

LOS GATOS (KPIX 5) September 12, 2019 — Video game addiction has grown so serious that the World Health Organization is calling it a “gaming disorder.” Though illness is on the rise, there’s hope and help for those affected. “It was pretty bad,” said 14 year old Simon, who declined to use his last name. He would not leave his bedroom due to playing games. He wouldn’t sleep, eat, or bathe. By all means, he was addicted. His mother, Mita, recalls the pain. “Whenever I remember, it’s hard. It was heart breaking for us,” she said. Simon found help at the Los Gatos Therapy Center in Campbell. “I was brought here because of depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety,” Simon remembered. In LGTC’s Screen Addiction Intensive Outpatient Program, executive director Virginie Goldstein says they’d seen a 10% increase in gaming addiction in the last several years. “It escalates, it turns into argument, then physical fight, then sometimes they have to call the police,” **Goldstein** said. She launched the treatment program, which she says is the only one of its kind in the Bay Area. In fact, video game addiction is so new that there’s no officially accepted diagnosis. But psychotherapists say their teenage patients share similar symptoms. Psychotherapist Alex says patients often also have other problems, from autism to depression. They’re hooked on games with endless levels of rewards. “We have parents who have thousands of dollars of credit card debt because of these in-app purchases”. During eight weeks of therapy, teens came in with their parents and family forcing everyone to spend more time together off their screens. “As we go along with the program, it’s like, ‘I’m bad, too,’” Mita noted. “As they children, they imitate the parents.” Of the 25 families who’d gone through the program, up to 80% say it had been successful. “I feel amazing after doing this program,” said Simon. Therapists say on average, patients went from 8-10 hours of gaming a day to 1-3 hours. “It’s made me explore life a little more,” Simon revealed. So what advice would they give other families? They say to put limits on gaming; each person’s different, but therapists say research shows 30 hours a week can be too much. Also, they advise to make time for your family. “Lot of families who come to the program, they don’t have time to eat together even one day a week,” Goldstein said. Reconnecting family relationships made all the difference for Simon. “It’s changed my life in a huge way,” he said. It takes a healthier view of gaming, where everyone’s a winner. Though the program has closed at the Los Gatos Center, **Goldstein** says she is opening a new program called the Screen and Technology Addiction Program in Los Altos. A second office is set to open in Menlo Park in February.