Internet Addiction

F: Welcome back to *Talk of the Nation: Science Friday.* I'm Linda Joyce. We're talking this hour about how and why people might become addicted to things other than drugs, addicted to things like gambling, sex, even shopping. Of course, our high-tech society also offers new high-tech addictions like video games, on-line chat rooms. Jonathan Kandell is a counselor at the University of Maryland who puts together a support group for students who find themselves addicted to the Internet. Maybe you should listen carefully to this one if you are an Internet groupie. He joins me now from his office in College Park. Welcome to the Program.

M: Thank you very much.

F: Is this relatively new addiction?

M: Well, for some People, | mean, some people have been involved with the Internet for years and some of them may have been addicted for a while. With the widespread use of the Internet now, it's certainly growing on college campuses. And we are seeing more and more of it

F: How does it present itself? Does a student come to you and say, "Doc, you gotta help me. I'm addicted to the Internet"?

M: Well, I've seen people who have been, but they haven't presented with that particular issue. They've presented with issues like relationship problems, or they are having problems maintaining their grades because they are spending so much time doing other things and when you find out what's really going on, they're spending a lot of time on the Net and they're not paying attention to their studies, they're not devoting the attention to the relationships. These problems are coming out in other ways.

F: Do other people turn their friends in, saying, "Doc, you gotta find out, this guy ..."

M: They haven't got to this point. At this point, people still see computers as a very positive thing. And I think there are many positive benefits for computer. But it's such a new idea that there is a problematic piece to it. There haven't been many people turning other people in.

F: This is something I worry about, personally, myself. I'll share this with you for a free consultation. I mean, whenever I get a chance and have some time, I love to to surfing on the Net. I'll be on there sometimes, very surprisingly, I'll be on there one o'clock in the morning, I'll send somebody an e-mail message thinking they'll get it the next morning. And I'll get an immediate response back, you know. What are the symptoms? How do I know when my Internet compulsiveness is turning into an Internet addiction?

M: Uh, I'm not sure the exact amount of time is really the issue, but I think when it becomes

something that really begins to affect other areas of your life, when for instance your work performance or your school performance, or relationships with other people. Uh, one of the problems I see with the Internet, especially the chat rooms, is that people start developing relationships over the Net and they are very different from relationships that you have on a face-to-face basis, and you start losing some of the skills that make relationships successful, so that's certainly a warning signal. I think if people are beginning to say something to you like, "You seem to be spending a lot of time on-line," that's probably a good indicator as well. But I think, a real important thing is to examine what's going on with you when you are not on the Net, if you beginning to feel anxious or depressed or empty or lonely, and you know you really look forward to those time when you can be on-line to be connected with other people in that way, then, I think, a serious issue is starting to happen.

F: What about if you stop giving up other things, like going out for a walk? Is that a symptom?

M: Well, people have to make choices every day about the different activities that they're going to do. I think it's helpful to have some sort of balance in your life, if you can spend some time on the Internet and then go take a walk at a different time of the day. That's not an issue. In fact, that's one of things that we suggest in the group is to somehow break the pattern. For example, set an alarm clock or something. When it rings, go out and take a walk, and then come back before you get back on-line.

Questions:

1. According to the man, why is Internet addiction so common now?

2. What worries the interviewer about surfing on the Net?

3. What is the problem with chat rooms, according to the man?

4. The man says that several areas of a person's life might be affected by Internet addiction. Which of the following is NOT one of these areas?

5. What dose the man suggest that students do to remind themselves to get off-line and take a walk?

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