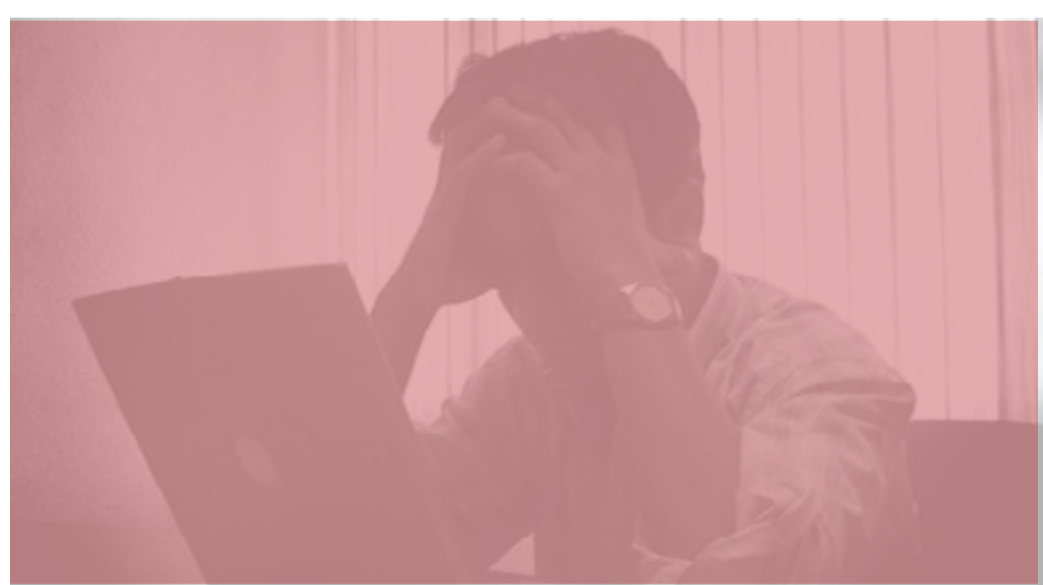
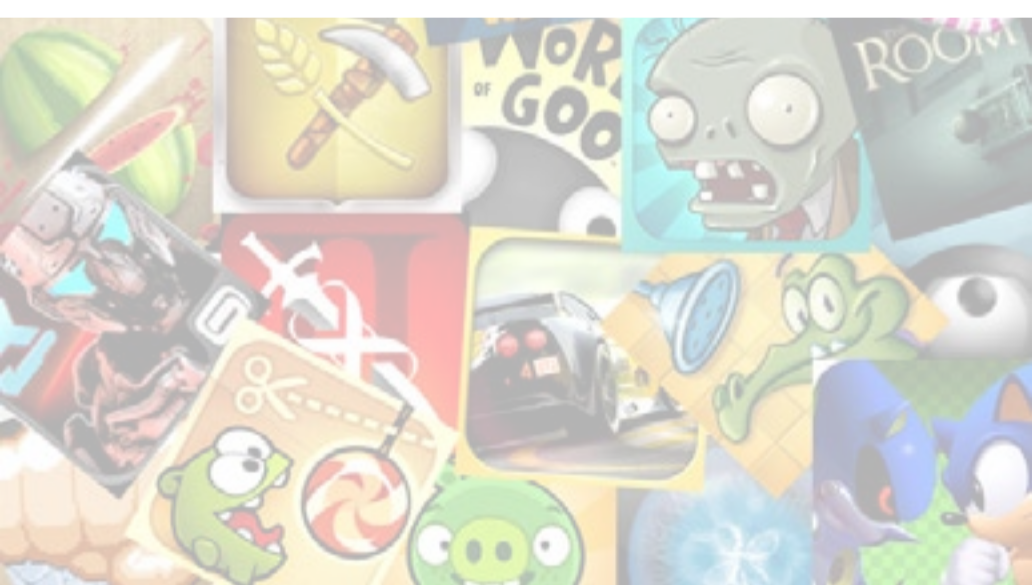


# INTERNET ADDICTION

## PART II



## Assessment Criteria

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According to the DSM-V, the most commonly used assessment tool - each of the subtypes of internet addiction, covered in *INTERNET ADDICTION PART I - Types of Internet Addiction*, must meet four criteria to be considered an addictive behaviour:

- **Excessive Use.** This is understood as use which interferes with essential life functions, and is associated with a loss of a sense of time.
- **Withdrawal.** When computer or technology use is unavailable, users experience withdrawal.
- **Tolerance.** This refers to the need for more use and better quality of technology.
- **Negative Outcomes.** These involve adverse effects on relationships, work, school, and health.



## Warning Signs

Correct diagnosis requires a trained professional. However, it can be helpful to know some warning signs that you may have a problem. The following are some common indicators that your computer usage is addictive.

- 1. Losing track of time.** It's easy to lose track of time when staring into a screen. It happens to everyone, but if you find yourself lost in cyberspace for extended periods of time, or frequently, it's an important indicator of addiction.
- 2. Preoccupation.** When not in front of the screen, do you constantly dwell on your last online activities and eagerly anticipate your next session?
- 3. Social isolation.** Do you feel separate from those around you as a result of your internet usage? Do you neglect your friends and family in order to spend time online? When your internet usage becomes a barrier to real-life socialising, it can mean you have a problem.
- 4. Difficulty with daily life.** A few dishes left in the sink or an unmade bed is not a cause for alarm. However, if you find that you have consistent trouble fulfilling home and work obligations due to internet usage, you may want to consider how it is affecting your life.
- 5. Euphoria or usage for escape.** Is using the computer the highlight of your day? Do you feel more at home online than in real life? If you find that using the internet is a great source of pleasure and your primary way to relieve stress, your usage may be problematic.
- 6. Guilt and defensiveness.** Often, when people have an addiction, they have an internal feeling that something is amiss. Alternatively, when friends and family are critical, the addict may become defensive and deny any sort of problem. If you find that this occurs in association with your internet usage, you may find that your usage is an issue in your life.



In addition to these problems, there are additional health risks involved with excessive use of technology.

- *Dry eyes or strained vision*
- *Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (pain, discomfort, and numbness in hands and wrists)*
- *Back and neck aches*
- *Severe headaches*
- *Pronounced weight gain or weight loss*
- *Sleep disturbances*

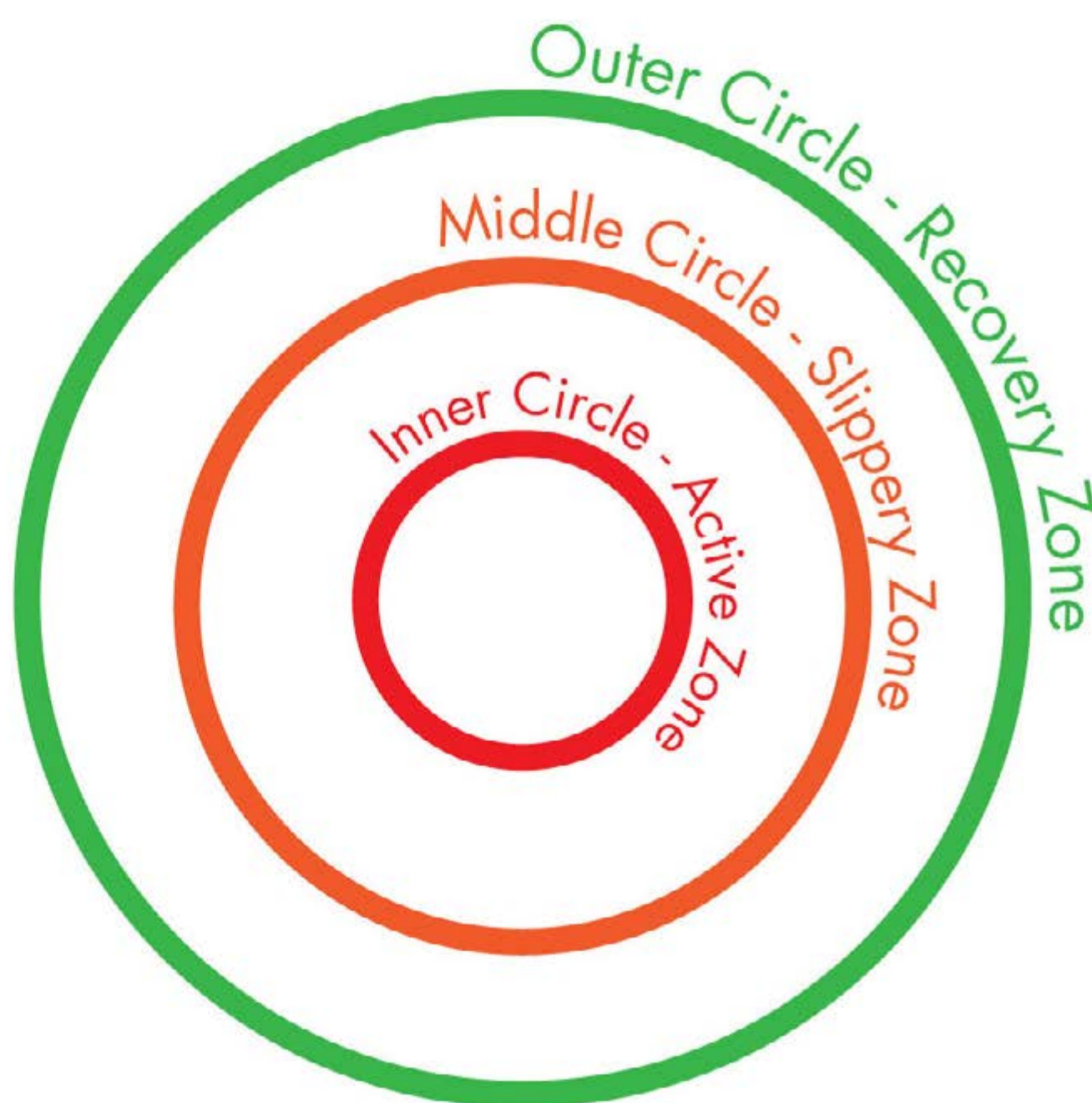
## Treatment for Internet Addiction

Treatment for internet addiction has some similarity with treatment for other process-based addictions. While there are a variety of treatment approaches, the one with the most research support and acceptance in the field is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This treatment approach is effective for the following reasons:

- **Change your expectations.** Persons with addiction often have a negative set of expectations regarding the self, the world, and the future. These negative expectations can trigger addictive behaviours, as the addiction provides distraction from uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. Such expectations also make change difficult, as our expectations are a major guide to our current behaviour. A major aim of CBT is to modify expectations so that you can live a healthy and fulfilling life.
- **Calm down and relax.** Stress can be a major trigger of addictive behaviours. Learning how to respond to stress is a skill acquired through CBT. By learning how to calm down and relax, you will have a greater ability to make healthy choices.
- **Change negative self-beliefs.** Perhaps the greatest psychological factor in addiction is negative self-beliefs. When you view yourself as inherently flawed, bad, or guilty, your ability to make healthy decisions is seriously impaired. CBT helps to understand how self-beliefs influence behaviour, and helps change these self-beliefs to be more positive.
- **Control Your Thinking.** Do you control your thoughts, or do your thoughts control you? When we have uncomfortable thoughts all the time, avoiding them can control a lot of our behaviour. CBT helps you to critically examine your thinking and then choose more balanced ways of thinking your life.
- **Become more rational.** With any addiction, there are moments of clarity when it is perfectly apparent how the addiction is damaging life. When undergoing CBT, you gain a greater ability to maintain cogent thinking and make rational choices based on your circumstances.

At The Cabin, we also use ***The 3 Circles – a model that is very good at defining a recovery baseline where abstinence isn't always possible.*** It is a simple yet powerful, holistic treatment approach where clients can individualise their abstinence treatment – as no two addicts are the same. This approach works for substance abuse issues as well, because some drug and alcohol addicted clients have a need to continue on with anti-depressant, anti-psychotic or pain medications – which some 12 Step centres might deem to be a 'break' of abstinence. But with a 3 Circle Plan this needn't be the case.

This is how it works. We divide our addictions (whatever they are), into 3 'zones' – Active, Slippery and Recovery. Every addict's ***Active Zone*** is different; you define what it is yourself. Your ***Slippery Zone*** again is particular to you – it could be a bar, which triggers feelings of strong cravings. If you find yourself in your "Slippery" zone then the 3 Circle Plan is a simple tool to fall back on as it lets you take an immediate Recovery Action from your ***Recovery Zone***. If you do not then you will surely end up in the Active Zone again.



## 3CIRCLES

**Inner Circle - Active zone:** Here clients define their 'Addictive behaviour' or what they need to abstain from because it has become uncontrollably compulsive and harmful to themselves and others.

**Middle Circle - Slippery Zone:** This constitutes of 'Slippery behaviour or triggers that could include environments, thoughts, feelings and behaviours that have the potential to make them want to use again – leading to relapse.

**Outer Circle - Recovery Zone:** This is a client's 'Recovery Plan' and contains environments, thoughts, feelings and behaviours which bring about recovery and create health, wellness, peace of mind, meaning and purpose.

This approach is simple, because whilst still being a 12 step abstinence-based model it is much less 'religious' sounding than the traditional 12 Steps. While the 12 Steps are sometimes hard for non-Westerners and young people, in particular, to relate to; the 3 Circles offer an easier format to grasp - and blends extremely well with the CBT and Mindfulness Meditation that we use here at The Cabin.

Through this carefully-derived combination of treatment methods, clients are taught how to deal with their impaired reward system more effectively and eventually learn how to successfully substitute their addiction with other healthy dopamine reinforcers such as service work and other activities.



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