

## What's the big deal?

It's not news to anyone that kids are exposed to gambling every day. All they have to do is turn on the TV to see their role models in poker tournaments, go online and get pop-up ads for internet gaming sites, walk into a mini-mart to see people buying lottery tickets, or even go to church or school for casino nights or bingo fundraisers.

Truth is, we don't know about what the ultimate effects of this ongoing exposure to gambling will be for our kids. Today's is the first generation to grow up in a society where gambling is widely accepted, advertising is everywhere and gambling activities are commonplace.

## What we do know is this:

- 60-90 percent of youth engage in gambling, and youth problem gambling rates are 2-4 times higher than those of adults.
- Surveys of Oregon teens tell us drugs, alcohol and gambling often travel together, yet many parents see gambling as a relatively safe pastime and encourage it as an alternative activity.
- Children and adults can and do get caught up in gambling in a way that is harmful to themselves and others around them.
- Adults who develop gambling problems often began gambling at a young age.
- Unlike other risk behaviors, most parents do not talk to their kids about gambling, leaving kids to make up their own rules.
- A small, but growing, number of college kids are leaving their studies to pursue gambling in lieu of a career.

Most kids engage in some form of gambling and most don't develop gambling problems. But as a parent you do need to recognize that gambling carries risk and approach it accordingly, as you would tobacco use, drug use or fastening your car's seatbelt.

## What you don't know can hurt...them

It's worth your while as a parent to stay informed about how increasingly easy it is for your kids to gamble. This generation is very tech savvy, and gambling marketers are gearing up fast: internet gambling is on the rise and since it can be done in the privacy of one's own room it might be difficult for you to even know if your child is gambling online. As if that wasn't enough, it's now possible to gamble via cell phone, and most kids these days have one of those handy. If you don't know what the latest gambling technologies are, you can be sure your kids probably do—ask them about it.

## Keep it simple and straight

Talk to your kids about gambling using these simple guidelines:

- Notice opportunities to discuss gambling. Help children make sense out of what they see on television, in the news and in the community.
- Discuss rules and expectations for behavior, and follow through with consequences.
- Be specific. When you talk about gambling, give examples such as buying a lottery ticket, betting on a sports event, playing bingo; for many kids the word "gambling" means going to a casino, and since they don't do that they don't think they are gambling.
- Be clear about your own values but avoid sweeping statements (all gambling is bad) or threats ("if I ever catch you betting money..."). Kids feel immortal, so scaring them doesn't work; threats invite rebellion.
- Emphasize balance and choice. Facing choices about gambling and other risky behaviors can be a good way to practice making good decisions about many life issues.

## How do I bring it up?

Here are some tips for starting the conversation with your teen:

- Look for a natural way to raise the topic. For example, discuss gambling after seeing a commercial for a gambling product or casino, or after you find out that a friend has won or lost money gambling.
- Ask questions first. Find out what your child thinks and feels about gambling before offering your own opinions or giving information.
- Be patient. Several discussions may be needed before your teen understands the ideas that you want to communicate.
- When you talk with your teens about drugs or alcohol, include problem gambling in the conversation as another potentially risky activity.

Include these two key messages:

Gambling is not a way to make money. Games run by casinos, racetracks, internet sites, and lotteries are all designed so that most people lose money in the long run. Games are designed to make a profit for the house, not the player.

Many problem gamblers do not understand this. They believe that they are blessed with special skills or special luck that will allow them to "beat the odds." They often "chase losses," betting more money in the belief that they will "win back" the money they have lost. Teens need to understand that these beliefs are illogical and dangerous. Gambling carries risk and problem gambling can lead to serious consequences throughout life, including the loss of huge amounts of money, destruction of a career, legal problems, and the loss of friends and family.

## More tips for parents

- Set the example you'd like your teens to follow —if you gamble, do so for fun and in moderation.
- Talk to your teen about the risks of gambling.
- Set consistent boundaries and consequences.
- Know their friends.
- Encourage involvement in the arts, sports or other constructive activities.
- Avoid hosting or participating in gambling parties involving young people; if you are involved in such an event make sure information about problem gambling and where to get help is provided.
- If necessary, explore software to block access to internet gambling sites.
- Check cell phone bills periodically to be sure your kids aren't gambling that way.

This document includes material from the Saskatchewan Health Department.

If you think you might be gambling too much, or if you are worried about a friend or relative, help is available.

Oregon has a toll-free gambling help line:

**877-2-STOP-NOW**  
**(877-278-6766)**

## What are the signs of a possible gambling problem?

Some of these signs will sound very familiar—they are also “signs” of adolescence or being in the teenage years. But if they occur in an ongoing pattern, or if you have reason to be concerned about your teen’s gambling, here are some indicators to look for:

- Asking for/borrowing money from the family.
- Unexplained absences from school.
- Sudden drop in grades.
- Unexplained debt.
- Carries or possesses gambling materials, such as dice or playing cards.
- Says gambling is one of the best ways to make easy money.
- Borrows money from family/friends to pay gambling debts.
- Takes desperate measures to get more money for gambling, such as stealing from family.
- Gambles with money that is supposed to be used for something else such as lunch, bus fare, etc.
- Neglects family/friends.
- Frequent mood swings, usually high when winning and lower when losing.
- Lies to people about gambling.
- Displays large amounts of cash and other material possessions.
- Gambles to escape worries, frustrations, or disappointments.

## Get help for a gambling problem

Treatment is free, confidential and it works.

**877-2-STOP-NOW**  
(877-278-6766)

## Getting help

If you are worried that you or your teen may be having problems related to gambling, help is available. Throughout Oregon help and treatment is free, confidential, and it works.

Call the toll-free Oregon Gambling Help Line at 877-2-STOP-NOW (877-278-6766) any time of the night or day to talk to a professional who can answer your questions and help you decide if your teen needs further counseling.

## For more information

Department of Human Services Addictions  
and Mental Health Division  
[www.oregon.gov/dhs/addiction](http://www.oregon.gov/dhs/addiction)

Problem Gambling Help  
[www.oregonlotteryhelp.com](http://www.oregonlotteryhelp.com)

Youth Gambling International  
[www.youthgambling.com](http://www.youthgambling.com)

## WHAT ARE THE ODDS YOUR TEEN IS GAMBLING?

