

Gambling: NOT A SAFE THRILL



Gambling has become a form of entertainment for many Americans. However, for young people, gambling may become a serious addiction. The chances of a young gambler getting “hooked” are far greater than those of an adult.

Consider the following numbers:

- There are nearly 8 million compulsive gamblers in the United States today. More than 1 million of them are teens.
- Two thirds of all students from ages 12 to 18 gamble regularly.
- About 90% of high school seniors have gambled at least once.

Gambling should not be seen as a “safe thrill.” Parents need to be aware of the danger gambling poses to young people and the warning signs of problem gambling. Compulsive gambling, considered by some experts to be the “addiction of the 90s,” has entered the new millennium.

What is compulsive gambling?

When gambling moves beyond fun and games and starts becoming the focus of a person’s life, it is considered compulsive gambling. There are three phases of compulsive gambling.

The Winning Phase

- Gambling is fun and exciting.
- Winning makes the gambler feel like a “big shot.”
- Losses are thought of as “bad luck.”
- All the gambler thinks about is gambling.
- The gambler thinks gambling is the most exciting thing in life.
- Free time, lunch breaks, or recess are often spent gambling.

The Losing Phase

- The gambler starts to lose, often borrowing money to cover losses.
- Self-esteem decreases.
- The gambler may lie to friends and family about gambling.
- The gambler may begin to sell possessions to cover bets.
- The gambler begins to miss school, work, or other important events to gamble.

The Desperation Phase

- The gambler becomes obsessed with gambling.
- Severe mood swings, lying, cheating, and stealing may occur.
- School failure is common.
- Nothing or nobody comes before a bet.
- Suicide may be attempted as a way out.

Who is the typical teen gambler?

Today, many communities rely on gambling casinos as a major source of income. Teens in these communities may be at greater risk for developing problems with gambling than other teens. However, teen gambling can be found anywhere — in cities and small towns, among the wealthy and the poor.

It is not easy to “spot” teen gamblers. They look no different than their friends. They often are very outgoing and social. In addition, teen gamblers tend to be

- Highly motivated, energetic
- Smart
- Competitive, risk takers
- Good students, hard working
- Perfectionists
- Confident

Teens who develop problems with gambling may have other issues, such as difficulties with their family or friends, problems with other addictions like alcohol or drugs, or engaging in other high-risk behaviors.

How do teens gamble?

Any game of chance or skill that is played for money is gambling. Most forms of gambling are illegal for anyone under the age of 18. However, teens find their own ways to gamble, including the following:

- Playing cards or dice games for money
- Playing games of skill for money (pool, basketball)
- Buying lottery tickets and scratch cards
- Playing casino- and arcade-type games (like pull tabs and slot machines)
- Placing bets on sports events
- Gambling on the Internet

Why do teens gamble?

Gambling is promoted as fun and exciting; an easy way to “strike it rich.” Many young people hope that if they can win big money, all their problems will be solved. As legalized gambling spreads to almost every community, it is easy for young people to get caught up in the promises of wealth and power. Adults do, too. In the United States, 80% of adults participate in some form of gambling. Teens who gamble may be copying their parents’ behavior.

How can I tell if my son or daughter is having a problem with gambling?

Look for the following warning signs:

- Finding gambling “stuff” like lottery tickets, betting sheets, casino chips
- Excessive TV sports watching and an overly intensive interest in the outcome of sports events
- Visits to a casino, despite being underage
- Excessive “checking in” or spending time on the Internet
- Unexplained debts
- Flaunting large amounts of money or buying expensive items
- Absences from school or work
- Anxiety and nervousness
- Stealing for gambling money

What parents can do

You are the best role model for your children. Take a close look at your own attitudes and habits. Do you spend your last dollar on lottery tickets? Do you make frequent visits to the casino with hopes of striking it rich? While gambling may be okay for you, you may be sending a message to your teen that gambling is a safe and healthy activity.

Talk to your children about gambling. Remind them that gambling is illegal for teens. Be clear about how you feel about gambling, and let them know what you expect of them. Help your children develop ways to resist gambling and develop interests in other activities. Avoid using recreational activities offered at casinos for child care while parents gamble.

Identifying a gambling problem early is the key to successful treatment. If you feel your teen may have a problem, there are people in your community who can help, including the following:

- Pediatricians
- Counselors
- Teachers
- Elders or Clergy

Compulsive gambling is like other addictions. Outside help may be the only way a person can stop. Talk to your pediatrician for information about treatment options, like individual counseling or family therapy, that can give compulsive gamblers the strength they need to quit.

Resources

For more information on treatment options, support groups, or other educational materials, contact

North American Training Institute
314 W Superior St, Suite 702
Duluth, MN 55802
218/722-1503
www.nati.org
www.wannabet.org (a Web site for kids on gambling)

Gambler's Anonymous
International Service Office
PO Box 17173
Los Angeles, CA 90017
213/386-8789
www.gamblersanonymous.org

The National Council on Problem Gambling, Inc
Nationwide Helpline
800/522-4700
208 G Street
NE 2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20002
<http://www.ncpgambling.org/>

Please note: Inclusion on this list does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The Academy is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned above. Addresses, phone numbers, and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

A few questions for teens

Give this brochure to your son or daughter. Ask your child to think about the questions below. Talk about your answers together. Can your teen answer "yes" to many of these questions? If so, it may be time to look for help.

1. Do you think gambling is the most exciting activity you do?
2. Do you often spend your free time involved in gambling activities?
3. Do you try to prevent your family and friends from knowing how much you gamble?
4. Do your friends gamble? Are you considered to be part of the "gambling crowd"?
5. Do you often daydream about gambling?
6. Do you often gamble during lunch breaks, recess, after school hours, or on weekends?
7. Do you miss school or other important events due to gambling activities?
8. Do you ever lie about whether you gamble or how much you lose?
9. Is gambling the main source of what you do to feel good about yourself?
10. Do you gamble alone?
11. Do you gamble with money that is supposed to be used for other reasons (such as lunch money, bus fare, or clothes)?
12. Have you ever borrowed money to gamble?
13. Have you ever stolen money or property in order to gamble or pay gambling debts?
14. Do you get upset or irritable if you are unable to gamble?
15. Do you most want to gamble when you are upset?
16. Do you often feel sad or guilty because you lost money gambling?
17. Is it hard for you to stop gambling after you lose money?
18. Do you often gamble longer than you wanted to and lose more money than you intended?
19. When gambling, do you tend to lose track of time or forget about everything else?
20. Do you find that thinking about gambling makes it hard for you to do schoolwork?

Excerpted with permission from the North American Training Institute's book, *Wanna Bet?™ Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Teen Gambling but Never Thought to Ask* © 1995, 1997. Web site: www.wannabet.org or www.nati.org

From your doctor

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 57,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

American Academy of Pediatrics
PO Box 747
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0747
Web site — <http://www.aap.org>

Copyright ©1999, Updated 8/01 American Academy of Pediatrics