Many students use gaming to cope with stress, boredom or anxiety. Classroom environments that strengthen emotional literacy reduce reliance on digital escape.

Teachers can regularly incorporate short emotional check-ins, asking students to identify how they are feeling at the start of class. Reflection circles once per week can provide structured space to discuss stressors and coping strategies.

Teaching simple regulation techniques – such as paced breathing, grounding exercises or short stretching breaks – equips students with alternative tools for managing discomfort.

Normalising conversations about stress reduces the need for avoidance behaviours.

10.6 Encouraging Alternative Sources of Competence

Gaming environments provide clear feedback, progression and recognition. Classrooms can replicate some of these motivational elements in healthier ways.

Teachers may:

- provide incremental feedback on progress,
- celebrate effort and improvement rather than only final results,
- introduce cooperative tasks that build peer connection,
- create classroom roles that foster responsibility and leadership.

When students experience competence and belonging within school, reliance on digital environments for validation decreases.

10.7 Structuring Break Times

Boredom is frequently cited as a trigger for excessive gaming. Schools can reduce this risk by offering meaningful alternatives during breaks.

Structured options may include:

- board games,
- creative corners,
- short physical activities,
- discussion prompts encouraging peer interaction.

When offline alternatives are accessible and appealing, students are less likely to default automatically to screen use.

10.8 Addressing Sleep Awareness

Given the strong link between late-night gaming and daytime fatigue observed in the GameOver research, classroom education on sleep hygiene is essential.

Teachers can incorporate brief lessons on:

- the role of sleep in memory consolidation,
- the impact of blue light exposure,
- recommended sleep duration for adolescents,
- practical evening routines.

Students often underestimate the cognitive effects of sleep deprivation. When they understand the connection between rest and performance, motivation for behavioural change increases.

10.9 Responding to Early Warning Signs in Class

When a teacher observes repeated signs of distraction, fatigue or irritability, the response should begin with observation and conversation rather than accusation.

A supportive approach might include:

- noting patterns over time,
- inviting the student to reflect on routines,
- discussing strategies for improving balance,
- agreeing on small, achievable behavioural adjustments.

Escalation should remain proportionate. Not all instances require formal referral. Many cases respond well to structured classroom support and family communication.



10.10 Maintaining Professional Consistency

Prevention strategies are most effective when applied consistently. Teachers should avoid dramatic or emotional reactions to device-related incidents. Calm, predictable enforcement builds credibility. Professional boundaries are also important. Educators are responsible for creating structure and initiating support, but they are not solely responsible for solving complex behavioural patterns. Collaboration with colleagues and support staff strengthens sustainability.

10.11 Creating a Classroom Culture of Balance

Ultimately, prevention is not about controlling devices but about fostering balance. A classroom culture that values:

- focus,
- respectful interaction,
- structured routines,
- emotional awareness,
- responsible autonomy,

naturally reduces vulnerability to problematic gaming patterns.

When students experience clarity, belonging and competence within the classroom, digital environments are less likely to become their primary source of validation or escape.

Classroom prevention strategies therefore operate not only at the behavioural level but at the relational and cultural level. Through structured guidance, reflective dialogue and consistent boundaries, educators can significantly reduce the likelihood that gaming habits escalate into patterns of concern.

11. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING INTEGRATION

Problematic online gaming is frequently linked to emotional regulation, stress management and social belonging. Research conducted within the GameOver project indicates that many students use gaming as a way to cope with negative emotions, relieve stress or escape academic pressure. For this reason, prevention cannot rely solely on device management; it must also address the emotional competencies that influence behaviour.

Integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into everyday classroom practice strengthens protective factors and reduces vulnerability to excessive gaming patterns.

11.1 Emotional Awareness as a Protective Factor

Students who are able to recognise and name their emotions are better equipped to regulate them. When emotions remain unidentified or overwhelming, avoidance strategies—including excessive gaming—may become more attractive.

Teachers can integrate emotional awareness in simple and consistent ways. Beginning a lesson with a brief emotional check-in allows students to pause and reflect on their internal state. This may involve identifying a single word describing how they feel or rating their stress level on a simple scale. Over time, these small practices build emotional vocabulary and self-awareness.

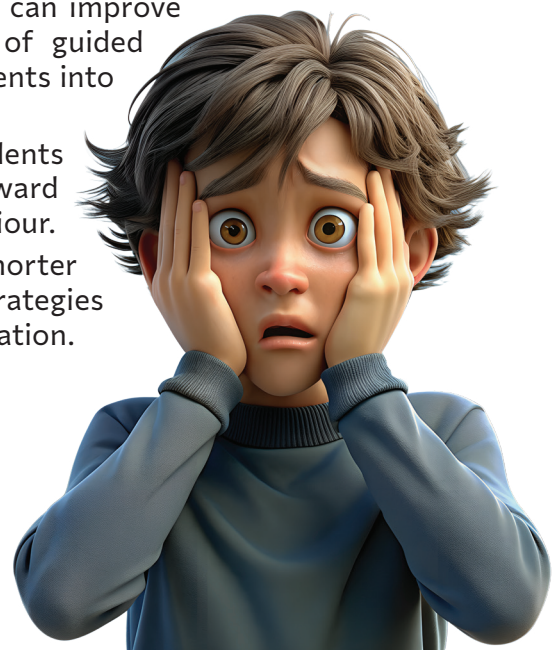
Reflection journals provide another effective tool. Students may be encouraged to reflect weekly on moments of stress and the strategies they used to cope. The aim is not to monitor behaviour but to build insight into patterns.

11.2 Developing Self-Regulation Skills

Self-regulation involves managing impulses, sustaining attention and delaying gratification. Because adolescence is characterised by ongoing development of executive functioning, classroom structures that support regulation are essential.

Short mindfulness or breathing exercises at the start of a lesson can improve attention and reduce emotional reactivity. Even two minutes of guided breathing may help students transition from stimulating environments into focused learning.

Goal-setting activities also strengthen regulation. When students articulate clear, achievable objectives for a lesson and reflect afterward on whether they met them, they practice monitoring their own behaviour. Time segmentation techniques—such as breaking assignments into shorter intervals—help students build tolerance for sustained effort. These strategies indirectly reduce the appeal of digital escape during academic frustration.



11.3 Coping Strategies Beyond Digital Escape

When gaming functions primarily as a coping mechanism, students may lack alternative strategies. Educators can explicitly teach healthy coping methods, including:

- problem-solving approaches,
- physical movement as stress relief,
- creative expression,
- structured peer support.

Class discussions can explore the concept of coping directly. Students may compare different strategies for dealing with boredom or frustration and evaluate their long-term effectiveness. By examining these strategies critically, students become more intentional about their choices.

11.4 Building Peer Connection and Belonging

A strong sense of belonging within the classroom reduces reliance on online communities for validation. Cooperative learning activities, structured group tasks and peer mentoring systems foster real-world connection.

Teachers can intentionally rotate group compositions to strengthen inclusive interaction and prevent social isolation. When students feel recognised and valued within their school environment, gaming becomes one activity among many rather than a primary source of identity.

Encouraging respectful dialogue and collaborative problem-solving reinforces interpersonal competence, another protective factor identified in research.

11.5 Managing Academic Stress

Academic pressure is frequently cited as a trigger for increased gaming. When students feel overwhelmed, digital environments may provide a predictable and controllable alternative.

Teachers can mitigate this by clarifying expectations, offering structured scaffolding and providing feedback that emphasises growth rather than failure. When students perceive challenges as manageable and support as accessible, avoidance behaviours decrease.

Normalising mistakes as part of learning also reduces anxiety-driven escape patterns.

11.6 Embedding SEL in Daily Practice

Social-emotional learning does not require separate lessons in every case. It can be embedded in existing routines. Brief reflection moments, collaborative problem-solving discussions and emotional vocabulary integration into subject teaching all contribute to a supportive classroom climate.

Over time, consistent SEL integration strengthens resilience and reduces vulnerability to problematic gaming behaviours.



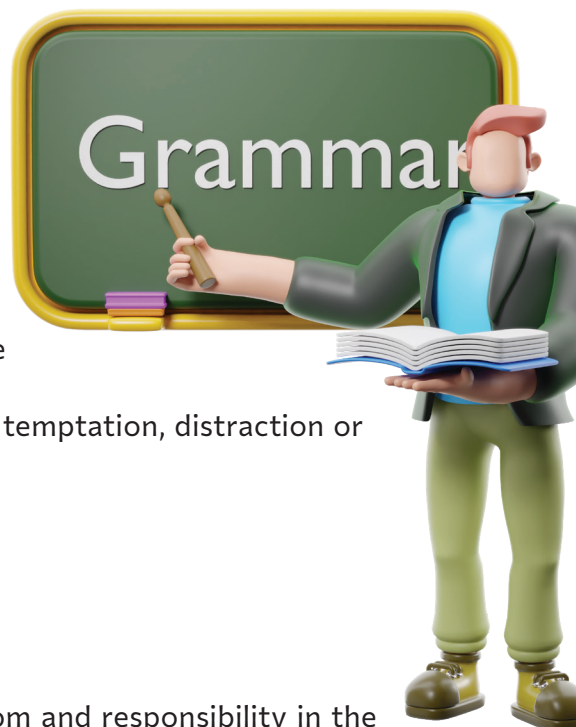
12. DIGITAL BALANCE CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Digital balance is most effective when treated as a cross-curricular theme rather than an isolated topic. Integrating reflection on digital habits into multiple subject areas normalises discussion and reinforces consistent messaging.

12.1 Language and Literature

In language classes, students can explore themes of moderation, responsibility and self-control through literature and creative writing. Reflective essays such as “A Day Without My Phone” encourage students to imagine alternative routines and examine emotional responses to disconnection.

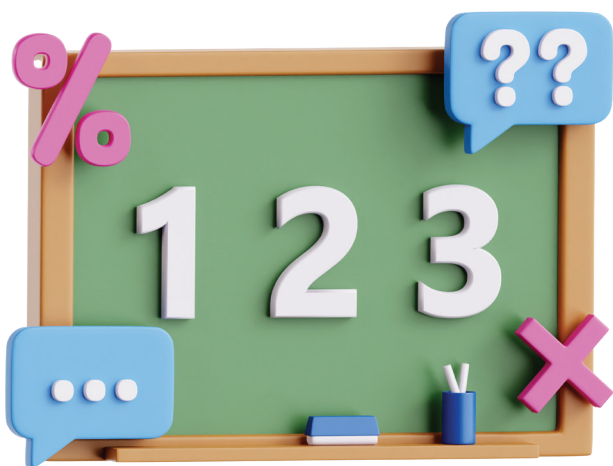
Literary analysis may also examine characters who struggle with temptation, distraction or balance, drawing parallels to contemporary digital habits.



12.2 Social Studies and Civic Education

Civic education offers opportunities to discuss autonomy, freedom and responsibility in the digital age. Students may analyse how technology shapes social interaction, attention spans and democratic participation.

Debates on digital rights and responsibilities encourage critical thinking about personal agency and societal impact.



12.3 Mathematics and Data Literacy

Mathematics lessons can incorporate data analysis related to screen time. Students may calculate weekly or monthly gaming hours and convert them into long-term totals. Visualising cumulative time often produces stronger awareness than abstract discussion.

Statistical interpretation exercises can also involve examining hypothetical data about gaming and academic performance, reinforcing critical evaluation skills.

12.4 Health and Physical Education

Health education provides a natural context for discussing sleep hygiene, sedentary behaviour and the physiological impact of prolonged screen exposure.

Students can examine the relationship between sleep, memory consolidation and concentration.

Practical routines for improving sleep quality can be discussed and evaluated.

Physical education classes reinforce the importance of balanced movement, offering direct contrast to sedentary gaming patterns.

12.5 Ethics and Philosophy

Ethics lessons can explore moderation, habit formation and the concept of self-control. Students may reflect on questions such as what it means to live a balanced life or how habits shape identity.

Philosophical inquiry into autonomy and digital influence encourages deeper reflection on personal responsibility.

12.6 Project-Based Learning

Schools may implement interdisciplinary projects focused on digital wellbeing. Students might design awareness campaigns, create informational posters or develop peer presentations on healthy gaming habits.

Active engagement fosters ownership and reduces resistance.

12.7 Sustaining Consistency Across Subjects

Consistency across subjects reinforces prevention. When multiple teachers address digital balance within their respective disciplines, students receive coherent messaging rather than isolated warnings.

Curriculum integration ensures that reflection on gaming habits becomes part of educational culture rather than a temporary initiative.



13. WORKING WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Effective prevention of problematic online gaming requires strong collaboration between schools and families. While teachers often observe early warning signs in classroom settings, daily routines, sleep patterns and device access are largely shaped within the home environment. Consistency between school expectations and family practices significantly increases the likelihood of positive behavioural change.

Research within the GameOver project indicates that limited parental engagement and inconsistent digital boundaries can hinder prevention efforts. Teachers frequently report that students receive mixed messages regarding gaming limits, particularly when families lack clear routines or when supervision is constrained by work obligations. For this reason, schools play an important role not only in supporting students directly but also in strengthening parental awareness and capacity.

13.1 Establishing a Collaborative Tone

Communication with families should be framed as partnership rather than confrontation. When concerns arise, the initial objective is to share observations and explore patterns collaboratively. Blame-oriented language often leads to defensiveness and reduced cooperation.

An effective communication structure involves three components: describing observed behaviour factually, expressing concern for the student's wellbeing and proposing joint strategies for improvement. For example, a teacher might state that the student appears fatigued and distracted, express concern about potential sleep disruption and suggest discussing evening routines together.

The emphasis should remain on shared goals: academic success, emotional wellbeing and balanced development.

13.2 Raising Awareness Without Alarmism

Parent meetings or informational sessions can address digital balance more broadly. These sessions may cover topics such as adolescent brain development, sleep hygiene, emotional regulation and the role of structured routines.

Providing evidence-based information helps families understand that problematic gaming is not simply a matter of disobedience but may be linked to developmental vulnerabilities and stress. At the same time, communication should avoid exaggeration or fear-based messaging, which may undermine credibility.

Printed guidance materials summarising practical recommendations can reinforce discussions and support implementation at home.

13.3 Practical Family Strategies

Families benefit from concrete, realistic strategies rather than abstract warnings. Schools may encourage parents to establish consistent daily routines that include defined study time, device-free periods and regular sleep schedules.



Creating device-free zones within the home, particularly in bedrooms at night, reduces opportunities for late-night gaming. Shared family rules regarding screen use increase clarity and reduce negotiation. When adults model balanced digital habits themselves, expectations become more credible.

Open conversation is equally important. Encouraging families to discuss gaming interests with curiosity rather than suspicion strengthens trust and makes it easier to identify emerging concerns.

13.4 Supporting Families Facing Structural Challenges

Some families face economic or logistical constraints that limit supervision or access to alternative activities. Schools should remain sensitive to these realities and avoid unrealistic expectations.

In such cases, schools may offer additional after-school programmes, structured extracurricular opportunities or access to counselling services. Strengthening protective environments outside the home can compensate for limitations within it.

13.5 When to Escalate Support

If collaborative strategies do not produce improvement and problematic patterns persist, families should be informed about available support services. Referral to school psychologists or external counselling should be framed as supportive rather than punitive.

Clear documentation and transparent communication help families understand the rationale for further steps.

Working effectively with parents requires patience, empathy and consistency. When schools and families align expectations and reinforce shared routines, students are more likely to achieve sustainable digital balance.



14. WHOLE-SCHOOL POLICY AND STRUCTURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Preventing problematic online gaming cannot rely solely on individual teacher initiatives. Sustainable impact requires coherent whole-school structures that reinforce consistent expectations, monitoring and support pathways.

A whole-school approach ensures that prevention becomes embedded within institutional culture rather than remaining dependent on individual enthusiasm.



14.1 Developing Clear Digital Use Policies

Schools should establish transparent policies regarding device use during instructional time, breaks and extracurricular activities. These policies must be clearly communicated to students, staff and families.

Consistency is critical. When teachers apply rules differently, students may perceive restrictions as arbitrary. A shared framework reduces ambiguity and strengthens credibility.

Policies should emphasise balance and educational purpose rather than prohibition alone. Framing rules as supportive of concentration and wellbeing fosters cooperation.

14.2 Establishing Structured Monitoring Systems

Systematic monitoring allows early identification without excessive surveillance. Schools may incorporate brief digital habit questions into regular wellbeing surveys or pastoral check-ins.

The Early Detection Instrument (EDI) provides a structured approach to screening and risk identification. Its use should follow clear internal procedures, including documentation, discussion within support teams and proportionate response planning.

Monitoring systems must respect confidentiality and data protection standards.

14.3 Strengthening Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Effective prevention requires collaboration among teachers, school psychologists, counsellors and administrators. Regular meetings of support teams facilitate discussion of observed patterns and coordinated action.

Interdisciplinary cooperation ensures that no single staff member bears responsibility alone and that interventions remain balanced and professional.

14.4 Professional Development for Staff

Staff training increases confidence and consistency in responding to digital behaviour concerns. Training sessions may address adolescent brain development, emotional regulation, EDI implementation and communication with families.

When educators share a common understanding of problematic gaming and prevention strategies, responses become more coherent and less reactive.



14.5 Promoting a School Culture of Balance

Beyond formal policies, school culture influences behaviour. Campaigns promoting digital balance, student-led awareness initiatives and visible messaging about sleep and wellbeing reinforce shared values.

Schools may create digital wellbeing weeks, reflection projects or peer ambassador programmes. Such initiatives signal institutional commitment without stigmatising individuals.

14.6 Integrating Prevention into Strategic Planning

Long-term sustainability requires integration of digital wellbeing objectives into school development plans. Including prevention goals within institutional strategy ensures continuity beyond project cycles. Periodic evaluation of device policies, monitoring outcomes and student feedback allows adaptation and improvement.

14.7 Ensuring Proportionality and Ethics

Whole-school strategies must maintain ethical safeguards. Students should not be labelled or publicly identified based on screening results. Data should be used to inform support rather than discipline.

A balanced whole-school approach combines structure with empathy. By aligning policy, professional development and collaborative support systems, schools create environments where digital habits can be guided constructively rather than managed through crisis intervention.

Through coherent institutional frameworks, prevention becomes sustainable, consistent and integrated into everyday educational practice.

ETHICAL DISCLAIMER

This toolkit:

- Does not diagnose Gaming Disorder
- Uses observed risk terminology
- Avoids labelling students
- Encourages support over punishment

High concern indicates need for support – not a clinical label.

FINAL MESSAGE

To Students:

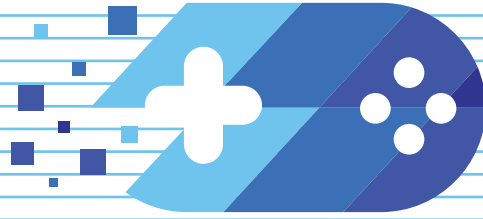
*“You are not bad if it is difficult to disconnect.
You can learn to manage.”*

To Educators:

“You are not alone. Structured prevention creates balanced digital environments.”

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game
OVER

Switch Off Addiction

Power Up Life

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