

'Gaming disorder' now designated as mental health condition

ABC News

Michael Strahan: New alert from the World Health Organization about video game addiction: the organization is now designating gaming disorder as a mental health condition. ABC's Deborah Roberts is here with more. Good morning Deborah.

Deborah Roberts: Good morning Michael and this is a move that has stunned many in and out of the medical community, some saying it's about time we recognize the intense pull of video games given the science that shows there could be some addictive nature to them, but others are wondering whether "disorder" is going a little too far.

Announcer: They're everywhere on your TV, your computer, even on your phone. But while video games seem close to becoming our new national pastime this morning the World Health Organization raising a red flag for the first time adding gaming disorder to their list of addictive activities, likening it to substance abuse and gambling disorders. Chris Davis, a dad of four, saying he was addicted to video games... at one point spending up to 18 hours a day playing in his basement. After therapy and a 90 day detox Davis is now in recovery, saying learning to set boundaries helped him save his family.

Chris Davis: I'm a year better, a father more involved in my marriage... it's been a good year and here's looking forward to the next.

Announcer: The WHO says video games can become an addiction when gamers aren't able to control how much they play, impacting their lives for 12 months or more.

Dr. Petros Levounis: A lot of people use games, recreationally use games for educational purposes, but for a subset of people this becomes compulsive and really addictive.

Announcer: An estimated 60% of Americans play video games every day with 2.6 billion gamers across the globe but only 3% of them are affected by the disorder leading some experts to caution that the new classification may lead to a possible misdiagnosis of mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and stress. The International Game Developers Association telling ABC News there are "serious and troubling consequences to the WHO's creation up of a gaming disorder when games are used as a coping mechanism for stress, anxiety, and depression", adding, "the science and common sense around how video games are played supports the conclusion that video games are not addictive."

Deborah Roberts: Now some medical experts also questioned the wisdom of classifying gaming as an addiction, some saying that may open the floodgates and weaken the seriousness of what has been traditionally considered addiction. But Chris Davis, that father of four, begs to differ... saying he had to work hard to kick his addiction and says that his marriage is finally back on track and that he's feeling healthier, Michael, after rehab so in his case there was really something going on.

Michael Strahan: There's really something going on and good for him that he took care of it good for him and his family as well. Deborah, stick around and we're gonna bring in Dr. Dave Anderson from the Child Mind Institute for more on this... and Dr. Anderson thank you for joining us and how big of a deal is this? This has now been classified as a mental health disorder so if you have children out there how concerned should you be, right?

Dr. Dave Anderson: I mean this is not without some level of controversy, it's something where the diagnostic criteria are still very stringent... I mean they require 12 months of addictive behavior around games before you can get the diagnosis, but it represents a

campaign by, you know, parents worldwide to, you know, kind of bring attention to a problem that they see in their children spending a lot more time on games than they should be.

Michael Strahan: So... so how do you know what's a lot more time how do you know my child has the problem?

Dr. Dave Anderson: I mean in terms of what parents should be concerned about with games... we think about age, we think about time spent, and we think about what they're doing socially on it. So they are stringent guidelines for kids under age six around screen exposure. In terms of time spent we don't want to replace activities that are really important for development like family dinners or spending face-to-face interactions with friends or making sure the kids are engaged in sports or exercise.

Michael Strahan: And Deborah, I realized that there is some technology out that it helps you monitor how much time you are spending on tech.

Deborah Roberts: On devices, because we're not just talking about games we're talking social media and you and I have teenagers and we know they're glued. Believe it or not I'm Google is actually announcing that it is going to come up with new features to help you monitor, maybe limit, your screen time... Apple with its new update is actually going to have an app called screen time to help the user monitor, not necessarily suggesting an addiction but suggesting that some people might be spending too much time.

Michael Strahan: And if you are docking, if you realize you have a problem what is some of your best advice for kicking the addiction?

Dr. Dave Anderson: Right and that's the thing is that what what technology companies are doing, there's been a lot of pressure placed on the technology companies, but now you know the acknowledgement of gaming disorder allows parents more of an opportunity to seek treatment for these things or to perhaps find clinicians who specialize in this. In terms of what parents can do a lot of this is setting boundaries from the start it's making sure that you've got you know boundaries around the time you spend as a family or the amount of time you want your child to spend on at night, making sure they still have time for homework, and it's also to watch out for, you know, the red flags that are always there like anxiety or depression and whether or not a child may cope by kind of retreating into gaming.

Deborah Roberts: In my case just yanking that phone from time to time, locking it up, yanking that phone... just making sure that they're aware that you're watching.

Michael Strahan: Doesn't make you a popular parent but you're doing the right thing and you know it's not always the kid with the problem it may be the parent with the problem as we saw in that piece. I want to thank you.

Dr. Dave Anderson: Absolutely

Michael Strahan: Thank you both, I mean very important method that you brought this morning. Thank you very much