

# Embracing a balanced approach between Online engagement and OFFline alternatives



## MODULE #4

Strategies towards gaining a balanced life

DEVELOPED BY: (ASSERTED KNOWLEDGE)



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# MODULE #4

## DESCRIPTION

This module intends to provide you with strategies that will help you regain a balanced life. The aim is to explore practical ways **to fight Internet addiction** and to **improve your emotional and physical wellbeing**. However, remember that there is **no one size-fits-all solution** to such an issue. This module will help you understand your **personal relation** with the Internet and guide you on developing **your own strategies to reduce online use** and **regain a balance life**. While these strategies can be very **useful**, the results may vary. If you **practice them continuously** for a long period of time, the **benefits will surely show up**.

# MODULE #4

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Once you have followed this module, you will be able to:

- Develop effective approaches to understand your addiction, its urges and triggers.
- Comprehend how the addictive behaviour impacts your life.
- Approach the internet as a tool and get the most out of your time online.
- Develop strategies to regain a balanced life.
- Strengthen your relationships with your closed ones and create new social relationships.
- Challenge the negative feelings that feed your addiction.

# MODULE #4

## LIST OF TOPICS

**TOPIC 1** Awareness of media and self

**TOPIC 2** Embracing quality media usage

**TOPIC 3** Selective single-tasking

**TOPIC 4** Carving out times and places to disconnect

**TOPIC 5** Nurturing relationships and face to face conversation

**TOPIC 6** Cognitive restructuring techniques

# 1 Awareness of media and self

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

**You can't change what you're not aware of.** Understanding your actions, your urges, and their triggers can be the first step towards addressing the problem.

Once you have followed this module, you will be able to:

- Map the time you spend online.
- Comprehend how the addition affects your emotional wellbeing.
- Get an understanding of the triggers that lead you to go online.
- Understand your urges in order to address them effectively.

# 1 Awareness of media and self

## Record the time you spend online

The first step to regaining a balanced life is to realise **how grave the problem is**. While spending your usual amount of time online, try to **record how much time** you spend and on **which activities**, sites, apps, etc. If you are studying/working online that will be a bit more complicated. But try to stick to it for a few days.



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# 1 Awareness of media and self

## Record the time you spend online

Maybe a few hours browsing the internet seem harmless but **adding up** the amount spent could lead to large numbers that you were not aware of.

To record the time you can use a **timer** or an **app** like [QualityTime](#), [addictOmeter](#), or [toggl](#).



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# 1 Awareness of media and self

## Observe the time you spend online

Apart from documenting the time spent online observe the **how you spend it**. For example do you spend more time on **social media** or are you mainly playing **online games**? Also, do you spend **consecutive hours** on Facebook or do you go on twitter **every 15 minutes** to check if there has been an update?

This way, you could be able to notice the possible **patterns** in your Internet use behavior.



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# 1 Awareness of media and self

## Note down your feelings

- *How do you feel when you are using the internet?*
- *How do you feel when you are not online, but you are craving it?*
- *Do you feel smarter or more confident online compared to real life?*
- *Do you feel isolated, stressed, or even depressed when not online?*
- *How do you feel after having spent several hours online? Tired? Unsatisfied?*

**Documenting** how you feel can give you some **insight** into how your internet use is affecting your emotional health.

# 1

## Awareness of media and self

### Identify the triggers



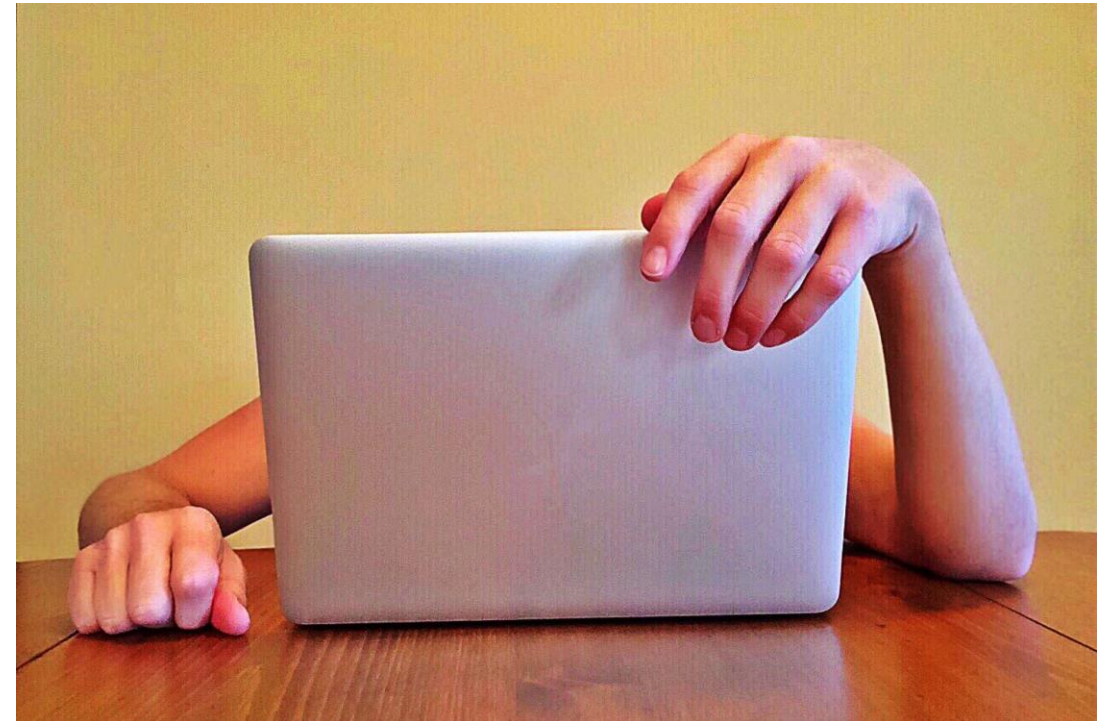
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Excessive internet use may be triggered by feelings of **boredom, loneliness, or stress**. Checking your smartphone could be an **automatic response to relieve your anxiety**, for example. Whatever the case, you need to know what is triggering your excessive online use. That is the only way to recover from it.

# 1 Awareness of media and self

## Identify the triggers

You can achieve that by paying attention to your self every time you go online. Try to **constantly notice** the **urges** to use the internet as they come up and how and why you respond to them.



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# 1 Awareness of media and self

## CONCLUSIONS

Understanding your online behaviour and your emotional reactions towards the Internet is the first step to a healthy and balanced usage. Start with keeping a **journal** for a few days with the beforementioned elements: **time, ways, feelings, triggers**. This can be a very helpful tool for yourself but also for others supporting you on this journey.



Source: [www.pixabay.com](http://www.pixabay.com)

# 1 Awareness of media and self

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# 1

## Awareness of media and self

### EXTRA RESOURCES

1. [QualityTime](#) and [addictOmeter](#): apps to monitor how much time you spend on your phone
2. [Toggl](#): a time tracking app to help you map your online activities

# 1 Awareness of media and self

## QUIZ

1. It is not important why and when you go online.
  - a. True
  - b. **False**
  
2. Feeling bored or lonely could be linked to excessive Internet use.
  - a. **True**
  - b. False



## 2 Embracing quality media usage

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Internet is a **highly useful tool** and a **key part of contemporary life**. The goal is not to abstain entirely from it but rather **to develop a healthy online behaviour** and a quality usage of technology.

Instead of trying to quit cold turkey, make a plan to **gradually reduce** the time spent online mindlessly without losing the benefits of the technology.

Once you have followed this module, you will be able to:

- Treat internet as a tool and get the most out of your time online.
- Enjoy fun activities within a healthy and balanced limit.

## 2 Embracing quality media usage

### Treat the Internet as a tool

The Internet is a **means to an end**. Remember that! Plan your time online with the end in mind and that will save you valuable time. Whether you have to work or you are just using the Internet for entertainment, or to keep in touch with friends don't forget **why you are online**.



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## 2 Embracing quality media usage

### Schedule your online time



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Instead of going online “whenever,” you can **create a schedule** for yourself. Keeping in mind your journal from topic 1, plan an Internet time schedule based on **your needs and preferences**. For example, you can set 1 hour after finishing your homework to play online games and 30 minutes before dinner to browse social media. If you need to, you can set a **timer** to remind you when to get off the internet. When the time is up, find a different task to occupy your mind with.

## 2 Embracing quality media usage

### CONCLUSIONS

The Internet is a tool and holds an important place in our lives. You do not have to give up entirely on your computer or smartphone. Setting boundaries and embracing quality media usage will give you **more control** over your online time.

## 2 Embracing quality media usage

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## 2 Embracing quality media usage

### QUIZ

1. To combat internet addiction you should refrain entirely from browsing the Internet.
  - a. True
  - b. False**
  
2. An online time schedule should be the same for everyone.
  - a. True
  - b. False**

### 3 Selective single-tasking

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

*“**Multitasking** is a brain drain that exhausts the mind, zaps cognitive resources and, if left unchecked, condemns us to early mental decline and decreased sharpness.”*

*Dr. Sandra Bond Chapman*

Technology encourages working on multiple sources of input at the same time. However, as it provides more distractions, **our attention is spread among multiple tasks and more thinly**. Although you may feel that you can accomplish more this way, according to many studies multitasking reduces productivity, increases the possibility of errors, and generates stress. **Selective single-tasking** can help reduce the stress and increase productivity.

Once you have followed this module, you will be able to:

- Increase productivity while using the Internet for work or school
- Learn to focus your attention on a single task



### 3 Selective single-tasking

#### Block distracting websites for a set amount of time



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If you are finding your self slipping into a Facebook sinkhole when you should be working then you might benefit from blocking **certain distracting websites or applications**. There are a few apps or browser extensions that you can use to block distractions for a certain amount of time (*For example: [AntiSocial](#) and [Cold Turkey](#)*)

### 3 Selective single-tasking

## Block these websites on select devices

Another tip that you might find useful is **blocking certain websites on selected devices**. Your journal will help you understand which websites or applications you are most addicted to and on which devices you use them the most.



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### 3 Selective single-tasking

#### Block these websites on select devices

For example, you may delete the Facebook application from your mobile phone and block the website on your school/work laptop. Now, you can only access Facebook from your home computer or your tablet. This can help you combat the urge and modify your habits. You can slowly incorporate them back into your life once you develop a healthier relation with the Internet.

### 3 Selective single-tasking

#### Turn off extra tech

Limiting your attention to a single task at a time is hard when you are constantly **connected on many different sources and devices**. When you are doing a specific school or job task, we would recommend to **turn off unnecessary technology** around you to minimise distractions. For example turn off your laptop, or the internet connection on your phone.

You will then focus more easily on your task and that will give you a feeling of accomplishment at the end.



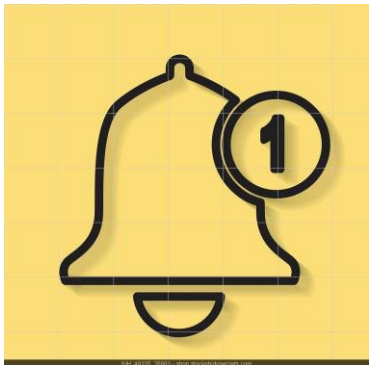
Source: [www.pixabay.com](http://www.pixabay.com)



### 3 Selective single-tasking

#### Disable unnecessary notifications

*“Someone commented on my Facebook picture! I must check that out!”*  
Does that sound familiar?



Another distracting **trigger** are **notifications**. Disabling the notifications from your laptop and phone will reduce the triggers and let you **concentrate** on your task at each time. You can check Facebook or other distracting sites on your own time after getting the work done.

### 3 Selective single-tasking

## CONCLUSIONS

We think it's a good thing to be busy. But that's not true.

Barry Schwartz has written that: *“given the media-rich landscape of the Internet era, it is tempting to get into a habit of dwelling in a constant sea of information with too many choices, which has been noted to have a negative effect on human happiness”*.

Good planning can help you **focus** more and be more **productive** and **content** with your work.

### 3 Selective single-tasking

## REFERENCES

10 Ways to Combat Your Internet Addiction Symptoms. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.addictions.com/internet/10-ways-to-combat-your-internet-addiction-symptoms/>

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### 3 Selective single-tasking

#### EXTRA RESOURCES

1. [AntiSocial](#): an app to block social media on your phone.
2. [Cold Turkey](#): a browser extension to block websites and applications on your computer

### 3 Selective single-tasking

## QUIZ

1. It's productive and efficient to work on more than 3 tasks at the same time.
  - a. True
  - b. False**
  
2. It is possible to block the Facebook website on your computer.
  - a. True**
  - b. False

# 4

## Carving out times and places to disconnect

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

As we said you don't have to quit the Internet cold turkey, it is after all a great tool. Even taking some time offline can have a great impact on your emotional as well as physical wellbeing.

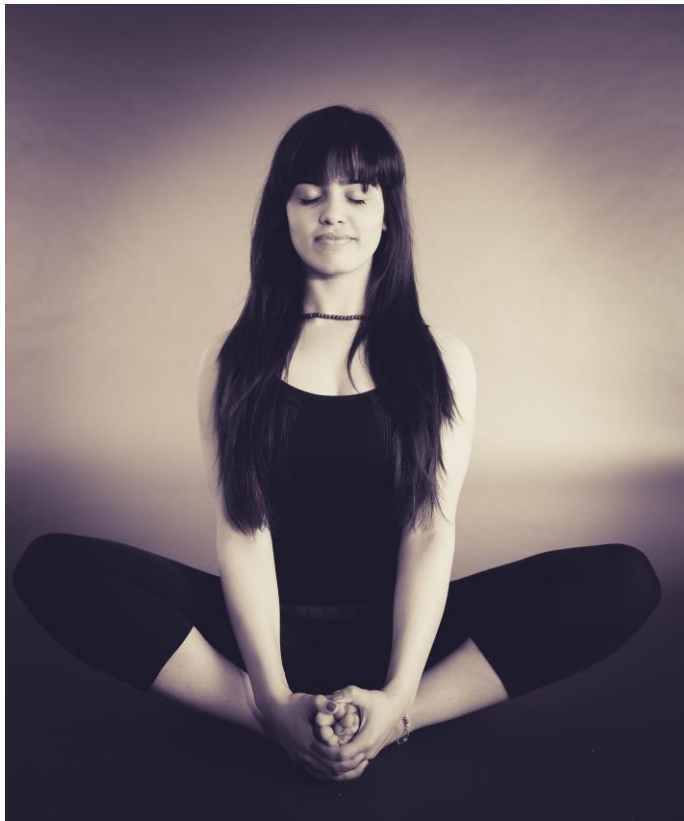
Once you have followed this module, you will be able to:

- Create a space to develop as a person away from the internet.
- Find new offline ways to have fun.

# 4

## Carving out times and places to disconnect

Designate specific times to unplug and think reflectively and creatively



You can start by designating and putting in your calendar **specific times** each week to **rest and reflect**. Get up from your desk and go outside for a walk, or just sit comfortably and relax. Leave your smart phone at home. This will give you some time to take a rest from the overload of information.

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## 4 Carving out times and places to disconnect

Designate specific times to unplug and think reflectively and creatively

Even when you are working online, and you have to spend much time in front of the computer just taking a 10-minute break every 1 hour can be highly beneficial.

You can **use a timer app on your phone** to remind you unplug from the Internet.

# 4

## Carving out times and places to disconnect

### Develop other interests

Most probably your parents or teachers are telling you to go outside or read a book but it's **not always easy** to disconnect. Developing **new enjoyable interests** can provide you with healthy ways to limit excessive Internet use and can help fill the void left when cutting down on your online time. For example, you can join a local sports team or volunteer for a cause that you are passionate about.



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# 4

## Carving out times and places to disconnect

### Schedule your free time

The urge to go online during your free time, especially if you are feeling bored can be overwhelming. That's why **not leaving empty time slots** can be helpful in combating the temptation. **Fill your free time** with activities that you find enjoyable and surround yourself with people who support you. You can just plan spending more time with your friends or family.

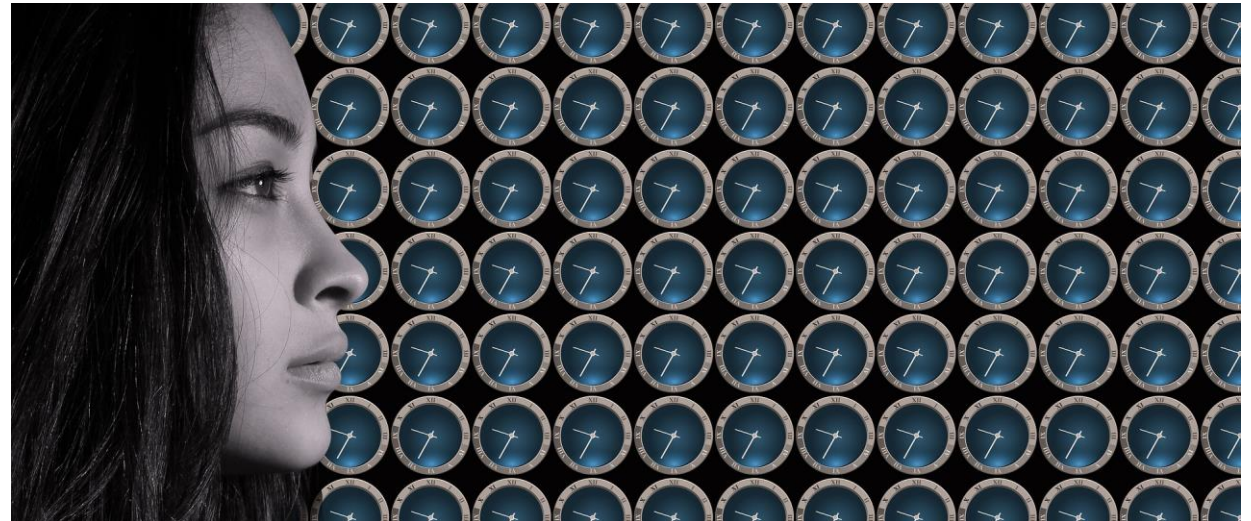


## 4 Carving out times and places to disconnect

### Change your routines

If you have been keeping a **journal** of your online time you have probably noticed that your Internet use follows **specific patterns**. Addiction tends to breed its own habits and routines that can slowly turn into a lifestyle. Fighting the symptoms means **replacing the habits with new routines and pursuits**. For example, instead of checking your phone first thing in the morning you can make yourself a nutritious breakfast. Or instead of browsing the Internet before you sleep you could try reading a book.

In general, postponing your Internet time or doing something else could make it easier to reduce your online use.



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## 4

## Carving out times and places to disconnect

## Stay physically active



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Staying physically active is the answer to many emotional and physical problems. On one hand exercising **boosts your mood** but most importantly you can't go online when running on the treadmill. So, if you are not doing it already find an activity that you like and set time on your schedule for practicing. If you have been leading a sedentary lifestyle you may want to **start low and slow**. It may seem hard at the beginning but once it becomes a habit, you'll see **great benefits**.

# 4

## Carving out times and places to disconnect

### CONCLUSIONS

Ask yourself: *“Want am I missing out on?”*

You might not realise it but you are probably missing out on a lot while spending mindlessly time online. Try to pursue the activities that interest you but also to rediscover neglected areas of your life. It may seem difficult now but taking it step by step will help you control excessive Internet usage.

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# 4

## Carving out times and places to disconnect

### QUIZ

1. The Internet becomes part of your routine. Substituting habits that include the Internet can be beneficial.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Leaving empty time slots could “feed” one’s internet addiction.
  - a. True
  - b. False

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Excessive internet use can **harm social relationships** of every kind, from family, friends, partners even social interactions with strangers. Existing relationships could be damaged and the formation on new ones could be undermined. At the same time nurturing social relationships and face to face interactions can work as a **support system** to help you get through internet addiction.

Once you have followed this module, you will be able to:

- Communicate your problem with the people around you and receive constructive support.
- Strengthen the relationships with your friends, family, and acquaintances.
- Choose face-to-face interactions instead of online ones and improve your emotional wellbeing.
- Broaden your social cycle with people who will support you.

## 5

## Nurturing relationships and face to face conversation

## Stay close to your family and loved ones

Unfortunately, the lack of a **strong emotional support system** is a risk factor for Internet addiction. Thus, maintaining strong social bonds could be an amazing thing to do for yourself. Designate a **specific hour** during the day to spend some time with your family, have a meal together, talk about your issues, or play a board game. Distancing yourself from your family not only increases **stress**, but it also makes you more **susceptible** to excessive online use.



## 5

## Nurturing relationships and face to face conversation

## Talk about your addiction



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Talking about your problems is a huge step and is not always easy. You probably think that they will not “get” what you are going through. Nevertheless, they can be more **understanding** and **empathetic** when they realise that it’s a real problem.

# 5

## Nurturing relationships and face to face conversation

### Talk about your addiction

**Discuss** with your loved ones your issues and concerns and ask them to spend more time with you. They can serve as a valuable support system, filling the time that you would be spending mindlessly browsing online. This way, you will not only be distracted from the Internet, but you will strengthen your bond with the people that are important to you.

## Make face-to-face friends

It may feel safer and easier to **make friends** or even meet potential romantic partners **online**. You can be chatting online for hours hidden behind the **anonymity** of your **online persona**. But the price to pay often comes in the form of addiction. Friendships and romantic relationships that flourish in the real world are far more valuable and stronger. Why don't you introduce to yourself to a new friend, go out with your friend's friends, or start a new hobby? **Meeting new people** is a great way to enjoy your day or feel more **confident and content**.

## Ask your loved ones to hold you accountable

As we said having the help of your friends and family is highly important. You could ask them to hold you **accountable** for **setting limits** on internet activity. This can make it easier to combat internet addiction symptoms throughout the day.



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# 5

## Nurturing relationships and face to face conversation

### Ask your loved ones to hold you accountable

How to do this? You could, for example, set limits on the amount spent online and make it **clear** to your family that you've got to be dragged away from the computer no matter what, once you surpass this limit.

## 5

## Nurturing relationships and face to face conversation

## Find new ways to socialize



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One of the biggest driving factors fueling excessive Internet use is the desire to socialise and feelings of loneliness or exclusion. Especially, if you are introverted making new friends may seem scary. But you can do this offline – we promise! Find a **club** or **organisation** to get involved with and start interacting in person with people that share **your interests**.



## Find new ways to socialize

Temptations that pull your attention away from reality are everywhere these days. However, new relationships can be a great substitute for your attention in order to minimise your internet cravings.



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## CONCLUSIONS

You may think that you can fight it alone, but you **shouldn't be doing it on your own**. Most probably there are people around you that are willing to take on a little inconvenience to support you in this journey. Therefore, **discuss** about your issues and try to stay close to your loved ones. In the meantime, making new relationships can be a great way to boost your mood and confidence and distract you from online use.

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## QUIZ

1. Having a strong emotional support system is a risk factor for Internet addiction.
  - a. True
  - b. False**
  
2. It's preferable not to discuss your excessive online use issue with your friends.
  - a. True
  - b. False**

## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

There are many approaches to treating excessive online use. One approach that has shown to be very effective is **cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)**. CBT is a type of **talking therapy** that is short-term and aims at modifying harmful behaviours. In this chapter we will discuss about **cognitive restructuring**, a core part of CBT.

Once you have followed this module, you will be able to:

- Identify the emotions and the situations that are linked to your excessive Internet use.
- Challenge the negative feelings in order to address the issue.
- Practice self-compassion and understanding.

## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### What is cognitive structuring?

Cognitive restructuring is a process that can help **people identify, challenge, and change negative and stress-inducing thoughts and patterns**. The aim is to enable them to replace the negative thoughts with more **accurate and less stress-inducing** habits.

In Internet addiction cognitive restructuring can be used to alter the thoughts and patterns that cause a compulsive usage of the Internet.

## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### Ways to changes your thinking



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Although CBT is usually practiced with the help of a therapist there are some techniques that you can try **on your own** to help you change your thinking.

## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### Ways to changes your thinking

Practice noticing your thoughts and habits

We have already talked about that in topic 1. Identifying your thoughts, habits, and patterns is the key to understand the issue and address it properly. So, try to **raise awareness** of your **negative emotions** that **cause** the excessive Internet usage.

*What is that leads you to use your smartphone?*

For example, it could be **low-self esteem** - some people think of the internet as a **safe place** where they are respected and appreciated contrary to the real world. That can lead to a psychological dependence that feeds the online addiction.



## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### Ways to changes your thinking

Track the accuracy of the negative thoughts

Let's take the case of going online because you are feeling not appreciated in real life. How real is this thought though?

Try writing down the **evidence for and against** your negative thoughts. For example, you can make a list of the things that you are good at, the good aspects of your character as well as the things that you wish to improve.

## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### Ways to changes your thinking

For example you can use the below template to identify your negative thoughts and emotions and the behaviours that you use as a response to them. Then you can add alternative positive thoughts to help you cope better.

Thoughts	Emotions	Behaviours	Alternative thoughts
“Nobody likes me. I’m alone”	Depressed, stressed, sad	Spending hours on your computer playing online games	There are people in my life who love me and support me.

## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### Ways to changes your thinking

#### Practice self-compassion

Being **kind** and **understanding** with yourself can help you greatly throughout this journey. Practicing self-compassion fosters **resilience**, **strength**, and **motivation**. Additionally, it can protect you against stress and the negative thoughts leading to excessive internet use.

Therefore, instead of criticising yourself for being “addicted” try to acknowledge that you've made a mistake and that this is part of the human experience. If over time you replace self-criticism with self-compassion, your thoughts will eventually alter.

## 5 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### CONCLUSIONS

In this topic we explored some tips to help you modify the negative thoughts linked to your Internet addiction. Cognitive restructuring can help you recognise that you are probably using the Internet to stay away from certain situations or feelings. In order to breach this pattern of behaviour you will have to address these feelings and situations, evaluate them, and find **new constructive ways to cope**.

## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

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## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### EXTRA RESOURCES

1. CBT Techniques and Worksheets for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy:  
<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/cbt-cognitive-behavioral-therapy-techniques-worksheets/#cbt-worksheets>

## 6 Cognitive restructuring techniques

### QUIZ

1. Critising yourself for your addiction can help you cope with the problem.
  - a. True
  - b. False**
  
2. Going online could be a coping mechanism for other emotional issues.
  - a. True**
  - b. False



# MODULE #4

## ASSIGNMENT

David has changed schools this year and he is feeling quite lonely and stressed. He has been spending too much time online to relieve the negative feelings, but this excessive Internet use is having an impact on his school grades but most importantly on his emotional wellbeing.

After going through all topics and content in this module, what would you suggest David to do?

Please upload your advice.

# MODULE #4

## GLOSSARY

<b>Multitasking</b>	When one person handles more than one task or activity at the same time
<b>SingleTasking</b>	When one person is doing one thing at a time
<b>Cognitive Behavioural Therapy</b>	A type of talking therapy that can help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave
<b>Cognitive restructuring</b>	A process that can help you identify, challenge, and change negative and stress-inducing thoughts and patterns

**Project acronym:** ON/OFF4YOUNGSTERS

**Project title:** Embracing a balanced approach between  
Online engagement and OFFline alternatives

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