

How to Talk to Students About Screen Addictions (Gaming, Pornography, Social Media)

Recognising the problem

Screen overuse may manifest through:

- Decline in academic performance
- Neglect of prayer and Islamic obligations
- Withdrawal from family/social activities
- Secretive behaviour around screen use
- Changes in sleep, appetite, and mood

Understanding the nature of addiction

Screen-related behavioural addictions engage the brain's reward systems. For example, gaming stimulates dopamine, reinforcing compulsive use, while pornography rewires expectations around intimacy, leading to shame and secrecy. Social media creates a cycle of comparison, validation-seeking, and low self-worth.

Islamic framing

In Islam, guarding one's time and senses is part of spiritual accountability:

Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart – about all those [one] will be questioned. (Qur'an 17:36)

How to talk to students

- Use gentle, non-judgemental language: *"I've noticed you've been online a lot lately, how has that been affecting you?"*
- Show empathy: Validate their emotional needs behind the behaviour (e.g., escapism from stress or loneliness)
- Address pornography with spiritual dignity, not shame: Emphasise Allah's forgiveness and the concept of tawbah. Reinforce self-worth and accountability.

Example conversation starter

"As Muslims, we are encouraged to use our time wisely and protect our hearts. Sometimes we can fall into habits that feel hard to control. Would you like to talk about how we can work on this together, for your wellbeing and iman?"

Practical strategies:

- Digital fasting (e.g., tech-free hours)
- Accountability buddy
- Replacing screen use with beneficial activities (Qur'an journaling, creative hobbies, physical activity)
- Apps to limit usage (e.g., Freedom, Cold Turkey)