

what you

NEED TO KNOW

about...

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

What is gambling?

Gambling is any activity where someone takes the chance of losing money or belongings, and when winning or losing is decided mostly by chance.

Gambling happens often these days. Common forms of gambling include:

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

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 problems in life, and the problems don't get better. 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 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

- 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

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?

While you can't simply 'make' your teen stop gambling, 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 (like your family physician, or a counselor) for advice ahead of time.

They 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 behavior.
- 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. 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, but also helps 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, like:

- 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).

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

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.** This skills help the person deal with everyday problems like gambling urges, limiting time and money spent on gambling, dealing with family members, finding 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 like 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, which helps keep people from 'chasing' after losses.

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

- What things to look for that would 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 that provides support for people with gambling problems. Like Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous is based on the 12-step principle. Members are encouraged to commit to acknowledge that their gambling is a spiritual and medical disease, and are encouraged to abstain from gambling. Groups are run by members, and not by professionals, and there is no membership fee.

Where to find help in Eastern Ontario

- In a crisis? Child, Youth and Family Crisis Line for Eastern Ontario, 613-260-2360 or toll-free, 1-877-377-7775
- Looking for mental health help? www.eMentalHealth.ca is a bilingual directory of mental health services and resources for Ottawa, Eastern Ontario and Canada.
- Renfrew County: Phoenix Centre for Children, Youth and Families, with offices in Renfrew and Pembroke. 613-735-2374 or toll-free 1-800-465-1870, www.renc.igs.net/~phoenix
- Leeds and Grenville County: Child and Youth Wellness Centre, with offices in Brockville, Elgin, Gananoque and Prescott. 613-498-4844, www.cywc.net
- Lanark County: Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth, with offices in Carleton Place, Smiths Falls and Perth. 613-283-8260, www.opendoors.on.ca
- To find a Psychologist anywhere in Ontario: College of Psychologists of Ontario, 1-800-489-8388, www.cpo.on.ca

Where to find help in Ottawa

- Youth Services Bureau, for ages 12-20, 613-562-3004
- Family Service Centre of Ottawa, 613-725-3601, www.familyservicesottawa.org
- Catholic Family Services, 613-233-8418, www.cfssc-ottawa.org
- Jewish Family Services, 613-722-2225, www.jfsottawa.com
- The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre (by physician's referral), 613-737-7600 ext. 2496. For more information on our programs, www.cheo.on.ca
- To find a Psychologist in Ottawa: Call the Ottawa Academy of Psychology referral service, 613-235-2529. Lists many, but not all, Ottawa psychologists. www.ottawa-psychologists.org/find.htm

Want more information?

Useful websites

- <http://ProblemGambling.ca>
- <http://www.ResponsibleGambling.org/>



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Disclaimer: Information in this fact sheet is offered 'as is'. It does not replace information from your health care provider. Always contact a qualified health professional for more information about your personal situation.

Provided by:

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