



## **Social Media Addiction**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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This fall a documentary called “The Social Dilemma” began airing on Netflix. In its former employees of large technology companies are interviewed and tell about how their work initially appeared to be helpful for society but later, because of its impact, led them to resign from their positions.

Actors who are portraying a family in this show, have different ways of interacting with social media. A teenage son, who is constantly online is challenged to not touch his phone for a week and, if successful, would receive a new screen to replace the one that is broken. Unfortunately, the notifications and ways that the social media had manipulated him to form an important part of the teen’s life, prevent him from lasting more than a couple of days.

The Social Dilemma points out the fact that the word “user” is one that describes not only a person on social media but also a person who is involved with substance abuse.

This week, Prince Harry’s wife, Megan Markle has been criticized for stating the same thing. Perhaps she watched the documentary!

Mental Health diagnosis is done using criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) published by the American Psychiatric Association. Social media addictions are not given status and Internet Gaming Disorder is only listed as a tentative disorder in the appendix of this manual.

There are nine criteria listed for Internet Gaming Disorder in the DSM-5 appendix including preoccupation, tolerance, escape, persistence, withdrawal, conflict, problems, deception, and displacement.

I didn’t grow up with computers and because of significant changes in technology over time, I have been slow to transition into the options that are commonly used by those who are younger or more technically inclined. In fact, I have frequently had to go to the office to get my phone which I use as an alarm clock. Forgetting it there gives you an indication of how little I think about it and how little need I have for its features.

Computers, phones and other technology are not a problem for everyone. It’s what you do with them that can lead to problems though If you find that you or those who you care

about are so absorbed by social media that the criteria listed are realized, perhaps it is time to seek outside help.

Identifying and observing healthy boundaries will help you to balance your time offline and your online use. Limit the time you use your phone or computer. (Set an alarm as internet searching can be mesmerizing!) Don't have your phone with you during mealtimes or when you are with other people. Don't trust people that you don't know who want to be your "friend". Use your common sense when it comes to offers that seem too good to be true. (They probably are).

Also, remember to do things offline that can be neglected with too much internet use. Go for a walk. Read a book. Phone a friend. Enjoy a technology-free day.

Treat the internet like a tool rather than an intimate partner and you will soon find improved mental health and balance in your life!