The case of Adrian

Name: Adrian
Age: 28
Profile:
Programmer, medium-high income,
living in a studio apartment in a big city,
no girlfriend

Adrian works for a small company as a Java programmer. Computing is his whole world. It seems he doesn't need anything more to be happy. He not only enjoys his work but also every activity connected to virtual activities. When he is not working, he plays computer games and has even built a special world which looks like where he would like to live. He spends allot of money on a regular basis in order to develop his life which he has created online. Because of how much time he spends in front of the screen, his family and friends are very concerned. He doesn't keep in contact or meet them very often. When they ask him to go out or when is he going to settle down, he gets angry. Almost every conversation finishes like this so, whenever he can, he avoids contact with his loved ones. His family wants to help him but, because of these strong emotions, they feel helpless. It is also visible for everyone that because of constant sitting in front of the screen, he put on weight considerably. They think that if they had given him more attention during his childhood, when the situation first started, he would have been more open to others and in contact with reality, not only his virtual world.

Additional notes:
Giving a child the ability to learn how to use computers and develop this interest is not a bad idea in itself. It strengthens analytic thinking, creativity, problem-solving and many more skills. However, every type of activity should have limits. Once you give permission to a child to spend numerous hours in front of the screen, it can easily get out of the control and affect many areas of their life. Childhood is a very vulnerable time wherein developing social competences is crucial for every area of life. Spending hours and hours in a virtual world gives instant gratification and predictability which is not realistic. As a result, they will grow up finding it easier to interact with a computer that with other people. Social interaction becomes challenging since you cannot predict how the other people will feel and react. The real world becomes boring at times so you need to think of things to do; it does not always provide enough stimulation, sense of satisfaction or fulfillment. Sometimes positive actions do not even result in a positive outcome which can be difficult at times. Therefore, not experiencing real life, and living in a virtual world, can become unpleasant and even unsafe.
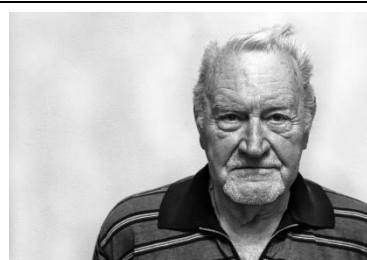
The case of George

Name: George
Age: 65
Profile:
Retired military worker, single, no children, lives alone in a middle-sized city

George is a retired, single man who needs to find himself within society. For most of his life he was dedicated to the Army and followed a very strict routine; getting up at 5 in the morning, exercising and following other demanding activities and rules which every member of the Army had to obey. When his time in this Army community was coming to an end, with less duties and more free time spent at home, he started playing online games like poker etc. Initially, he was gambling on random days, usually in the evening after meeting with friends and shopping. As time went by, he started to feel a need to gamble more often, in the hope of winning enough money to fulfil his biggest dream – buy a yacht and travel the world. He started with bets ranging between $5,000 and $10,000 a day. He would gamble until 2:00am, try to sleep for a few hours and bet again for another five hours. Such a lifestyle, revolving around just one main activity, soon made him more dedicated to gambling in order to win enough money to win his 'freedom' (trip around the world). He started to borrow money from friends and even spent all his life savings. It did not work and every day he became more and more in debt. His friends stopped meeting with him because he talked to them only to borrow money and never had time to talk about anything else but his problems… As a result of his addiction he lost his friends and has a huge debt which he now tries to pay off by gambling further.

Additional notes:
Internet literacy may be very beneficial for retired people. It gives access to a variety of knowledge, it is source of new opportunities, information about local events, it connects people in similar situations, and entertainment. However, its benefits can transform into disadvantages if it is not used wisely. There are numerous reasons why people decide to gamble online. Mainly, it provides entertainment and they don't even need to go out in order to get it. It is also available 24/7. No time restrictions and constant availability makes it more dangerous because, when there is no limit, it is hard to stop someone from doing it. Moreover, the immediate gratification connected to the pleasure of playing and winning, or even dissatisfaction of losing, drives the cycle of repetitive actions in order to win eventually. In order to save a person from such a dangerous situation of becoming an online gambler in debt, is to provide him/her with a social support and set clear limits before it's too late. There are a number of support groups for people affected by this kind of addiction. Besides the help and support of professionals, a person can hear stories of other people who have a similar problem. Building a strong community of people who can and want to help and spending time in the 'real world', engaging in helping others in need, are some of the most crucial factors for the path to recovery.

The case of Marta

Name: Marta
Age: 35
Profile:
Communication Specialist, medium-high income, lives in the suburbs of a big city with her partner, no kids

Shopping online can be as easy as click, click, buy...
Marta's online shopping addiction began three years ago when she was recovering from a physical illness and online shopping was her way to fight boredom. It used to offer her emotional satisfaction and she was getting a thrill from finding great deals. Makeup and clothes are her biggest weaknesses. Unfortunately, things quickly became out of control...
Nowadays, Marta buys several new items a week and she shops online almost every day.
"I used to feel good about it, I used to enjoy it," she says, "I used to upload my purchases onto Instagram and Snapchat people about them. But now I just buy them and often hide them away in my wardrobe, without even using them once."
Marta hasn't been able to tell her friends and family about how bad her problem is and goes to exhaustive lengths to hide her purchases from her partner. She says: "I probably couldn't go a day without doing it, and he probably doesn't know that. He knows about one credit card, he doesn't know about the others..."
Because, of course, the financial burden of this addition is another problem... By now Marta has a "huge amount of debt" across three credit cards, and once she even took out a loan...

Additional notes:
 The combination of anonymity, the convenience of not having to go to a store and the variety of products available, can fuel an online shopping addiction. If you are not careful, it could become a habit that wrecks your finances and can get in the way of other areas of life, particularly your time and family.
As online retailers sweeten deals for consumers, experts say more shoppers are at risk of becoming addicted to online shopping.
Online shopping addicts may get emotional satisfaction from shopping for different reasons. That can include needing to portray a certain image, getting a thrill from finding deals or even the need to buy for loved ones.
Some possible actions to control online shopping and online spending: blocking favourite retailers' sites, setting a time limit for how long you can shop, restricting your budget to reduce the amount of purchases you can make, and taking your credit card information offline.

The case of Robert

Name: Robert
Age: 15
Profile:
High school student, living in a small town
with his parents and older brother

Robert is a modest high school student who wants to become a doctor one day. He is a kind and hard-working person who is shy at times. His family is very traditional, which means that his parents value a good education above all and expect him to get the best grades possible. That is why he spends all his time studying and only has a few close friends. As every person his age, he likes to stay up to date with what's going on in other people's lives, being accepted by his peers and have a girlfriend one day. A month ago, he got a message on Facebook from a pretty girl from his school. They started chatting every day. After a week the conversations got more intense and finally Robert started sharing with her his deepest thoughts and concerns. One day Robert gained enough courage to invite her for a date but instead of getting the 'yes' response, the girl published their conversations on the school's student group, laughing at his secrets and affection towards her. He saw how his school mates were commenting on his feelings towards her and calling him 'naive', 'silly', 'boring' and so on. Finally, all of the school knew about the incident and continued to insult him offline. Robert has become so anxious about going to school that he started having severe headaches almost every day before school. He also lost interest in studying and resigned from going out with friends. All in all, his parents had to move him to the other school, but it took him many months to regain people's trust and live to a normal life.

Additional notes:
Cyberbullying can be a devastating experience, not only for a person as a victim but also for his/her family. Social rejection can cause permanent damage to a person. Because of easy access to the Internet and anonymity, it makes it easy for others to engage themselves into devaluing other people's social background or looks. It is reported that over 34% of teens experience cyberbullying which, in many cases, is the cause of anxiety, depression and even the reason for attempted suicide. It is a serious issue which needs to be taken care of immediately.
That is why the development of awareness and empathy are so crucial from the earliest years of children's education. Also, access to the Internet should be given by parents consciously, so they know what the risks of its misuse are and how to prevent misuse. But the most crucial is development of mutual respect, conversation and bonding which will help children to accept diversity and understand other people's needs.

The case of Sarah

Name: Sarah

Age: 6

Profile:

Primary school student, lives in a big city with her parents, high class family

Sarah is an only child. Both her mother and father have their own business and are respected in the society. From the earliest stage of her life, Sarah was given all she wanted except her parent's attention. Since the age of two, when her parents were busy with their work, a babysitter took care of her. Sometimes she was moody and did not want to listen to her babysitter; she was given a tablet and played videos for children or played games. As time went by, it was the only way to make her do something without her crying and becoming angry. After her 6th birthday, her parents decided to send her to school. For the first week, everything seemed to be fine – there were many interesting classes and many new children. However, during her days at school, it became noticeable that Sarah had problems with anger, impatience and an attention disorder. Wherever she tries to solve a problem or solution to a task, she gets very frustrated and gives up immediately. During classes she cannot focus for more than 10 minutes and then becomes occupied by drawing and swinging on a chair.

Additional notes:

Internet addiction and its consequences can develop and pile up at a very early age. Nowadays, there are more and more parents who don't give much time and attention to their children. During their absence, the parents are not aware of the time their children spend on different activities which will help them to develop competences crucial for their age.

Excessive use of the internet and gaming can cause symptoms such as a need for stimulation and instant gratification, impatience, problems with maintaining attention and learning difficulties. If a child gets used to such activities, they can also become more frustrated in real life, in social interactions, has less empathy towards others and only develop few relationships with others.

What parents can do is to spend more quality time with their children eg. in the park, in the forest, on the playground by developing their innate curiosity and mindfulness of the outside world. Many adults should also learn how important it is, from the early age, to read books to their children, talk to them, listen to them, help others and interact with their loved ones. Setting a limit on internet use initially can be very difficult and takes a lot of commitment and patience, but the effects will considerably change their children's life for the better.