

Clinic opens for children addicted to video games and the internet

Doctors claim to have opened the first dedicated clinic in Britain to treat children addicted to video games and other technology.

Capio Nightingale Hospital, a private facility in Central London, introduced the service after calls from parents concerned about their children's use of games, the internet, or mobile phones.

A spokeswoman for the hospital said the service would be offered for children as young as 12 but those aged 15 to 17 are expected to be the main target group.

Richard Graham, a consultant psychiatrist who is leading the new clinic, added that although other clinics provided treatment for young people as part of general addiction treatments, services needed to "adapt quickly" to specifically address problems linked to technology.

Dr Graham, who also sees NHS patients, said some parents reported that their children flew "into a rage" when they were told to turn off their computer, and police had even been called to sort out the rows.

"Mental health services need to adapt quickly to the changing worlds that young people inhabit, and understand just how seriously their lives can be impaired by unregulated time online, on-screen or in-game," he said.

He called for official guidelines "on what counts as healthy or unhealthy use of technology."

The Capio spokeswoman declined to comment on the costs of a private consultation at the Young Person Technology Addiction Service, which aims to increase off-screen social activities and improve children's general confidence.

It also encourages them to think about their relationship with their phone, computer games or social networking websites like Facebook and teaches them skills to help them to switch off.

Other experts have previously questioned whether technology addiction is a real illness, or just an over-reaction on the part of parents and gamers.

Richard Wood, a researcher at Nottingham Trent University, argued in 2008 that video game addiction was a "myth".

"Some people are being mislabelled addicts by concerned parents, partners or others when they have no problems with their game-playing behaviour. Some people who are concerned about their own behaviour ... end up labelling themselves as video game addicts," he said.