game
OVER

Toolkit 1
For Students

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Foreword

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

The project includes 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 an Early Detection Instrument (EDI), dedicated toolkits for educators, students and parents, alongside an online professional training programme.

One of the coolest parts of the GameOver Project is a tool we call the Early Detection Instrument (EDI). Think of it as a high-tech scanner for problematic online gaming, designed to catch "glitches" in gaming habits before they turn into a full-on system crash. It includes a student's questionnaire - a self-report where you get to share how you're feeling and playing.

The EDI is publicly accessible for everyone on the official project platform. You can find it here: https://gameover-project.eu/edi/

It is important to know that the EDI is not a doctor's diagnosis. It's not about labeling you or "diagnosing" you with a disorder. Its purpose is 100% educational and preventive. The EDI is like a "Check Engine" light for your gaming life. It tells you when something needs a tune-up so you can keep playing safely for the long run.

Chapter 1. Problematic Online Gaming: What's Really Going On?

Whether you're a pro-level carry, a creative builder, or just a casual mobile gamer, you are part of a massive global community. Gaming isn't just a hobby anymore—it's the world's biggest playground. In 2026, over 3.3 billion people worldwide are gamers. That's nearly half the planet!

And while in previous years, gaming was mainly a boys activity, current statistics show that in more recent years almost as many girls as boys are playing video games. And 1/5 of gamers are teens, just like you!

Gamers Worldwide by Gender

46%

53%

■ Boys   ■ Girls
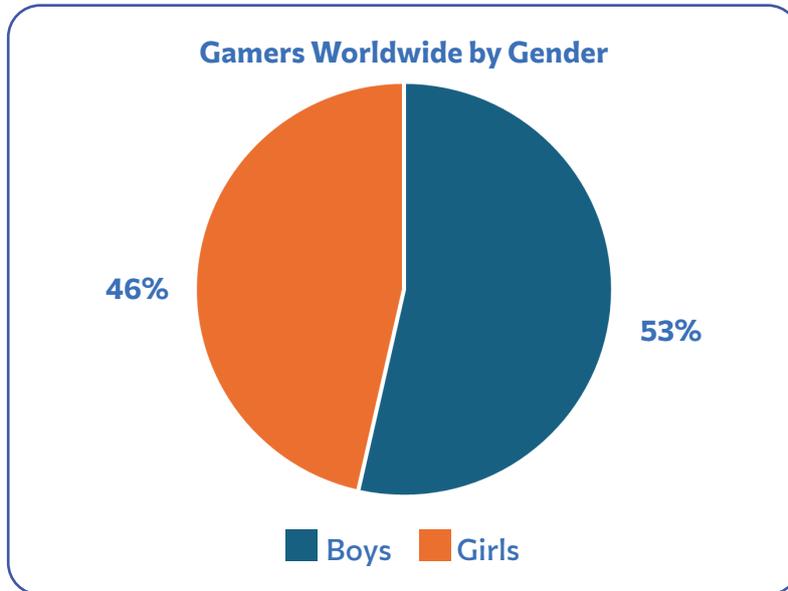
Ever wondered why you can spend hours perfecting your base in a sandbox game? It's not just because the graphics are cool, it's because gaming feeds our brains in ways the real world sometimes forgets to.

We asked students your age why they play, and they gave us a list of reasons. Check out what motivates teens to log in:

WHY THEY PLAY

The Ultimate Chill Pill: Life can be loud. Gaming is a way to hit the "mute" button on school stress and just vibe.

The Global Lobby: It's where you meet your best friends, even if they live 3,000 kilometers away. It's your digital hangout spot.

The Competitive Spark: Nothing beats the rush of outsmarting an opponent or seeing your name at the top of the leaderboard.

The Great Escape: Sometimes, real life feels like a "Hard Mode" mission you didn't sign up for. Stepping into a game lets you leave those responsibilities behind for a while.

The Confidence Buff: In a game, you get instant "Gamer Cred." Seeing your stats go up and getting a "GG!" from teammates makes you feel like a total boss, boosting your self-esteem when you need it most.

The Storyteller's Dream: Whether you're a dragon-slaying warrior or a futuristic detective, games let you "try on" different versions of yourself and live out epic stories you won't find in a textbook.

Pause & Reflect

💬

Which one of these is your **Main Mission**?
Do you play mostly to win, mostly to escape or just for the story?

So, if gaming is such a high-tier way to spend time, how does it suddenly become a problem? It's not about the game being "evil" or you being a "bad gamer." It's actually more about balance.

While gaming is an incredible way to explore new universes, there is a point where the "fun" starts to look more like a "glitch." Think of it like a Stamina Bar in your favorite RPG. In the game, you use stamina to sprint or perform cool moves, but if you run out, your character slows down or gets stuck. Real life has a stamina bar too! Gaming is a blast, but when it starts "draining" your actual health, your sleep, your grades, or your real-world friendships, it shifts from a fun side quest to a problematic habit.

This is what we call **Problematic Online Gaming (POG)**. It isn't about how much you play games; it's about whether the game has started playing you. When the urge to stay online starts to override your hunger, your need for sleep, or your desire to see your friends in person, it's time to check if your hobby has turned into a "debuff" on your real-life stats.

Problematic Online Gaming is less about the clock and more about control. It's that feeling when:

- You **want** to stop, but it feels like your hand is glued to the mouse.

- You feel **irritable or "salty"** the moment you have to log off.

- The game stops being a "choice" and starts feeling like a "requirement."

Pause & Reflect

Imagine a bag of your favorite spicy chips. Eating a few is awesome. Eating the whole bag might make you feel sick. Eating only those chips for breakfast, lunch, and dinner? That's when you've got a problem. POG is just "eating the whole bag" but with games.

Mini-Quest: Check yourself, before you wreck yourself!

Here we have listed a few statements or behaviors which are intended to measure your knowledge of POG. Considering what you have learned so far for POG, check for each statement whether it is **Healthy**, **Risky** or **Problematic**.

Statements	Healthy	Risky	Problematic
First, I finish my homework, then I play games.			
I skip meals to finish my game.			
If I get interrupted during my game, I get frustrated.			
I stop playing at least for one hour before going to bed.			
I've skipped sport practice or going out with friends to have more time for games.			
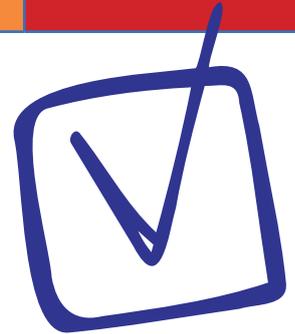
Chapter 2. Stats & Status: How Gaming Shapes Your Reality

Before we talk about the "glitches," let's give credit where it's due: gaming can be an absolute powerhouse for your brain and social life! When you're navigating a complex map with teammates or coordinating a 40-person raid, you're not just "playing"—you're training. Research shows that gamers often have faster reaction times and better spatial awareness (the ability to visualize 3D objects) than non-gamers.

Beyond the brain gains, gaming is the ultimate social hub. Video games can help you build teamwork and communication skills that are essential in the real world. For many, it's a safe space to de-stress after a tough day at school, providing a sense of achievement when things feel stuck in real life. Whether you're learning a new language by chatting with international teammates or building resilience by trying a "Soulslike" boss for the 50th time, gaming offers a unique toolkit of skills that — if used correctly — can help you level up every part of your life.

This was the positive side of things, now let's talk about the negative side of too much gaming. In gaming, a debuff is a status effect that weakens your character—maybe you move slower, take more damage, or lose mana. In real life, Problematic Online Gaming (POG) works the same way. It doesn't just stay on the screen; it leaks into your brain, your body, and your relationships.

Here is a breakdown of **how too much gaming can "glitch" your real-life stats, based on what scientists have discovered**.

1. The Brain Lag (Cognitive Effects)

When you play, your brain is flooded with dopamine—the "feel-good" chemical. If you play too much, your brain gets used to that high level of excitement. Real life (like a math class) starts to feel "boring" because it doesn't give you a dopamine hit every 5 seconds. This can lead to a shorter attention span and trouble focusing on tasks. Scientists have found that excessive gaming can affect the prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain that helps you plan and control impulses. It becomes harder to say "just one more round" because your "Stop" button is literally weakening.

2. The Emotional Rollercoaster (Emotional Effects)

Many students use games to "escape" sadness or stress. While it works for an hour, the science shows that avoiding your feelings instead of dealing with them can actually lead to higher levels of anxiety and depression over time. Which can activate a vicious cycle in which too much gaming leads to lower mood, and lower mood stimulates excessive gaming.

3. The "Ghosted" Squad (Social Effects)

You might be talking to people online, but "digital-only" friendships don't always provide the same support as hanging out in person. And spending too much time on in-game friendship can lead to not spending enough time on real-life relationships. When the game becomes the most important thing, you might start blowing off your real-life friends or start neglecting or arguing with your family. Problematic Online Gaming is one of the biggest causes of "Home PVP" (arguments with parents).

4. The GPA Drop (Academic Effects)

"I'll just do one more mission before my homework…" and three hours later, the homework isn't even started or "Just one more round and I'll go to bed" and the gaming sessions continues for several more hours. Sounds familiar? Studies show a direct link between problematic gaming and lower grades, mostly because of missed assignments and extreme fatigue. Video games are designed in a way that make us want to play more and more and can have addictive effects on the developing brain.

5. The Health Bar (Physical Health and Well-being)

Excessive gaming can harm our health in several ways. The blue light from screens tells your brain

HOW TOO MUCH GAMING CAN "GLITCH" YOUR REAL-LIFE STATS

it's daytime, blocking melatonin (the sleep hormone). This leads to having trouble going to bed, sleeplessness, waking up often during the night and having a nervous sleep which results in feeling like a zombie on the next day. Believe it or not, "Gamer's Thumb" (De Quervain's Tenosynovitis) and Carpal Tunnel are real medical issues caused by repetitive clicking and poor posture. When we're focused on a screen, we often ignore our "Fullness" signals, leading to mindless snacking on "low-tier" fuel like soda and chips.

Mini-Quest: The "Salty" Scale

On a scale of 0 to 10, **how do you feel** when your internet cuts out unexpectedly?

0-3
"No biggie, I'll go grab a snack or read."
(Safe Zone)

4-7
"Super annoyed. I'm going to be grumpy for an hour.
(Caution Zone)

8-10
"Full-on rage. I might throw something or yell at whoever is nearby."
(Critical Zone)

Chapter 3. The Architecture of Addiction: How Games Are Built to Keep You In

Ever felt like you had to log in just to finish a daily quest? Or felt that rush of adrenaline right before opening a crate, hoping for a "Legendary" skin? That's not an accident. Modern games are masterpieces of engineering, but they aren't just engineered for fun—they are engineered for retention, to keep you playing. Developers use specific "psychological hooks" to keep you in the game longer. Understanding these will help you better understand your own brain and be more protected from malicious influence.

Here is a brief overview of how game developers try to "hook" you to play more:

HOW GAME DEVELOPERS TRY TO "HOOK" YOU TO PLAY MORE

* **RNG (Random Number Generation)** is the "invisible dice roll" behind your favorite games. Whether it's a loot box, a card pack, or a Gacha pull, it's based on Variable Ratio Reinforcement. What does that mean? Your brain releases more dopamine (the "feel-good" chemical) when a reward is "maybe" rather than "definitely." It's the same feeling as a slot machine. You think, *"The next one has to be the Gold tier!"* But the math doesn't care how many times you've lost. It's always a gamble.

* **FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out)** is a powerful "debuff" on your decision-making. Humans are hard-wired to avoid loss. Games exploit this by making you feel like you're losing something if you aren't logged in. Once you buy it, you feel like you must play every day to get your money's worth. It turns your hobby into a second job. "Only 2 days left to get the Cyber-Dragon skin!" or "Buy the Season Pass now and get a 15% discount!". Sounds familiar?

* Ever seen a message like *"Day 14 Streak! Don't break it now!"* or *"Log-in for 31 days in a row and get the special mount!"*? These systems are designed to build a habit. By rewarding you for just showing up, the game becomes part of your daily routine—like brushing your teeth, but with more flashing lights.

* Many games with Gacha mechanics (spending real money or in-game currency to receive a random reward) use a "Pity" mechanic. After a certain number of failed pulls, the game guarantees you a high-tier reward. It makes you think, *"I've already spent 70 pulls, I might as well spend more to hit the 'Pity' mark so my progress isn't wasted!"*.

* In the Season Pass have you noticed how the best rewards are always at the very end of the pass? If you're at Tier 80 of the season pass and the season ends in 2 days, the game offers you the chance to "Buy Tiers" with real money. It creates a "false emergency" where you pay to avoid losing progress you worked hard for.

* In some competitive games, if you don't play for a week, your "Rank" or "Rating" starts to drop automatically. This turns gaming into a chore. You aren't playing because you want to; you're playing because you're afraid of losing the status you already earned.

* Some games use dark patterns—tricky UI designs that make it easy to spend real money (or in-game premium currencies – gems, crystals, etc.) by accident or out of frustration. If a game makes a level "impossible" unless you buy a boost or makes you wait for a specific amount of time before you can retry, that's not a challenge; it's a paywall.

The Cheat Code

The best way to beat these "traps" is to recognize them. When you see a "Limited Time Offer," tell yourself: *"That's just a FOMO hook."* It puts the power back in your hands!

Mini-Quest: Identify the Hook!

Think about your favorite online game right now. Does it use any of these?
(Check all that apply):

The "Near Miss"
You almost got the rare item, it was right there on the spinning wheel! ☐

The Countdown
A timer showing when an item disappears from the shop. ☐

The Daily Reward
Getting a tiny bit of currency just for opening the game. ☐

The Energy Bar
Making you wait (or pay) to play another round. ☐

Pause & Reflect

💬 If your favorite game didn't have any rewards, levels, or skins—if it was just the gameplay—would you still play it for 3 hours straight?

Chapter 4. The Danger Zone: What Makes a Gamer Vulnerable to POG and How to Spot It?

In any game, some areas are higher risk than others. You wouldn't walk into a Level 50 dungeon with Level 1 armor, right? In real life, there are certain "environmental conditions" or personal "stats" that can make it easier to fall into the POG trap.

Scientists call these risk factors. **They aren't a guarantee that you'll have a problem, but they are like having a "Weakness to Magic" debuff—they make you more likely to get hit hard by the hooks we talked about in the last chapter.**

So, which are the risk factors that make you more likely to develop problematic online gaming? The results from our own research conducted among approximately 150 students your age, across four countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania, Spain), suggest that some teenagers are more likely to develop problematic online gaming than others.

We identified the following risk factors which are linked to problematic online gaming:

- **Gender** - boys not only spend much more time on videogames than girls, but they are also more likely to engage in excessive or harmful gaming behaviors;
- **Age** – younger children find it more difficult to control their own behavior and are more likely to fall for all the "hooks" video games use to keep them playing;
- **Academic performance** – students who have lower grades and don't feel successful at school are more likely to develop problematic online gaming because they use video games to escape or forget the difficulties, they have at school;
- **Family situation** – in the same way as students who have difficulties at school, those who have problems at home with their parents are more likely to spend excessive amount of time on video games to escape or forget the hardships of real life. If things are stressful at home, the game world becomes a "Safe Zone." While that's okay for a bit, using it as your only way to cope can lead to POG;
- **Personality** – teenagers who often feel sad or anxious can turn to video games as a way to lift up their spirit and brighten their mood.

All of these risk factors can combine and work together to put somebody at a much higher risk for developing problematic online gaming. For example, a 12-year-old boy, who doesn't have friends, have poor grades at school and parents who often argue at home is much more likely to have problems with video games than another 12-year-old boy, who has many friends, good grades and family that supports and helps him.

Pause & Reflect

If you had a totally stress-free week at school and home, do you think you would play more or less?

All of the information above can help us understand which teenagers are more likely to develop problematic online gaming, but how can we find out if somebody has already started developing such issues? How can we know if our friend already has problems with excessive and harmful gaming? If we ask him/her they may deny it, they may even not know it themselves. Luckily there are early warning signs that help us find out if somebody has problematic online gaming.

In gaming, if you see a flicker in the textures or your ping spikes to 999, you know a crash is coming. Real life gives us "error messages" too! These are the early warning signs—little red flags that our behavior is sending to let others know your gaming balance is slipping into the "Danger Zone."

We consulted the scientific literature to find out the exact warning signs that show if somebody has problematic online gaming. Here they are, to help you understand better if you or someone around you has a problem:

WARNING SIGNS

1. The Time Warp (Losing Track of Time)

You log on at 7:00 PM for "just one match," and suddenly it's 11:30 PM. It's like a hole in the space-time continuum! If you find that "10 more minutes" consistently turns into 2 more hours, your internal clock is glitching.

2. The "XP" Hunger (Wanting More and More)

Yesterday, two hours felt like enough. Today, you feel "incomplete" unless you play for four. This is called "tolerance". You get accustomed and need more and more of it to feel the same way. Just like needing a higher level to defeat a boss, your brain starts needing more screen time just to feel "normal."

3. The Academic Lag (Falling Behind)

Is your homework piling up? When gaming takes up the "RAM" (memory) you need for school, you might start missing deadlines, "forgetting" projects, or zoning out during class because you're busy theory-crafting your next build or thinking how to defeat the boss that bettered you several times already.

4. Ghosting the Squad (Choosing Games over Friends)

If you're turning down invites to go to the cinema, play football, or just hang out because you'd rather stay in your gaming chair, you're losing "Social XP." Games are fun, but digital teammates can't replace real-life connections.

5. Stealth Mode (Lying About Game Time)

"Yeah Mom, I only played for an hour," you say, while you know perfectly well that it was much more than that. If you feel the need to hide your gaming habits or lie to your family and teachers about how much you're playing, it's a sign that even you know deep down it's getting out of hand.

6. The "No-Wi-Fi" Rage (Feeling Stressed/Irritable)

How do you feel when the power goes out or your parents say "time to log off"? If you feel genuine anxiety, anger, shaky hands, or "gamer rage" when you can't play, your brain is experiencing a withdrawal debuff. When you do something you like, which gives your brain a constant supply of

dopamine (the "feel-good" chemical) for a long time, your brain and body suffer when it stops. We get used to feeling good and when that feeling suddenly disappears everything crumbles.

7. The Great Escape (Using Gaming as a Shield)

Did you have a bad day? Did you fail a test? Is things at home feeling heavy? If your first and only move is to dive into a game to forget about it, you aren't actually solving the problem—you're just pausing it. Video games can turn into a way to escape real life, but the truth is that real life doesn't stop existing, it's still there with all the problems and waits for you to stop playing.

Mini-Quest: The "Red Flag" Inventory
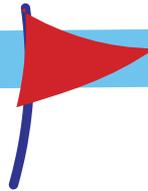
Check the boxes that have happened to you in the last month:

Statements

I've skipped a meal or a shower to keep playing. ☐

I've lied to a friend about being "busy" so I could play. ☐

I feel "salty" or annoyed for no reason when I'm not at my PC/Console. ☐

I've fallen asleep in class because of a late-night session. ☐

I think about the game even when I'm supposed to be doing other things. ☐

I've played to feel better. ☐

Scoreboard

0-1 Flags
You're in the
Safe Zone.
Keep that balance!

2-3 Flags
You're hitting the
Caution Zone.
**Time to set some
"Cooldown" timers.**

4+ Flags
You're in the
Critical Zone.
**Your "Life Stats"
are taking damage.**

Chapter 5. The Balance Build: Strategies for Healthy Gaming

You've learned about problematic online gaming, navigated the traps that game developers put into games to keep you hooked, identified the "debuffs" on your life, and spotted the warning signs that show somebody has a problem. Now, it's time to unlock the most powerful tool in your inventory: The Balance Build, which will teach you how to keep playing and having fun, but without it affecting your personal, family or school life.

Before we give you the tactical guide to taking back control, let's do a quick recap on what we've learned so far.

Let's be 100% clear: **Gaming is not inherently bad**. Just like a powerful weapon in an RPG, gaming is a tool. In the right hands, it's a source of creativity, epic friendships, and brain-boosting challenges. You don't need to delete your accounts or smash your console to live a great life. The real boss fight is with *how* and *why* you play.

Healthy Gaming (The Buff)	Problematic Gaming (The Glitch)
You play to relax after finishing your tasks.	You play to *avoid* your tasks.
You feel energized and happy when you finish.	You feel "salty," tired, or guilty when you log off.
You can walk away when a friend calls IRL.	You "ghost" real-life friends to stay online.
The game is a fun **Side Quest**.	The game has become the **Main Storyline**.

Uncontrolled gaming is like playing a game with a broken controller—you're putting in the effort, but you aren't going where you actually want to go. Healthy gaming means **you are the one holding the controller**, not the loot boxes, not the FOMO, and not the "just one more round" urge.

The Reality Check

A fire can keep you warm and cook your food **(Good!)**, or it can burn the house down if it gets out of control **(Bad!)**. Gaming is the same way. It's all about keeping the fire in the fireplace.

Mini-Quest: Your "Gaming Philosophy"

Take a second to define your own rules. Complete these sentences:

1. Gaming is most fun for me when I am playing with _____

2. I know it's time to log off when I start feeling _____

3. One thing I love doing in the real world (besides gaming) is _____

So, what are the things that help you keep your gaming habits in check and protect you from spiraling into problematic online gaming? If risk factors are things that make you vulnerable, protective factors are like your high-tier armor and shield. These are the habits, people, and mindsets that protect you from developing POG. The more of these you have equipped, the harder it is for those "hooks" and "traps" to pull you under.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

1. The "Dual-Class" Mastery (Multiple Hobbies)

The best way to make sure a game doesn't become your entire world is to have other worlds you love. Having at least one physical hobby (like basketball or skating) and one creative hobby (like drawing or playing guitar) keeps your brain from becoming "dopamine dependent" on just the screen. That way when the game server is down or you're on a losing streak, you have another quest to pivot to.

2. The "Real-Life" Party Members (Strong Support)

Having people, you can talk to outside of a headset is the ultimate protection. Keeping a solid connection with your family and non-gaming friends. This means actually talking about your day, your stress, your wins and your losses in real life. These people are your link to reality. If you start to drift too far into a game, they are the ones who will notice and pull you back before the glitch becomes a crash.

3. The "Self-Awareness" Skill (Emotional Intelligence)

Being able to check your own "status bar" is a pro-gamer move. Recognizing when you are playing because you are bored vs. when you are playing because you are sad or angry. If you know why you're logging on, you can choose a better way to handle your feelings. Feeling stressed? Maybe a walk or a chat with a friend is a better "heal" than an 8-hour grind.

Mini-Quest: Rate Your Armor

How many of these "protective items" do you currently have equipped?
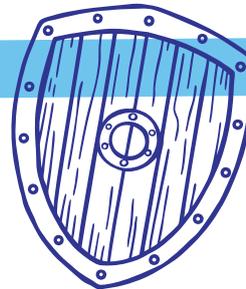
Item	Yes	No
The Sport/Physical Shield: Do you move your body for 30+ minutes a day?	☐	☐
The Creative Cape: Do you have a hobby that doesn't involve a screen?	☐	☐
The Family Link: Do you eat at least one meal a day without a phone or game nearby?	☐	☐
The Sleep Scroll: Do you get at least 8 hours of sleep most nights?	☐	☐

Pause & Reflect

Which one of these items do you think you need to upgrade first?

Now you know what protects you, but sometimes it's hard to put in practice what you already know in theory. Don't worry! Here are some useful and practical tips on what to change in your life to be more in control of your gaming habits.

To play like a pro, you need to treat your body like high-end hardware. If you overheat your PC, it crashes; if you overheat your brain and body, you "glitch" in real life. Here are the tactical strategies to keep your performance at 100 percent:

The 2-Hour Power Limit

Aim for no more than 2 hours of total screen time per day (that includes your phone, TV, and PC). Your brain's "reward center" is like a battery. If you over-stimulate it with high-speed visuals and sounds for more than 2 hours, it starts to get "fried," making everything else in life feel boring and making you feel super irritable.

Break Up the Session

Don't use those 2 hours all at once! Split them into smaller "missions". Sitting for long periods stops your blood from flowing properly and locks your muscles in a "gaming hunch." Breaking it up keeps your metabolism active and your brain fresh.

The "Cooldown" 15-Minute Rule

Take a 15-minute break for every 45 minutes of play. Your eyes have tiny muscles that focus on the screen. If you don't look away, they get "spasms," causing headaches and blurry vision. So, it is good at least every 45 minutes to do 15-minute breaks in which to look at a distant object so that your eye muscles can relax.

The "Sunlight & Moonlight" Protocol

No screens immediately after waking up, and no screens at least 1 hour before bed. Screens emit blue light, which tricks your brain into thinking it's midday. If you use a screen right before bed, your brain stops producing melatonin (the sleep chemical), meaning you'll wake up feeling like a zombie.

The "Server Shutdown" (22:00)

No gaming after 10:00 PM. Your brain does its "deep cleaning" while you sleep. Late-night gaming keeps your stress hormones (Cortisol) high, which ruins your sleep quality and stops your brain from storing what you learned at school that day.

Maintain Your "FOV" (Field of View)

Keep your distance from the screen! If you are playing on a smartphone – keep it at least 40-45 cm from your eyes. If you are playing on a PC, stay at least 1 meter away from the monitor or the full length of your arms. If you are playing on a console, sit at least 3 meters away from the TV. Staying too close causes digital eye strain. It's like forcing your eyes to run a marathon without moving—it leads to permanent vision changes and dry eyes.

Gear Up for Offline Quests

Balance every hour of gaming with an hour of Offline Action (sports, walking, or non-screen hobbies). Moving your body releases endorphins—the natural "Happy Buff." This lowers stress and helps your brain recover from the high-intensity focus of gaming.

Use "Auto-Save" Timers

Set an alarm or timer to tell you when to stop. Use breaks as a reward (e.g., "After this match, I get a snack or 10 minutes of music"). When you're "In the Zone," your brain loses track of time. An external alarm acts as a manual override for your focused brain, helping you regain control.

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Sign the "Gaming Contract"

Create a simple contract with yourself or your family that lists your daily limits and the consequences if you break them. Writing something down and signing it engages your prefrontal cortex (the logic center). It helps you stay committed even when your "impulse" brain wants to keep playing.

Gaming as a "Victory Lap"

Gaming is a reward for finishing "Main Quests" (homework, chores, exercise), not a replacement for them. This creates a healthy "dopamine loop." When you achieve something in real life first, the gaming session feels more satisfying and reduces the "gamer guilt" that often leads to stress.

Mini-Quest: "Swap It Out" Challenge

Pick one gaming hour to replace with a new hobby for 7 days. After the end of the week report back

- What changed? _____

- What didn't? _____

- What surprised you? _____

- What did you like about the new activity? _____

- What didn't you like about it? _____

- How is it similar to gaming and how is it different? _____

Chapter 6. The Self-Scan: Self-Assessment and Reflection

In almost every RPG, before you enter a new zone, you open your Character Menu to check your status, equipment, and level. You wouldn't try to fight a Fire Dragon if your "Fire Resistance" was at 0%, right? Life works the same way. In order to "patch" a glitch in your behavior or level up your habits, you first have to check your own Character Menu.

As we saw in Chapter 3, games are designed by experts who use different "hooks" to keep you playing. They know exactly which buttons to push in your brain to make you feel like you need to stay.

If you don't understand how you're reacting to these hooks, you're playing on autopilot. And let's be real: autopilot rarely wins the race. When you understand why you're reaching for the controller (Are you bored? Stressed? Chasing a dopamine hit?), you take the power back from the game developers. Reflection isn't about judging yourself. It's about looking in the mirror to see if you're doing things right or you need to change something.

Mini-Quest: The "Why" behind the "Play"

Let's do a quick check. Think about the last time you played for more than 3 hours. What was the real reason? Check the statements that were valid for you.

Social Buff: My friends were all online and I didn't want to be the "random" left out.

Achievement Hunt: I was so close to that new rank/skin/level and couldn't stop.

The Great Escape: I had a mountain of homework and looking at it made me stressed.

The Infinite Loop: I wasn't even having fun anymore; I was just "scrolling" through matches because I didn't know what else to do.

Changing your behavior is like re-mapping your keybinds. It feels weird and clunky at first. You might keep reaching for the old buttons out of habit. But once you "map" your life correctly, everything becomes smoother, faster, and much more rewarding. This is why this toolkit is full with self-assessment and reflection activities, which we named "Mini-Quests". Like the one that follows!

Mini-Quest: "Gaming Mood Meter"

Track how you feel before and after playing. This will help you identify what makes you play and help you better understand your behavior. For the task, use this table or make your own in a notepad or a piece of paper:

Time spent gaming	Which game you played?	Why did you decide to play?	Emotions	
			Before	**After**

Chapter 7. Squad Tactics: Group Activities for the Classroom

Gaming is better with a team, and so is learning how to master your gaming habits! These activities are designed to be played in class to help you and your classmates "map out" the gaming world together. No boring lectures—just strategy, teamwork, and a bit of friendly competition. Feel free to offer these activities to your teacher, school counselor or psychologist to help you implement them in class.

Here we offer you one of our offline activities – the escape room "Connect to Reality". If you like it you can find more ideas for such activities in our EDI handbook on the following website: https://gameover-project.eu/edi-handbook/

Group Activity: Escape Room "Connect to Reality"

Overall objective
to raise awareness of the risks of problematic online gaming and promote social skills, decision-making, emotional self-regulation and critical thinking. This tool can be used by teachers in a classroom, or families in home.

Format
short gamified escape room (30–40 minutes). Adaptable to traditional classrooms, digital whiteboards, immersive spaces, or home setting.

Development

PHASE 1 Introduction and setting   5 min

the teacher presents the challenge: the players have been "absorbed" by their avatar; to escape, they must pass five collaborative tests that reconnect them with reality.

PHASE 2 Main Activity

25-30min

Prominence

Objective: to identify signs that gaming is displacing essential activities.

Development: sort cards with daily activities, classifying those that are essential and those that have been displaced by gaming.

Assessment: individual reflection rubric.

Abstinence

Objective: simulate emotions when stopping playing.

Development: role playing without access to games; reflection on emotional management.

Assessment: emotional self-assessment.

Balanced Life

Objective: to build a balanced life profile.

Development: create a digital collage (Canva or Genially) or pen and paper collage, that represents a balanced schedule between gaming, studies, relationships and rest.

Assessment: brief presentation to the group.

Social Support

Objective: practise asking for help and empathic communication.

Development: role-playing with cards depicting real situations.

Assessment: guided observation with rubric.

Conscious Gaming Contract

Objective: to propose specific prevention actions.

Development: group construction of a decalogue with short phrases and visuals on a digital whiteboard or white paper.

Assessment: joint presentation.

PHASE 3 Closing and commitment   5 min

symbolic signing of the "Conscious Gaming Contract" and guided group reflection.

Group Activity: "Mythbusters: Gaming Edition"

This classroom game is based on myths vs. facts about problematic online gaming. Students work individually or in teams to decide whether statements about online gaming are MYTHS or FACTS, then discuss why. The goal is not to "catch" anyone, but to learn together.

Purpose
- Help students identify false beliefs about online gaming;
- Encourage discussion, critical thinking, and self-reflection;
- Reduce stigma and shame around problematic gaming.

Duration
30–45 minutes (flexible)

Group Size
Whole class OR small groups of 3–5 students

HOW TO PLAY (STEP-BY-STEP)

STEP 1 Set the Tone   5 min

Teacher says:

"This game isn't about judging gamers. It's about learning what's true and what's not—and why people believe these myths."

Remind students:
- No personal sharing is required;
- Respect all opinions;
- It's okay to change your mind.

STEP 2 Myth or Fact Rounds

20-25 min

1. Teacher reads **one statement** aloud (or shows it on a slide).
2. Groups discuss for **30–60 seconds**.
3. Each group answers:
   - o 🔴 **MYTH or**   o 🟢 **FACT**
4. Teacher reveals the answer and gives a short explanation.
5. Quick discussion:
   - o "Why do you think people believe this?"
   - o "How could this myth cause problems?"

MYTH CARDS

Here we offer some examples of myths and facts. But feel free to create your own.

Card 1

Only kids who play all day have a gaming problem.

Answer: MYTH

Card 2

Games are designed to keep players playing as long as possible.

Answer: FACT

Card 3

If you get good grades, gaming can't be a problem.

Answer: MYTH

Card 4

Anyone –boys or girls– can struggle with problematic gaming.

Answer: FACT

Card 5

Gamers who struggle just lack self-control.

Answer: MYTH

Group Activity: "Design a Balanced Life"

Separate your class in different teams or all work together. Create posters showing what a healthy balanced gaming lifestyle looks like.

Group Activity: Discussion
"Gaming – what do I like and what I don't like about it?"

This is an open discussion in which everyone who wants to can participate. You can share your own thoughts and gaming experience and reflect on it in a non-judgemental way. Here are some example question to keep the discussion moving:

- What do I like about gaming?
- What don't I like about gaming?
- If gaming disappeared tomorrow, what would I miss the most?
- What's one tiny change I could make today to make my gaming healthier?
- Was there a time when you thought about stopping gaming altogether? Why? What happened?

Chapter 8. Real-life Stories

Alex's Infinite Loop:

Alex was a top-tier healer in an MMO. At first, it was just weekend fun. But soon, Alex felt like his guild couldn't survive without him. Alex started staying up until 4:00 AM for raids, falling asleep in History class, and eventually stopped texting back his real-life friends. Alex wasn't having more fun—in fact, Alex felt more stressed than ever. The game wasn't a hobby anymore; it was a job that didn't pay.

! The Takeaway:

Alex didn't need to quit gaming forever; he needed to learn how to hit the **Save & Exit** button before the real-life "Game Over" happened.

Martin's "Just One More Pull":

Martin saved up all his birthday money for a new pair of sneakers. But then, his favorite Gacha game released a "Limited Time" character. He used a few pulls and got nothing. Feeling "due" for a win, he spent 10 euro… then 20 euro… then his whole sneaker fund. He finally got the character, but the "rush" lasted only 5 minutes. The next day, he felt sick looking at the screen. He realized the game tricked him into spending money he didn't want to spend.

! The Takeaway:

Martin learned that "Limited Time" offers are designed to make you feel like you're making a smart investment, when really, they are just draining your real-world gold. If a game makes you feel "sick" or guilty after spending time or money, the "Reward" isn't a reward—it's a trap.

Jordan's "Stealth Mission":

Jordan started keeping his console on "Mute" and putting a towel under the door so his parents wouldn't see the light from the TV. He thought he was being a pro-sneaker, but his grades dropped from As to Ds. When his friends stopped asking him to hang out because he always said "no," Jordan realized he was winning in the game but losing everywhere else.

! The Takeaway:

Lying about your playtime is like ignoring the "Low Battery" warning on your phone—eventually, everything just goes dark. Honesty with yourself is the first step to fixing the glitch.

Sam's "Multi-Platform" Life:

Sam loved competitive shooters. He was good—like, "top 1% of the region" good. But Sam also played the drums and was on the swim team. When his team lost a major tournament, he felt terrible. But instead of spiraling into a 12-hour "revenge play" session, he went to drum practice and hit the kits until he felt better. Because he had other hobbies in his life, the loss in the game didn't feel like a loss in real life.

The Takeaway:

Sam's "armor" was his variety. He wasn't just a gamer. He had other places and activities to win, which made the games he played more fun and less stressful.

Does anything in these stories sound familiar to you? Have you been in any of the situations described above? Can you understand how these teens feel and why they did what they did? If you met them in person and they asked for your help, what would you advise them to do?
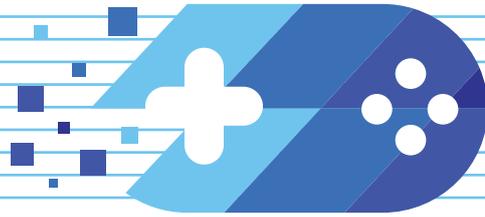
game OVER

Switch Off Addiction
Power Up Life