Helping reset gaming addiction

For children

Have you ever been so into a game that you forget to eat or drink? Have you ever lost sleep to hours of scrolling on social media? Does it annoy you when your parents tell you to get offline?

We get it.

You can't be in two places at once. That's why it's so frustrating when the real world calls and you're immersed in the online world.

We understand.

Playing video games, surfing the net and sharing on social media can be fun. But did you know that doing too much of it can impact your brain development, health and wellbeing?

While most young people's online and gaming habits aren't anything to worry about, there is a growing number of Aussie kids being diagnosed with gaming disorder.

What is gaming disorder?

When somebody loses control over their gaming or screen time and it impacts other areas of their lives, often with negative consequences, this is when it becomes a real issue.

Did you know that:

It's estimated that around 100,000 Australian teenagers are living with gaming disorder. That's what a full house at the MCG looks like!

15 - 20

Boys aged 15 to early 20s are most at risk, but it can affect anyone at any age.

What's the big deal?

Just like other health and wellbeing issues, gaming disorder can have a snowball effect. If you don't get help, it can have an impact on your developing brain and ability to:

- Critically think and problem solve
- Control your impulses
- Use your judgement
- Regulate your emotions

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How?

Research tells us that gaming activates dopamine, a neurotransmitter in the brain that makes you feel good. This feeling of pleasure or reward encourages you to repeat the behaviour.

But too much repetition can lead to addiction.

And this addiction can make you produce too much dopamine due to too much gaming, or not enough due to the constant need to game.

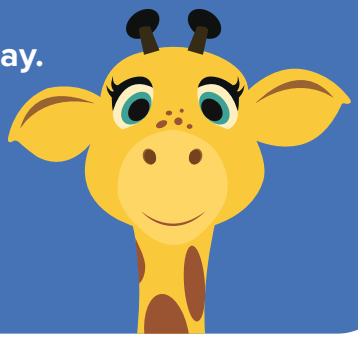
It's a cycle – that can only be broken by you.

Circuit breakers

There are a few things you can do to make sure your gaming and screen time levels are safe:

- Take lots of breaks – time flies when you're having fun. Make sure you're pressing pause regularly and stepping away from the screen. It can help you to loosen up by giving your brain a rest and your body a stretch.
- Do the important things first – make sure you prioritise your offline activities like eating, sleeping, exercising and socialising with friends or family. Choose to do these things before you start a game or a session of scrolling.
- Talk to someone – if you're finding that you lose yourself in gaming or the online world too much, talk to someone you trust. Connecting with someone in the real world can be enough to reboot your system.

If you're finding it difficult to find someone to talk to that's okay.

You are not alone. You can contact:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14 or **lifeline.org.au**
- Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or **beyondblue.org.au**