Talking to Teens about Gambling:
A guide for parents and carers

- Getting real about advertising
- Making sense of mobile 24/7 gambling
- Gambling problems: avoiding them in the future, and dealing with them now
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Why you need to read this guide

As a concerned parent, you may be aware of the increasing presence of gambling in the lives of young people, whether it’s through advertising, media coverage, branding or online games.

This guide will help you in two ways:

1. To assist you and your young person to understand gambling and its promotion in an informed and thoughtful way. When and if your child is ready to legally gamble, they will have all the tools and knowledge they need to make sensible choices.

2. If your young person or their friends are engaging in underage gambling, the guide will provide the basis for a discussion about gambling and some pathways to help if necessary.

Our goal is to ensure that if current and future generations decide to gamble they do so responsibly and understand the signs that they may be running into trouble.
FACT: young people are more susceptible to problems with gambling than adults.
Part 1

Gambling and young people – the real-world facts

Gambling messages are everywhere

Like it or not, we live in an age where it’s hard to avoid gambling promotion in Australia. This is particularly so in high-profile sports, where the game and the gambling sometimes seem inseparable. Some ways in which your teen might be seeing gambling promotion:

- Social media links to gaming sites
- Discussion of odds during live broadcasts
- TV advertising
- Online gambling ads and promotions
- Online gambling sites
- Gambling apps
- Sponsorship signage on uniforms, sports grounds and venues
- Games that simulate gambling or are a pathway to actual gambling.
Sportsbetting promotion:

• In Australia during 2012, there were reportedly 20,000 sports betting advertisements on free to air TV.¹

• Reportedly, spending on sports betting television advertising increased more than threefold between 2010 and 2012.²

• An audit of two weeks of televised NRL and AFL programs in 2012 identified 72 gambling communications, mainly for corporate bookmakers, constituting 2.5% of broadcast time.¹

Problem gambling and young people

1. Three to four per cent of teenagers have problems with gambling. That averages one in every average high school class.³

2. One in five adults with gambling problems started gambling before they were 18.⁴

3. 60-80 per cent of Australian young people will gamble in any one year.³

4. Gambling problems in teens can lead to depression, missing school or dropping out, undermined friendships, family disruption and criminal behaviour.

5. Boys are more likely to gamble and develop problems than girls.⁶

6. Because underage gambling is illegal, young people may have even more trouble than adults in asking for help.
Why gambling may appeal to your teenager

The positive portrayal of gambling and its associated glamour and excitement in films, television programs and advertising may encourage young people to believe they will develop a similar lifestyle.¹

It may also reinforce the belief that an individual can develop the skills to repeatedly beat the odds. If parents and other adults around them gamble, that will also make gambling more appealing, because it seems like an everyday part of adult life.

Other reasons may be:

- People they look up to such as sportspersons and celebrities promote gambling products.
- It’s increasingly integrated in sporting and male social culture.
- Your teens may be looking for distractions that allow them to escape the pressure of family life or school.
- Participating in activities around gambling may allow them to fit in more easily with their peer group.
Part 2

Bulletproofing your teen against future gambling problems

‘On my 18th birthday, my mate took me to a venue for my rite-of-passage first play on the pokies. I won and I’ve been hooked ever since.’

Our Gambling Help counsellors tell us they’ve heard this story many times. Young people are often educated about issues like alcohol, drugs and violence. But it’s a rare individual who comes of age with a clear idea of the realities of gambling and how reality differs from the promises.

This part of the booklet provides facts and information that aim to encourage your teen to think in a critical way about gambling and to make sensible and informed choices when and if they are legally able to gamble. You won’t be telling your teen never to gamble – gambling is harmless for most people. It’s a matter of being informed.

You’ll also be helping them stay safe online, where gambling promotion is highly visible, including through unregulated overseas operators.
'On my 18th birthday, my mate took me to a venue for my rite-of-passage first play on the pokies. I won and I’ve been hooked ever since.'
Talking about pokies and casino games

Opportunities to raise the topic:
When you are driving or walking past gambling venues, when watching movies or TV shows that have gambling venue settings, or when TV ads promoting gambling come on.

Questions to raise:
Do you think there’s a way to increase your odds of winning on pokies or casino games?
Do you know the odds of winning a lottery or major jackpot on a poker machine?
Why do people gamble?
Can you be a smart gambler?

On some of the most popular poker machine games, the odds of getting the top prize, putting in a $1 per bet line...

1 in 9,765,625 for a typical prize of $5,000.
Facts to share during the discussion

In NSW, poker machines return you 85-90 cents per dollar on average.7 They’re set this way so that the venue makes a profit. Imagine doing that transaction over and over again, losing as much as 15 cents every time. Unless you had a big win, your money would soon dwindle – and your chance of winning the jackpot on a poker machine is no more than a million to one.

In the long run, most players are unlikely to come out ahead.

There are no actual ‘reels’ in poker machines. Instead, there’s a computer programmed to select the combinations of symbols for each push completely at random. No matter what you do, there’s no way of improving your outcome. Some people think that events like a win on a poker machine or a roulette wheel spinning a black number can be ‘due’ to happen if they haven’t occurred in a long time. But that is not true. The odds are the same every time you push or spin.


Smart gamblers set budgets. Have an enjoyable time playing your game. If you have a win, take your money and celebrate. If you lose what you’ve budgeted, then finish playing. Never spend extra money trying to win back what you’ve lost.
Talking about online gambling

Opportunities to raise the topic:
When you see ads promoting online gambling.

Questions to raise:

• Do you think that the way gambling and winning is portrayed reflects the reality? Why do you think the advertiser chose those particular images and words?

• Do you discuss odds when you’re talking about sport with friends? Why?

• Can you develop skills that make you more likely to win on sports or track betting?

• What are some problems that might arise from online gambling?

Odds of getting a royal flush in poker on first five cards dealt:

649,740 to 1
‘Wagering’ is betting on a real event like a football game or horse race. The thing to remember is that when you bet against a bookmaker, that bookmaker has all the available facts concerning the event right at their fingertips in a way that the punter never will. They set the odds based on this knowledge. In the long term the bookmaker will always come out ahead. Currently, online bookmakers in Australia make millions in profits every year. And every dollar is a dollar lost by a punter. There is no such thing as a ‘sure thing!’
Facts to share in the discussion:

- Your chances of coming out ahead in the long run are almost impossible, and so thinking of gambling as a good way to make money is a mistaken belief. Online bookmakers have very powerful computers that track the betting patterns of gamblers and change the odds so they are always in favour of the bookmaker.

- There are many unauthorised offshore bookmakers and virtual casinos. Players are not protected by Australian laws and there have been cases where players have had their money taken with no return. There can also be links to organised crime in unlicensed and unregistered online gambling venues.

- Some online bookmakers offer ‘free’ money when you sign up with them. In fact, the system is set up so you can’t get access to the money – you can only lose it to the bookmaker.

- Online gambling can take place anywhere, 24 hours a day and that can mean people bet more often. People who bet during a game are more likely to get caught up in the heat of the moment, making it hard to set limits and avoid rash decisions.
Part 3:

If your teen is gambling underage

Young people can be vulnerable to problem gambling because they:

- can be more impulsive
- are less likely to understand the risks
- are more influenced by media and advertising
- are inquisitive and more likely to think they can win
- are digitally savvy and may be more likely to try and get around legal barriers to online gaming sites and illegally access gambling sites and products on smart phones, tablets, apps and the internet 24/7.

Know what signs to keep an eye out for:

- your teenager being suddenly short of money and spending less on clothes, movies and music
- changes in your teenager’s grades or performance at school
- changes in mood and withdrawal from friends, social activities and events
- changes in sleep patterns and tiredness
- low energy levels, or irritability when away from gambling activities
- secrecy about gambling, or denial that there’s a problem
- talking about sports and other events only in terms of the odds.
Research tells us that the majority of young Australians gamble at some point before they come of age. In any year, between 60-80 per cent of young people will have gambled in some way. Gambling underage does not necessarily mean your child has a gambling problem, though it is very important to point out that it is illegal. There are good reasons why Australian law protects children from gambling environments.³
Think about what’s going on in your own home

It can help to remember that kids are always watching and observing. Be aware that young people are more likely to gamble if they observe their family members gambling or they hear their family members talking excitedly about gambling. Discussing with your child that gambling is a form of entertainment and not a good way to make money can help them understand that, in addition to being fun, there are risks to gambling.

How to raise the topic

Discussion: If you believe your child is gambling underage, ask what it is about gambling that appeals to them.

- If their main motivation is winning money, you may want to share some of the facts about the odds of winning on pages 13-17.
- If their motivation is avoiding boredom, discuss some other activities that you can do together or with friends that meet the need for stimulation and don’t involve gambling.
- If their motivation is stress, then encourage them to talk about the issues and pressure points that make them feel most under stress. It is worth noting that if they are gambling, their stress levels may increase as they lose more and more money. Develop a plan of action for the next time they feel stressed or overwhelmed. This may include anything from relaxation or meditation exercises to physical exercise or coming to talk to you.
- Explain that what they are doing is against the law and could result in prosecution, which could have many negative effects for them in the future.
• It’s important to discuss money management. Discuss how much your teen is spending. Calculate together how much this might add up to by the time they turn 18. Discuss what else they might like to do with the money on their 18th birthday if they had saved instead of gambling. Develop a savings plan together to reach those goals.
Stressbusters:

Go for a walk
Kick a ball
Get out of the house to visit a friend or see a movie
Bushwalking
Team sports
Cooking
Cycling
Dancing
Drawing / painting
Fishing
Reading
Martial arts
Talking to someone
Going for a run
Yoga

Planning an event or making a bucket list of goals that young people want to achieve after they’re through their stress period (such as studying for exams)
How to have the conversation with your child

It can be difficult to raise the subject of whether your young person has an issue with gambling. Counsellors advise that it’s best not to ask direct questions as this may make the young person feel accused and put up defensive barriers. Instead it is best to raise the topic indirectly. For example, ask whether they know of any fellow-students who gamble underage, or whether they’ve seen gambling ads a lot on social media. If they do admit to gambling, let them know that it makes you feel concerned and explain why.
Gambling Help Services

If you are concerned about your young person’s gambling you can seek professional help through Gambling Help services, face to face, by phone or online. These are free services and can be accessed in a variety of languages.

Phone: 1800 858 858  24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Online counselling via live text or email can be accessed via the Gambling Help website at www.gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au

On our website, you can also find a lot of information to assist you in understanding problem gambling and a range of self-help options if counselling is not for you.

To find the closest face to face service, call the Gambling Helpline or type your postcode into the search facility on our website, or call the Helpline on 1800 858 858. The Helpline can also tell you which face to face services are specifically qualified to counsel teenagers.
References used in this guide


4. Department of Justice, ‘A study of gambling in Victoria – Problem gambling from a public health perspective’, Department of Justice, Victoria, September 2009

5. Gambling and young people: Impacts, Challenges and Responses: VOLUME 1 Number 1 October 2013, Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation 2013


Helplines and Hotlines

Gambling Help
Free and confidential counselling, including legal assistance and financial counselling, can be accessed by phone, online and face to face. Gambling Help services are available for friends and families, as well as those struggling with a gambling issue, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

1800 858 858
www.gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au

Kids Helpline
A free counselling service (telephone, web and email) for young people aged 5-25.

1800 55 1800

Lifeline
Telephone crisis support 24/7

13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au/

Suicide Call Back Service
Professional 24/7 telephone crisis support for people at risk of suicide, carers and the bereaved.

1300 659 467
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/

headspace
Support and advice for young people aged 12-25 going through a tough time, with centres across regional and metropolitan Australia.

www.headspace.org.au/

ReachOut
An online youth mental health service for under 25s, where you will find fact sheets, stories, videos, guides, tools, apps and a community forum.

au.reachout.com/
NSW GOVERNMENT

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