

Breaking the Denial:

Confronting a Loved One Addicted to the Internet

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“My wife spends more than fifty hours a week chatting with some guy she met online and our marriage and family life is in a shambles. She receives erotic email and every time I try to tell her how it hurts our marriage, she claims that it is all my fault. I think she talks to him on the phone and I fear that she may run off with him. My pastor does not know how to help. What can we do to bring her back to reality? Our whole family is really hurting!”

Shawn, a concerned husband in Pennsylvania

In the spring of 1999, after a workshop that I gave on Internet addiction at a university in Nebraska, I noticed several women waiting to speak with me. Gathered in the corner of the room, they stood whispering and talking amongst themselves. After most people cleared out and the line dwindled down, I walked over to them. One woman held a copy of my book in her hand and said, “My husband has struggled with this addiction for the last six months, I just didn’t know where to turn. I was so revealed to find your book because no one around here knew anything about Internet addiction.”

The next woman told me a story about her 31-year old daughter, wife and mother of two toddlers, who was having several online affairs. “Her behavior has just traumatized the whole family. She was the perfect wife and mother until the Internet

came into their home. Suddenly, my daughter's entire personality changed. When I tried to talk with her about it, she became angry and defensive. She used to be able to tell me anything, and now she refuses to talk with me."

Yet, another woman told me about her sister and the next told me about her son. All of them complained that they were frustrated, scared, and confused by the sudden personality changes that took place after the Internet came into their lives.

Where to Turn

Addiction hurts the one you love. Since then, I have received literally hundreds of emails and phone calls from family members and friends desperate to find help for their Internet-addicted loved one. They feel helpless and alone in their quest to find help as therapists have never heard of Internet addiction and if they have, they aren't sure how to approach someone who suffers from the problem. Or, counselors minimize the problem and suggest that Internet addiction isn't real and tell them to simply turn off the computer. As one woman said, "That's like telling the wife of an alcoholic to tell him to simply stop drinking." Given the newness of the disorder, parents, spouses, family members, and friends search for validation and struggle with where to turn for help on how to confront an addicted loved one in denial. As one mother told me, "I went to three therapists and none of them believed me that my son could get addicted to online games."

Andrea's Story

Andrea is a 45-year-old elementary teacher living White Plains, New York. She wrote to me about her sister's addiction. Her story captures the pain and frustration that concerned family members, children, and friends of the addict often experience.

“My sister, a married mother of three lost all interest in her teenage and adult children, her husband of twenty-three years and all other outside activities she had previously been involved in. The change was gradual. At first we were just concerned and irritated because she was constantly online and no one could reach her. Then she started developing intense online friendships. Since February of 1998 she progressed to having what we believe are multiple real sexual relations with men and perhaps women.

We, her daughter and I, have reason to know that these sexual relationships are centered around a slave/master theme. In fact, most of the time when she is in a chat room she is engaged in some sort of weird cybersex. We also know that she is engaged in this type of sex with live partners, not just on the net. Her high school aged son has caught her with men on at least three occasions but she has denied everything. We know she plans to visit at least two of these men in the coming months. We are terrified for her and don't know what to do. My niece, my parents, and myself have your book [Caught in the Net]. We think my sister is vintage example of the people you describe, with the exception that she has expressed that she doesn't care about the cost of her new behavior, she will not stop for anyone.

My niece and I are the only two people in our family who know the extent of the problem, we know that she is meeting with multiple men. We have tried to protect both

my parents and my sister's sons from this because we see no benefit for upsetting them. My sister's husband simply refuses to acknowledge that there is a problem. In fact, he has admitted that sometimes this is a nice change because my sister is off his back. We have not told him the extent of my sister's betrayal. My sister gets calls at all hours from these people. She has changed her dress from that of a normal mom to black lace and tight mini-skirts. She leaves that house at all hours and doesn't return. She goes away for weekends and lies about who she is with. She says she loves these people to them, while she is standing in front of her own family, and then denies a problem.

She is wearing jewelry given to her by these people. She is involving her daughter way too much in this. She has confided in her daughter things that she should not know, but if her daughter challenges her she gets mad and calls her judgmental and brings up anything she can to discredit her 22 year-old daughter. We believe that she will react this way with anyone that confronts her.

We think it is important for you to know just how bazaar and enormous the change has been. My sister has always been a terrific decent religious, caring person. She was the best mom I know. She was fun to be with and talk to. Now, I don't believe a word that come out of her mouth, she lies constantly and doesn't even bother with being consistent. The other thing we thought you should know is that my sister has shown my niece pictures of these people, they truly look like the dregs of society. It is almost like her self esteem has lessened with this contact and she is associating with people she never would have before. These are not working normal people, they are obese, sending nude pictures, one couple says they both love her and she loves both of them, husband and wife.

I don't live with my sister so her addiction has only caused me anger and worry. Her daughter tells me that her mom stopped cooking dinner, which she did every night for 20 years; she stopped asking her youngest son about school and has not asked for a report card in 18 months. She does not attend any of his school functions, even though in the past she would never have missed anything. When my niece was home for Christmas her mother, who she was very close to, did not spend a single evening with her. My niece and her mother got into very harsh argument about these problems and her father sided with her mother, just to make the tensions go away. My parents are very worried, although again, I have not told them everything. My mom is 70 and my dad had by-pass surgery less than a year ago. I don't feel that they need to know as much as I do. Her son in the Navy can never reach home because of her constant usage.

My sister's husband recently began his own online weirdness, sending an advertisement for sexual services. He claims it was a joke. My sister felt the need to call and inform her daughter of this a seven am one morning, obviously in an attempt to say hey, its not only me. I have failed her in that I have never confronted her on what I see and know. My reasons were that I knew things I wasn't supposed to and I didn't want to upset the rest of the family. I live 800 miles away, so it would be her husband and kids that would take the brunt of my confrontation. My niece and I did not discover that the problem had overflowed into real life and she is meeting these people until about six weeks ago. That is when we searched out and found your book. My niece has confronted her about the danger involved in letting these people have her telephone number and address, but she says they are her friends and she trusts them. Another weird thing that seems to be happening is my sister has told her family enough about the slave

master thing that she will openly talk about it, saying it is just a game. We know that it is not, but we think is talking about it to take the sting of weirdness away and make it more normal and acceptable.

We are seeking any help we can get. What can we do? What can you tell us about the sexual addiction, which has come from the Internet? Are we too late? We are thinking about sending her and her husband a copy of your book. We are pretty sure she won't read it, in fact, I suspect she would hide it from her husband. We think we have become enablers by our passivity. We have considered going to her and confronting her even though we both live out of town. We just aren't sure the best way to proceed and could use advice and insight.”

Breaking the Denial

Why would a parent use the Internet to the point it causes pain for their children? Why would a spouse jeopardize a marriage for pictures on a computer screen? Initially, Internet users will rationalize that people are unable to become addicted to a machine. Compulsive disorders can manifest themselves in many non-chemical means such as gambling, food, shopping, or high-risk sexual behavior, and the mental health field is just beginning to acknowledge the addictive potential of the Internet to the same extent. While research in the addiction field has not been conclusive, most researchers agree that a combination of neurochemical and behavioral bases explain addictive behavior and studies support that non-intoxicants are equally as habit-forming as substances. Despite these research findings, most Internet addicts deny that anyone can “get addicted to a machine” and it is the family and friends who first view the behavior as troublesome.

Children may be the first to know

At an alarming rate, I receive a growing number of cries for help from the children of Internet addicts. Here is part of one such letter I received from a son about his mother, “I need your help. I am a 19-year-old who knows that my mom is cheating on my father on-line. She's in her late 40's and pretends to be in your early 20's when she talks to on-line guys. This issue has finally come to a climax with me because I want it to stop, yet I don't know how. It is ruining our mother-son relationship, while at the same time rotting the inside of me because things have currently become extremely ugly. My mother isn't a bad person, to say the least, she is just doing something wrong. She thinks I hate her because of all this anger inside, even though I've told her that I never could hate her because there's so much of her in my heart that it would mean that I'd hate myself. I don't have any money, thought I wish I did because she, and the rest of us, need help abolishing this addiction that is taking her away from us.”

Because children and teenagers are more computer-savvy than their parents they are more likely to be the first one in the family to discover mom's online affair or dad's secret online pornography collection. Children who use a parent's computer can accidentally find undeleted emails, locked files, old chat logs, or history folders that reveal the true nature about what a parent does online. And when that child makes this discovery, he or she is deeply wounded and thinks, “How can my mom or dad do this?”

Children are sensitive, especially over matters that concern their parents. In many respects, children grow up with this belief that mommy and daddy will stay together forever, but that doesn't always happen. And it is very difficult for children to learn that a parent had an affair. A child may develop feelings of deep anger at the adulterous parent for having the affair and for breaking the family apart. A parent's infidelity can

crush a son or daughter, no matter how they find out. Imagine the shock and devastation when a child makes this discovery through the Internet.

Not only does this discovery cause emotional pain, but may develop sleep and eating problems and become increasingly depressed as she or he internally agonizes about what to do: “Should I tell my father my mom is having cybersex?” “Should I confront my mom directly?” “How should I tell I found out without her hating me?” “How can I keep my parent’s marriage from falling apart?” “My mom wants to run away with her online boyfriend, how can I stop her?” A son or daughter feels too embarrassed to talk with friends about it and ends up feeling alone in their emotional struggle and confusion. If you happen to be a son or daughter reading this book now, do not attempt to handle this all by yourself. It is overwhelming to handle the situation alone and you should talk with a relative, trusted family friend, school counselor, or teacher about the situation.

Understanding the Denial

Denial stems from maladaptive core beliefs, rationalizations and distorted thinking that support the addiction. For example, the husband who surfs the Internet late at night for cyberporn while his wife and children sleep upstairs tells himself that he isn’t doing any harm to his family. He tells himself that having cybersex keeps him from going to strip clubs or worse, running around with prostitutes. What he doesn’t realize is the quality time lost with his wife each night he goes online, nor does he think about the lost opportunities to spend with his children, and he ignores how exhausted he feels during work the next day. Internet addicts rationalize and justify their behavior:

- No one will know.
- It's not really extramarital sex - it's just words on a screen.
- No one else is like me.
- Just one more time won't hurt.
- Everyone else is doing it.
- I can't get addicted to a machine.
- It's been a long day and the Internet helps me relax.
- It's better to be addicted to the computer than to drugs and drinking
- So I spent too much money gambling online, I've spent my money on sillier things.
- I can't understand why my spouse complains about my computer use, we never did much anyway.
- I must be okay using the Net all night – I still do well in school (or work).
- Doing chores is just not as important as staying online
- So I miss a few hours sleep from the Net; that's just wasted time anyway.

What Families Can Do to Help

The first step towards your loved one's recovery is for that person to admit the problem. If he or she is not ready to do that, then the person is not ready for treatment.

So then how do addicts break denial to recognize the problem? Generally speaking, they must first hit the metaphorical 'rock bottom' which is different for each person. In one case, it may be when the divorce papers are finally served, for another person it may be when they lose their job, and still for another, it may mean being kicked out of school.

Despite how powerful denial is when you are dealing with an addict, there are ways that concerned family and friends can help the addict to recognize he or she has a problem. In the addiction field, this is usually known as a “family intervention”. *Interventionists*, as they are sometimes called, are specialists who assist families in confronting an addiction. Their services may range from brief consultations to facilitating the actual family confrontation.

Given the magnitude of calls I receive from families who struggle with how to help an Internet addict in denial, I have included a step-by-step outline to serve as a blueprint and guide for family members and friends to follow. While this pamphlet provides direction, you should seek out the consultation and assistance of a healthcare professional before considering doing an intervention on your own. Such professional guidance will be instrumental in achieving maximum results with your loved one.

When searching for a healthcare professional, it is important to find one familiar with Internet addiction, however as we have seen this isn't always easy. Unfortunately, the field is still new and many therapists are unfamiliar with the Internet, and even worse, some reject the notion that people can get addicted to the Internet. In the previous case, Andrea spoke with several therapists before she came to our clinic. She explained, “The people we are talking to have no experience in sexual addiction or any type of obsessive behavior that was initiated through the Internet. Are we being stupid using them? They are all we have in this small town but we don't want to make a mistake.” To help you find a nearby healthcare professional familiar with the disorder, the Center for Online Addiction is developing a database of local referrals at www.netaddiction.com.

Step 1: Gather everyone together

Family interventions should include everyone concerned for the addict. This may include the immediate family such as a spouse or partner and age-appropriate children, extended relatives such as an aunt, uncle, mother, father, sister, brother, or cousin, and trusted friends. Start by talking about the issues, the problems, and begin to carefully examine how this person has changed since the becoming involved with the Internet.

In many situations, the spouse or partner is left to feel completely alone because he or she is the only one to witness the early stages of the addictive behavior. If you are a spouse living the addict, and haven't already enlisted the help of your family and friends, then now is the time to do so. Don't be afraid that they will laugh. Making a joke out of it is always a possibility as others may find it hard to believe that someone can become addicted to the Internet. If they do start to minimize the problem, educate them on the severity and full extent of the behavior to help them understand. Show them this book and other research materials associated with Internet addiction to help them see that this is just as real as alcoholism or drug dependence, and is nothing to laugh at.

Step 2: Develop a list of consequences due to the addiction

Once you have collected everyone together, it is time to reflect on the problems created by the addiction. Each of you should independently generate a list of consequences that you have observed due to the addiction. This process allows you to reflect more deeply about your own hurts caused by the addiction. Keep in mind that this isn't a time to air old issues, but genuinely try to think back to when you first noticed a problem. Consider what life was like before the Internet. Generally speaking, Internet

addiction is a quick fall, often less than one year. Given the short development cycle, much less than compared to the development cycle for alcoholism or drug dependence, it is easier for family and friends to recall what life was like before the Internet.

Ask yourself when you first noticed the shift in behavior. Was it sudden or gradual? Was it little things that slowly weren't getting done around the house such as the laundry, cooking, or cleaning? Did he become less interested in once cherished events such as golfing, going to the theater, or playing cards with friends since the Net? Did she spend less time gardening since discovering chat rooms? Your list can range from hobbies the person used to enjoy to specific consequence resultant from excessive online use such as a forgetting to pick up the children from school, losing a big job promotion, failing school, or getting fired. Your list might look like this:

- Having a close, trusting, and loving marriage
- Stability at the job or being up for a good promotion
- Going boating on weekends
- Spending time with the children in the evenings
- Working on model planes
- Gardening on the weekends
- Going on family outings such as to the zoo or sports events
- Talking on the phone with friends
- Going out to lunch with friends
- Keeping in touch and calling relatives

Your list should be thorough, so try to include as many specific examples as you can possibly think of. When it comes time for the actual family intervention, a clear and comprehensive list will help the person to fully understand your concerns.

One goal of a family intervention is to help the addict realize the consequences of current behavior and what the future will look like if he or she doesn't stop. To facilitate this awareness of what the addict stands to lose, make a second list of what life will look like if he or she doesn't seek out help. These lost goals might include:

- Breaking trust and fidelity in the marriage
- Separation or divorce from the marriage
- Being fired at work
- Money problems
- Losing one's children in a custody battle
- Losing one's friends
- Being arrested (if illegal online activity is present)

Step 3: Share your lists with one another

Next, gather all the family and friends together who will be involved with the intervention and share your lists with one another as a group. Did you all notice any common themes or issues? Did you all notice that his job performance has suffered lately? Have you all noticed that mom seems less interested in the children since meeting her online friends? Have you all noticed that dad no longer spends time doing once cherished activities with the family such as boating or going to baseballs games, instead

he is always 'working' on the computer?

The purpose of this group discussion is not to sit around and "bad mouth" your loved one, but rather to help you each crystallize and prioritize your thoughts and generate a comprehensive picture of the addict's behavior. This is also a process for family members to reveal secrets and share truths. Andrea explains, "Finally, my niece and I have managed to convey there is a problem to the other members of our family, and they are willing to do whatever it takes - but we have not told them everything. The stuff is too ugly and hurtful. We don't want to tell them, for my sister's sake and for their sake." Obviously, each situation is a little different, but for the intervention to be effective, it is important that each relative and friend involved understand the extent of the problem. While the truth may be initially painful to hear, it is better to come from the mouth of a loved one at this stage where the information can properly be absorbed and processed, rather than having it revealed during the actual intervention only to come as a great shock.

The key to this step is to allow family and friends time to openly share feelings and process what living with the addict has been like in order to gain support and strength from knowing that you are not alone. Gail first introduced her mother to the Internet, and described how this process helped her, "I was so relieved to know that my father also saw my mother's addiction to cyber chat rooms, she even lied to these men about being married to my father. Initially, I felt responsible for my mother's behavior because I taught her how to use the Internet. I carried this guilt with me for months until we all sat down to talk about the problem. It was so comforting to know that I wasn't alone and it helped ease my sense of self-blame."

Step 4: Develop a plan for the intervention

It is important to develop a plan for how to execute the family intervention. Time, date, and place should all be considered in this stage. Decide when the best time to have the intervention should be? Should it be in the afternoon or evening? Would it be better after dinner when the person is less likely to be on the Internet? Obviously, the time you designate should maximize the receptiveness of the message so doing it at the normal time the addict goes online won't be a practical time to choose.

What day is best? Are weekdays less hectic than weekends? Or would weekends be a better time because the person doesn't have to go to work the next morning, leaving him or her time to adjust emotionally to what has been said?

Where should you hold the intervention? Should it be at the addict's home? Or should it be in a neutral place, say at a family member's home or a friend's house? If you decide to have it away from where the addict normally accesses the computer (at his or her home), then you must consider how you will get the addict to arrive at the person's house? What will you tell her? Why does she need to go there? One family member explained, "We always have Sunday dinner at her daughter-in-law's house. It seemed the only time of the week that she allowed herself to be away from computer." Each step of the family intervention should be discussed ahead of time, however, don't expect everything to go as planned. Even if you have considered everything, life has a mind of its own, so be prepared for the best-laid plans to change.

Step 5: Rehearse the Intervention

Returning to Andrea's case, she felt overwhelmed about the prospect of the impending family intervention. "I will admit that my niece and I are very uncomfortable about confronting my sister," she explained. "We would love another suggestion. Much of what we know, we learned because we read some email that we shouldn't have. We are in the strange position of being ashamed to have violated her privacy while knowing that someone needs to know what is going on. I am full of nerves thinking about talking to her. What if she gets mad and never talks with us again? I just don't know how I would handle that."

Andrea expresses the typical emotions family members feel towards doing an intervention – dread, worry, apprehension, and fear. What if the addict becomes defensive? What if the addict storms out of the room? What if the addict refuses to listen? These are all possible outcomes that should be considered. What you are about to do isn't easy. No one likes to confront another person, even if it is meant to help.

To help reduce this anxiety, as a family you should rehearse together for the anticipated intervention in a similar fashion actors rehearse for a theatrical play. What you are about to do is very difficult and nothing prepares you for the actual event, but rehearsal will help you each feel more comfortable with the process and minimize apprehension.

Decide who will be the main spokesperson and in what order you will each speak. As you practice together, carefully consider how you will state your concerns. This isn't a situation calling for "tough love" and focus blame solely on the addict's inappropriate behavior, as this attitude will only produce shame and resistance. Concentrate on using

nonjudgmental language that won't sound critical or blaming and critique each other and refine your statements as necessary. Practice using non-blaming “I” statements that will help your loved one actually hear the message and avoid trigger words such as “always,” “never,” “should,” and “must” that sound like an attack. To enhance the reality of the rehearsal process, enlist a family member to pretend to be the addict. This person should respond in the same way you envision the addict responding, so that you can better anticipate the addict’s potential reaction. Finally, try to rehearse as much as possible to help the family prepare to act in a cohesive manner. This type of thoughtful preparation will help you show a united front and send a clear, strong, and confident message that will hopefully save your loved one from self-destruction.

Step 6: Communicate with Warmth and Caring

It is important to communicate with your loved one in warm, supportive, and loving tones during the family interventions. In an ideal situation, the intervention should foster an atmosphere to:

- Negotiate and express needs
- Establish and maintain proper boundaries
- Listen to each other’s concerns with respect
- Be comfortable sharing feelings
- Encourage honesty and trust

Despite your best efforts to express create a positive atmosphere, your loved one may respond with defensiveness, anger, and resistance. During a recent family

intervention one mother stormed out of the house crying, “You just don’t understand. I hate you all”. Repeated attempts by her two teenage daughters, her husband, and her mother to encourage her stay and listen failed. In other cases, the person recognizes the addiction, and his or her behavior is less about denial and more about poor self-control. For example, a spouse feels guilt about the virtual cheating or a parent feels ashamed downloading dozens of pornographic online pictures, but feels powerless to stop. Attempts to go a month or a week or even a day without logging online become an overwhelming task. And the realization that the family knows “the secret” in turn makes the addict feel embarrassed.

Remember that while you have prepared for the family intervention for days, weeks, or perhaps months, this is the first time your loved one has heard what you have to say. Your loved one may be emotionally unprepared to deal with what is being told to him or her, even if he or she knows it is the truth. Reactions in response to the intervention can range in the following ways:

1. *Denial* – Refuses to accept what is being told.
2. *Withdrawal* – Pulls away from the situation and conflict because of hurt feelings, anger, and resentment.
3. *Shaming* – Feels guilty and ashamed by the family’s discovery.
4. *Emotional Cutoff* – Stops all communication and storms out of the room
5. *Threats* – Makes demands, uses ultimatums, or blames family for the problem.
6. *Humor and Sarcasm* – Makes jokes or cutting remarks to shift focus off the conflict.
7. *Manipulation* – Uses guilt and deception to control the family.

8. *Convergence* – Superficially and insincerely agrees with the family to avoid further confrontation.

You should expect a combination of these feelings to emerge and be prepared for the transitional stage that takes place after the intervention. During this transitional phase, your loved one needs time to absorb what has been said and must decide where to go from here. Independent of this person's initial response, there is a period of reflection and discernment to determine the next course of action. This may take days, weeks, or months. Meanwhile, the family is also in transition as they can no longer pretend that the "white elephant isn't in the room". The Pandora's box is now open and you must be prepared for how the family will change.

Step 7: Be Prepared to Treat the Family

How much the family system can recognize old patterns of behavior, learn new communication skills, establish boundaries, and accept personal commitment for change measures intervention success. However, families falsely believe that the only goal of the intervention is to get the addict into treatment as soon as possible. Many families think that once they have done the intervention, they have finished their part and that the addict must be the one to change.

Family interventions are about much more than getting the addict into treatment. The intervention "event" with the addicted person is only an initial part of the recovery process. The intervention process is designed to recognize the effects of addiction on the entire family and the family in turn must also learn to recognize and change old patterns

of behavior. As part of the healing and recovery process, the family must understand what has happened to them as a result of the addict's abuse of the Internet and how they may have played a role. Internet addicts often look for a way to escape troubling marital or family relationships but substituting online friends and companions. It may be that problems existed in the family before the Internet came into their lives. It is possible that the addict turned to the Internet as way to avoid dealing or confronting relationships in his or her life. Treating the family is especially important in this situation.

Rebuilding healthy relationships may mean getting involved in couples counseling and family therapy to address issues that have been hidden or avoided. Perhaps the family has a history of addiction and the Internet addict is abusing the Internet in the same a family had abused alcohol or substances. Perhaps the family doesn't talk openly about problems and issues have lingered between people for years. Treating the issues in a couple or a family means that everyone takes a bit of responsibility towards the road to recovery. This isn't to say that the family takes the blame for the addict's behavior. The addict clearly needs to take responsibility. This is to say that there may be unresolved family issues that will lead the addict back into relapse if they aren't addressed. With the addict's entire family involved, the addict feels supported through the recovery process and the issues that previously sustained her or his behavior are no longer available. Everything changes and the addict is pulled into the change process, making the road to recovery seem more manageable and achievable.

Andrea's sister, Margaret, struggled with many life issues prior to the Internet. Margaret was on medication for heart problems, asthma and had a recent hysterectomy. Married twenty-three years, she has three grown children, one in college, one in the navy

and one who will graduated high school last year. She worked off and on for the last nine or ten years at various jobs. She was a stay at home mom until her children were in high school and was very devoted to all of them. Her husband, Alan worked 12-hour shifts as a mechanic in a local plant, came home exhausted, hungry, and tired, and suffered from a drinking problem. While these events existed in her real life, online she was very popular with her cyberfriends and her virtual world served as a convenient escape to avoid several unresolved issues in her life:

- Her role as a mother changed
- She felt empty in her marriage
- She felt isolated and alone by herself each day
- She felt bored with her daily routine
- She lacked adequate support from her family
- She hadn't cultivated outside hobbies or interests
- She lacked marketable skills to find suitable job
- She suffered from significant health problems over the past year.

Margaret felt stuck her life but the family didn't realize the emotional pain that she was in. One family goal was to develop a better support system, to create cohesion within the familial relationships, and strategies to improve Margaret's independence.

Margaret enjoyed the attention she received from her cyberlovers because Alan was gone all day at work and asleep most nights at home. With the children grown up, she felt her purpose in life had changed and without marketable skills, she didn't think

she was capable of getting a job. Margaret grew distant from Alan and she felt more like a maid than a wife as her main roles in the marriage were doing his cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Out of jealousy, Alan was motivated to stop his wife from chatting with men and tried to spend more quality time with one another on the weekends. However, the hardest issue to overcome in their marriage was his drinking problem. He refused to admit his own addiction to alcohol, and put the blame on job stress. With the family's help, he was able to see how much his drinking had become out of control and eventually entered Alcoholics Anonymous.

Margaret's sisters were able to provide support missing in her life. Her sister invited her to join an aerobics class taught through her church and this allowed them to spend more time together. Over time, Margaret decided to take business courses at the local community college and worked part time in the college library. This not only provided her with a sense of purpose and trained her for future jobs, but now her Internet use focused more on schoolwork than chat rooms. With dedication and commitment from the entire family, successful recovery is possible.

For more information, please contact the Center for Online Addiction at

www.netaddiction.com