Problematic Use of Digital Technology Screening & Assessment Tools

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

Information for Service Providers

A range of screening and assessment tools have been developed to address problematic internet use, many of which have been demonstrated to be reliable and valid for use with children and youth [1]. Below is a selection of these tools and key information regarding their terms of use.

Review the accompanying documentation carefully to understand the usage conditions for each tool. While some instruments permit limited use for research purposes with proper acknowledgment, others explicitly prohibit reproduction, distribution, or use for research, clinical, or training purposes without explicit permission from the copyright holder or the organization managing the tool's distribution. To ensure legal compliance, contact the copyright holder or affiliated organization for guidance on obtaining the necessary permissions.

Internet Addiction & Concurrent Disorders Screening Tools

The CAGE Questionnaire
Initially developed for patients with alcohol problematic use. CAGE is an acronym representing four areas of a patient's thoughts and behaviors: Cut Down, Annoyed, Guilt, and Eye Opener.

• Cut Down – Have you ever felt you should cut down on your playing?
• Annoyed – Have people annoyed you by criticizing your playing?
• Guilt – Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your playing time?
• Eye Opener – Have you ever started playing first thing in the morning? Do you think about playing when you're not playing?

As an initial screening, it can be helpful to determine if further assessment may be needed. Responses on the CAGE are scored 0 for "no" and 1 for "yes. A total score of 2 or greater, suggests further assessment is required. The CAGE questions can be used in the clinical setting using informal phrasing and a client's clinical history.

CAGE has been translated into several languages and there are also modified versions of this questionnaire to measure a person's relationship to other potentially addictive substances or practices such as food, internet, and sex addiction. By adapting the questions, service providers can use this tool to identify the nature and severity of the impact of a young person's gaming [2].
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17716538/

For more information
informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca

https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx   Updated: June 2025

Recovery Alberta
MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Gain Short Screener (GAIN-SS)
The Global Appraisal of Individual Needs – Short Screener (GAIN-SS) is a brief screening tool that identifies one or more behavioral health disorders (e.g., internalizing or externalizing psychiatric disorders, substance use disorders, crime or violence problems). It is appropriate for youth populations ages 12 and up. The GAIN-SS has included diagnostic categories as the original tool such as problematic eating, traumatic stress, disordered thinking, gambling, video games, and internet use. It can be completed in 5-10 minutes and can be self or staff- or staff-administered on paper in diverse settings. If your team is considering using the GAIN-SS for client services, contact Addiction and Mental Health Concurrent Capable Practice Supports amh.practicesupports@recoveryalberta.ca.

Licensing Information, Mandatory Online Training, and Learning Opportunities
For Learners with MyLearningLink (MLL) Access:
Please refer to the AHS Staff Intranet to complete this module as part of your official learning record:
https://mylearninglink.albertahealthservices.ca/elearning/bins/index.asp

For External Learners (No MLL Access):
If you do not have access to MyLearningLink, you can complete the eLearning module using the following public link:https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/webapps/elearning/wc/wc-if-amh-gain-ss-elearning/index.html#/

For additional training resources and information:

https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page18690.aspx

Technology Addiction (internet addiction, cyberaddiction):
Designed to provide a quick screening of whether an individual might have problems with technology and internet addiction [3].
https://www.ementalhealth.ca/index.php?m=survey&ID=47

Internet Addiction Assessment Tools

The Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS)
This valid instrument assesses the severity of compulsive internet use with 14 items rated on a 5-point scale: 0, never; 1, seldom; 2, sometimes; 3, often; and 4, very often. It can be administrated by a service provider or self-administered [4].
https://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/compulsive-internet-use-scale-cius/

Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ-SF-6)

For more information, contact
informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca
https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx

Recovery Alberta
MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

A short self-administrated questionnaire evaluating obsession, neglect of basic needs, and control disorder related to internet use. The shortened version of the PIUQ uses a 5-point rating scale: 1, never; 2, rarely; 3, sometimes; 4, often; and 5, always [5].
http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0159409

The Generalized Problematic Internet Scale 2 (GPIUS 2)
A 15-item Likert-type scale assessing problematic internet use is suitable for self-administration. Responses range from 1 (strongly disagree - definitely disagree) to 8 (strongly agree - definitely agree), with stronger agreement indicating the strength of the thoughts and behaviors associated with problematic internet use. Completing the GPIUS should take participants approximately 20 minutes. It should not be used for diagnostic purposes [6].
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338046960_GENERALIZED_PROBLEMATIC_INTERNET_USE_SCALE_2_GPIUS_2_Scale_Items_Instructions

The Internet Addiction Test (IAT)
This psychological assessment is the first validated measure of internet and technology addiction. It is a self-reported instrument for adolescents and adults that measures the presence of addiction to the internet, electronic entertainment, social media, and general use of electronic devices. Responses can range from rarely or never, every once in a while, sometimes, often, and always; results describe the severity of addiction on a continuum from mild to severe. This test should be administered by a qualified clinician.

The Internet Addiction collection of tests brings together the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and the Internet Addiction Test for Families (IAT-F) described below. Both instruments can be used together to obtain a comprehensive profile of a client's internet addiction.
https://stoeltingco.com/Psychological-Testing/Internet-Addiction-Test--Kit-IAT-Kit~10448

Addiction Test for Families (IAT-F)
This test evaluates problematic behavior associated with the compulsive use of technology, including online porn, online gambling, and compulsive use of online games and social media for the population of elementary school through high school. Administration time is approximately 5-15 minutes if administered verbally to parents or caretakers. The IAT-F contains the Parent-Child Internet Addiction Test (PCIAT), a 20-item questionnaire for adolescents, and the Problematic and Risky Media Use in Children Checklist, an 8-item checklist for use with children. Both forms may be completed by a person who knows the child or youth well.

Note: To use this test, it is necessary to purchase manuals that provide evidence about internet addiction, research involving the use of these assessments, information about interpreting findings,
and recommendations for healthy Internet behavior and how to address issues of internet addiction. Service providers must consult with their manager if they want to get access to the

For more information, contact
informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca

Updated: June 2025

Recovery Alberta
MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx

test. Manuals can be purchased for each site through the Alberta Health Practitioners agency.
https://stoeltingco.com/Psychological-Testing/Internet-Addiction-Test--Kit-IAT-Kit~10448

Internet Disorder Scale (IDS-15)
The IDS-15 was developed based on the definition of Internet Gaming Disorders in the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). This scale is a valid and reliable instrument to assess internet addiction. It provides yes or no questions that enable the classification of internet users along a continuum with varying degrees of internet addiction risk across four factors: Escapism and dysfunctional emotional coping (Factor 1), Withdrawal symptoms (Factor 2), Impairments and dysfunctional self-regulation (Factor 3), and dysfunctional internet-related self-control (Factor 4). The authors state that more research is needed to further validate the IDS-15 in other cultural contexts [7].
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306460315300125?casa_token=5qE7MXUF1JoAAAAA:gH5Xg-Bf_aaXlnuQii-vwcJu5bWEvsd11bJZ9XAQDQgQUhgkTgVmVFyVTmo5oJFJGHqIkFcRwm

Digital Distraction Test
This test was created by Dr. Greenfield, founder of The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction. It provides 12 yes or no questions that evaluate a possible problematic use of digital technology. This survey is proposed for educational and informational purposes only. If the score is on the higher side; service providers may need to examine whether a client's use or over-use is creating any work-life balance problems [8].
https://virtual-addiction.com/digital-distraction-test/

Child Technology Test
This simple questionnaire helps service providers, parents, or caregivers to determine if a child's use of digital technology is negatively impacting their social, familial, or educational well-being [9]. It is important to note that this test is a screening tool and cannot provide a medical or psychiatric diagnosis on its own.
https://virtual-addiction.com/child-technology-test/

Virtual Addiction Test
This short, 11-question test is designed to measure the level of dependence on, and potential misuse of, internet and smartphone use [10]. If service providers are concerned about internet or smartphone use, they are encouraged to consult with a mental health or addiction specialist who has expertise in internet and technology-related behavioral addictions.
https://virtual-addiction.com/

For more information, contact
informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca

Updated: June 2025

Recovery Alberta
MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx

Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS)

The PRIUSS is an 18-item scale developed to assess problematic internet use in adolescents and young adults. It includes three subscales: Social Impairment, Emotional Impairment, and Risky/Impulsive Internet Use. The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties [11].

https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4035908/#:~:text=The%20Problematic%20and%20Risky%20Internet%20Use%20Screening%20Scale%20(PRIUSS)%20is,and%20Risky%2FImpulsive%20Internet%20Use.

https://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kplu/files/201502/PRIUSS_scale_and_guidelines.pdf

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

A brief behavioral screening questionnaire for children and adolescents aged 2 to 17 years. It assesses emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behavior. While not specific to internet use, it can help identify broader behavioral issues that may be associated with problematic digital technology use [12].

https://depts.washington.edu/dbpeds/Screening%20Tools/Strengths_and_Difficulties_Questionnaire.pdf

DSM-5-TR Online Assessment Measures

For further clinical evaluation and research, the APA is offering several "emerging measures" in Section III of DSM-5-TR. These assessment measures were developed to be administered at the initial patient interview and to monitor treatment progress, thus serving to advance the use of initial symptomatic status and patient reported outcome (PRO) information, as well as the use of "anchored" severity assessment instruments. Instructions, scoring information, and interpretation guidelines are included [13].

https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/educational-resources/assessment-measures

These tools can aid in the early detection and intervention of problematic internet use among children and adolescents. It's important to select the appropriate tool based on the specific context and needs of the population being assessed.

For more information, contact
informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca

Updated: June 2025

Recovery Alberta
MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx

References

1. Kuss, D. J., Griffiths, M. D., Karila, L., & Billieux, J. (2014). Internet addiction: A systematic review of epidemiological research for the last decade. *Current Pharmaceutical Design, 20*(25), 4026-4052. doi: 10.2174/13816128113199990617

2. Dhalla, S., & Kopec, J. A. (2007). The CAGE questionnaire for alcohol misuse: A review of reliability and validity studies. *Clinical and Investigative Medicine, 30*(1):33-41. doi: 10.25011/cim.v30i1.447

3. eMentalHealth.ca. (2018). Screening Tool: Social Media Use. Retrieved from https://www.ementalhealth.ca/index.php?m=survey&ID=474.

4. Meerkerk, G. J., Van Den Eijnden, R. J. J. M., Vermulst, A. A. & Garretsen, H. F. L. (2009). The compulsive internet use scale (CIUS): Some psychometric properties. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior, 12*(1), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2008.018

5. Demetrovics, Z., Szeredi, B., & Rózsa, S. (2008). The three-factor model of internet addiction: The development of the Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire. *Behavior Research Methods,* 40, 563–574. 10.3758/brm.40.2.563

6. Caplan, S. E. (2010). Theory and measurement of generalized problematic internet use: A two-step approach. *Computers in Human Behavior,* 26, 1089–1097 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.03.012

7. Pontes, H. M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). The development and psychometric evaluation of the Internet Disorder Scale (IDS-15). *Addictive Behaviors,* 64, 261-268. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2015.09.003

8. Greenfield, D. (n.d.). *Digital Distraction Test.* The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction. https://virtual-addiction.com/digital-distraction-test/

9. Greenfield, D. (n.d.). *Child Technology Test.* The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction. https://virtual-addiction.com/technology-addiction-test/

10. Greenfield, D. (n.d.). *Virtual Addiction Test.* The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction. https://virtual-addiction.com/

11. Jelenchick, L. A., Eickhoff, J. C., & Moreno, M. A. (2014). The Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS) for adolescents and young adults: Scale development and refinement. *Computers in Human Behavior,* 35, 171–178. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.01.035

12. Goodman, R. (2003). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 12*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-003-0298-2

13. American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed., text rev.). American Psychiatric Publishing.

For more information, contact
informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca

Updated: June 2025

Recovery Alberta
MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx

For more information, contact
informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca

Updated: June 2025

Recovery Alberta
MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx