Dangerous games

Wearing nappies, sleeping in class – children hooked on online play

Part 1

B. McDougall

SCHOOLCHILDREN have become so dangerously hooked on computer games they’re being offered to treat them at adolescent psychiatric facilities to wean them off.
The first time admitted to hospital partly due to computer addiction is living full-time at the Rivendell Adolescent Unit in Sydney, getting therapy and doing schoolwork.

But psychiatrists said they were seeing a flood of calls from distressed families seeking help for children who have fallen victim to “pathological Internet use”.

Mental health professionals say schools report exhausted students falling asleep in class after marathon online sessions playing highly addictive games such as World of Warcraft.

The teen, who cannot be named, is being treated for mental illness along with family problems from computer gaming.

The 11-year-old Rivendell volunteer, has accepted he needs to be separated from his computer if the treatment is to work.

Last year the first retreat for internet addicts opened for young people in Washington State in the US.

There are children dying from this – 17-year-olds committing suicide

Mother of computer addict

Part 2

An unhealthy addiction

School-age children are getting hooked, above, on computer games such as World of Warcraft, right.

You might call it the Facebook Generation. Facebook is far more fun, often, than sitting with your own family

Psychiatrists are developing a guide to measure computer addiction.

"There are tricky and complex cases," Dr. Tam said. "People themselves often don't see it as a problem. It's fuelling that people who use the computer and teachers who use the problem.

Up to 10 per cent of computer users are thought to meet criteria for addiction.