

what you

NEED TO KNOW

about...

Helping Children and Youth with Problem Gambling Information for Parents and Caregivers

What is gambling?

Gambling is an activity in which someone knowingly risks losing their money or belongings for the chance to win more. Winning or losing is determined by chance.

Gambling happens in a number of ways. Common forms of gambling include:

- Buying lottery tickets
- Playing poker with friends or online
- Going to a casino

- Sports betting

In moderation, gambling can be fun. But gambling too much can cause bankruptcy, problems with relationships, and even lead people to suicide.



Problem gambling

Problem gambling happens when gambling starts causing difficulties in life which may spiral. The official term is ‘**pathological gambling**’. People with a gambling problem may:

- Be preoccupied with gambling or with getting money to gamble with. They may also need to gamble with increasing amounts of money.
- Lose control over their gambling (all the time or just some of the time).
- Become restless or irritable if they try to stop or cut down on gambling. They may use gambling as an attempt to escape from problems.
- Keep gambling even when bad things happen because of it. They may lie about how much they are gambling.
- Get involved in crime to get money to gamble. They may damage or lose relationships or jobs because of gambling.
- Rely on others for money to gamble. (APA, 2000).

Warning Signs & Risk Factors

- Gambling for longer and longer periods of time
- Needing to gamble more to win back money that has been lost
- Neglecting responsibilities at school, work or home
- Lying to cover up gambling
- Neglecting friends and family to gamble
- Borrowing money, selling possessions, or even stealing to have money for gambling
- Being introduced to gambling at a young age if the gambler is a youth
- Being introduced to gambling by family members if the gambler is a youth
- Having family members who are very open to gambling

How common is problem gambling?

The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (1999) showed that between 4 and 5 teens out of 100 (4.5%) met the criteria for problem gambling.

What should we do if our teen has a gambling problem?

You cannot simply ‘make’ your teen stop gambling. But you *can* help your teen get support for problem gambling.

If the problem is severe, and you are worried how your teen will react when you raise the issue, speak to a professional for advice ahead of time - for example, your family doctor or a counselor.

Your doctor or a counselor can help to:

- Find a private, quiet time to talk with your teen
- Tell your teen that you care, and that you are worried about the gambling behaviour
- Tell your teen how the gambling behaviours are affecting you and others
- Ask your teen how you can help

Be prepared for denial or anger from your teen. Family members should consider if they doing anything to enable the teen’s behavior - for example, allowing your teen to take money from you. You may want to think about taking steps to protect your money and possessions from out-of-control gambling. This gives security to your family, and will help your teen in the long run.

Treatment and help for gambling

Different professionals provide treatment for gambling problems:

- Mental health counselors
- Addictions counselors
- Psychologists or physicians with expertise in addictions



Youth can get treatment in different ways:

- **‘Outpatient’ or ‘Community treatment’:** where youth meet with a counselor for appointments.
- **Day treatment programs:** where youth take part for several hours each day.
- **Residential treatment:** where youth live for a period of time.

Services may be offered through private practices, addiction agencies, community health centres, or hospitals.

Types of counseling and therapy

Talk therapy (or counseling) is the most common way of getting help for problems with gambling. There are different types of talk therapy, such as:

- Motivational enhancement therapy (MET)
- Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

Motivational enhancement therapy (MET)

This is a type of brief therapy. It helps people become more ready to change. It has been very successful with many other types of addictions and problem behaviours (Miller, 1991.)

For people who are not ready to change: the therapy helps them weigh the advantages and disadvantages of their gambling behaviour, and set limits on their gambling.

For people who are ready to change: the therapy helps them learn what to do to overcome gambling (for example, avoiding situations or people that trigger one to gamble).

This therapy has been adapted for gambling, (Ladouceur, 2007) and helps people to look at their thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

Elements of CBT for gambling include:

- **Correcting unhealthy beliefs about gambling** (cognitive distortions). For example, gamblers tend to have unrealistic beliefs that they will get lucky. They often have superstitions that are at odds with their actual chance of winning. Many gamblers also have an illusion of control, believing that they have the skills or abilities to beat the odds. In reality, skill has a very small impact on winning at gambling.
- **Developing problem-solving skills.** These skills help the person work through everyday problems, such as how to: cope with gambling urges; limit time and money spent on gambling; deal with family members; and find solutions to gambling debts.
- **Learning social and coping skills.** CBT can help problem gamblers to:
 - Communicate effectively and more assertively
 - Say no to invitations to gamble
 - Manage stress, anger and anxiety

Therapists help people develop these skills through:

Role playing: practicing a skill, such as saying no to invitations to gamble.

Visualization: imagining a challenging situation, and imagining a more positive way to handle it. For example, thinking about a past incident where the person lost a lot of money gambling, and having the person think about what needs to happen differently so that money loss could be prevented.

Goal-setting: For example, setting limits on how much to gamble. Deciding *beforehand* on the set amount they will use to gamble helps keep some people from 'chasing' after losses.

Education about gambling: CBT can be used to help people learn:

- How to look for signs that indicate problem gambling
- How to handle urges to gamble (impulse management)
- How to keep track of money and time spent on gambling (self-monitoring)
- How to prevent gambling problems from happening again (relapse prevention)

Self-help

Gamblers Anonymous (GA) is a self-help mutual aid group. It provides support for people with gambling problems. Gamblers Anonymous is like Alcoholics Anonymous because both are based on the 12-step principle. Members are encouraged to acknowledge that their gambling is a spiritual and medical disease. They are encouraged to abstain from gambling. Gamblers Anonymous groups are run by members, not by professionals. There are no membership fees.

Where to find help in Nova Scotia

- In a crisis? Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team, 902-429-8167 or toll-free, 1-888-429-8167
- To find a Psychologist anywhere in Nova Scotia: Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia, 902-422-9183, www.apns.ca
- To find a Social Worker anywhere in Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers, 902-429-7799, www.nsasw.org
- Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868, www.kidshelpphone.ca
- Feed Nova Scotia Helpline, 902-421-1188 (within HRM) or, 1-877-521-1188
- Nova Scotia's Problem Gambling Services, www.gov.ns.ca/heal/gambling
- Problem Gambling Help Line, 1-888-347-8888
- Gam-Anon NS, 1-866-484-6668, or 902-252-3132, www.gamblersanonymous.org

Where to find help in Halifax Regional Municipality

- Capital Health Addictions Program, 902-424-8866, www.gethelpstopping.ca
- IWK Mental Health & Addictions, offers programs for ages up to 19, 902-464-4110 or toll-free, 1-888-470-5888 (ask to be connected to Central Referral), www.iwk.nshealth.ca/mental-health
- Laing House, offers programs for ages 16 to 30 living with a mental illness, 902-425-9018, www.lainghouse.ca
- Capital Health Addictions & Mental Health Program, offers programs for ages 19 and up, www.cdha.nshealth.ca/addictions-and-mental-health-program

Want more information?

Useful websites

- www.thesite.org
- www.youthgambling.mcgill.ca
- www.ResponsibleGambling.org/
- www.kidshealth.org

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Provided by:

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