



PARENTS GUIDE TO GAMBLING

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How children feel about gambling is strongly influenced by their home environment and society around them and in Ireland there is a strong culture of gambling. Latest figures, published by the Department of Health, show that two-thirds of the population have gambled in the last 12 months and more than 40% of people gamble on a monthly basis or more often. Ireland has the third highest gambling losses per capita in the world; Irish people lose a shocking €3.2 billion to gambling every year. Our own behaviours and attitudes to gambling, coupled with widespread advertising from betting companies, are normalising gambling for a generation of children.

The prevalence of problem gambling among children is rising fast. There are no research figures available for Ireland but the number of UK children, age 11-16 years old, with gambling problems has quadrupled in the last two years. Compared with other potentially harmful activities, UK figures show that rates of gambling are higher among young people than the rates of drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes or taking illegal drugs. This is a serious public health concern when you consider that 1. people who develop gambling disorders earlier in life also tend to have problems with substance abuse or impulsivity disorders and 2. gambling addiction can cause people to harm themselves; problem gamblers are 15 times more likely to take their own lives.

Introduction to the world of gambling

Early introduction to gambling can be critical in the development of a gambling addiction so it is important to consider all the ways in which your children could be exposed to the idea of gambling.



Lottery tickets and scratch cards

The law states that to purchase a lottery ticket or scratch card in Ireland you must be over 18 but according to the Department of Health's research almost 10% of children aged 15-17 purchased a lottery ticket or scratch card in 2014-2015. Younger children can also be exposed to this form of gambling. Do you ever purchase scratch cards and lottery tickets at the shops when accompanied by your child or allow your child to be the one to check if the scratch card is a winner?

Race course and dog track

Do you ever bring your children to the horse or dog track? Incredibly there is currently no age limit for tote betting in Ireland so it's hardly surprising that 2014-2015 figures show that roughly 1 in 10 15-17 year olds in Ireland placed a bet at a dog or race track. No figures are available for children under the age of 15 but as there is no age limit even small children can place bets. The 2019 communion and confirmation packages at one dog track, with tote betting at your table, highlight how acceptable the concept of tote betting around children truly is in Ireland. The Government has introduced new legislation, the Gaming and Lotteries Bill of 2019, which will set an age limit of 18 for tote betting once it has been enacted later this year.

Card games at home

Children often learn to play cards at home or witness their parents playing with friends and family. When they see bets being placed on the outcome of these games, however small, it becomes a natural part of the game and will be included when they subsequently play with friends.

Gaming arcades

There are gaming arcades in many towns and villages across Ireland and they are often positioned in busy locations that children will frequently pass. Gaming machines, such as slot machines, with their flashing lights and spinning patterns are designed to be highly addictive. Slot machines are actually illegal in Ireland but the laws in this area are not enforced and are completely outdated, e.g. the legal maximum spend is sixpence and the legal maximum payout is ten shillings. The Government's Gaming and Lotteries Bill of 2019 will provide for updates in this area once it has been enacted later this year.

Family friendly gaming apps

This generation of children spend a lot of time playing games on phones and tablets. Some of the games younger children are attracted to can appear quite harmless because they feature cute cartoon characters, but they can be filled with gambling functionality and in app purchases. The age ratings assigned to apps are not always accurate or even consistent across stores because Google and Apple have different approaches when setting age ratings. As a result many apps that introduce gambling concepts to children, such as roulette, slots, dice, cards, virtual coins and chips, are rated PEGI 3 or 4+. A child experiences the emotions of real world gamblers as they progress through the games. Many other apps feature loot boxes for sale which have also been linked to gambling.

Video game purchases

Many popular apps and console and PC games contain mystery or randomised in-app purchases known most commonly as loot boxes. The UK Gambling Commission's report shows that 31% of young people, aged 11-16, have accessed loot boxes in a video game or app. Depending on the game loot boxes may be referred to by a different name, e.g. crates in

Counter Strike:Global Offensive (CS:GO) and PUBG, packs in FIFA, keys in Rocket League, alpha packs in Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege, fortune cookies in Animal Crossing, orbs in Fire Emblem Heroes and so on. Loot boxes are considered to be a "game of chance" within video games because when you make your purchase you do not know what items are contained or if those items will improve your chance of success in the game. There are valid concerns that loot boxes act as a gateway to problem gambling. Children experience the same emotions when they purchase these mystery items, that gamblers do:- reward anticipation, highs and lows depending on the contents received, spending more and more in the hope that they will get a better outcome. e.g. a rare skin or character/weapon they need. Like many gamblers they mistakenly believe their luck will have to change if they keep spending or that they have already spent so much that they have to try to recoup their losses. It requires no player skill to access a loot box and the outcome is random so they function similarly to scratch cards, roulette or slot machines in many ways. A number of published studies have shown that there is a significant link between loot box spending and gambling problems.

There is an additional concern about some PC games that allow virtual items or "skins" obtained in loot boxes to be transferred outside the game where they can be used to bet on professional gaming competitions or other games of chance, e.g. CS:GO, Dota 2, PUBG. This betting is known as "skin gambling" and the sites that allow it are not regulated and allow underage gambling. Skins can also be sold for cash outside the games.

In 2018 the Irish Government, along with authorities from 15 other countries, signed an international declaration expressing concern about gambling in video games. Belgium and the Netherlands have taken the necessary steps since to make the sale of loot boxes in games illegal due to their links with gambling and games manufacturers either modified their games for these markets or removed them altogether. Regulation is not consistent across Europe however and in Ireland there are no restrictions on the sale or promotion of loot boxes in games, even those within apps rated as PEGI 3 or 4+.

Social media gaming

Older children may opt to play casino style games, such as simulated poker games or virtual slot machines, that they can download or accessed online, often through social media platforms like Facebook. These games use virtual money in game when betting and while players do use real money to make in-app purchases the games at no time return real money to the player. As a result they are not classified as gambling and do not have to adhere to gambling regulations so there are no age restrictions. The games teach underage players the rules and habits of gambling. Players can play on their own but are encouraged to play with their friends or with strangers online and to track their progress on leaderboards. The games give players a false sense of their own abilities and skills because success in these games is much easier to achieve than in the monetary gambling. Research shows an increased risk of addiction for teens who play these casino style games, with players 3 to 4 times more likely to gamble with real money in the future.

Community hall gambling

Local community events such as bingo nights or the parish “Sale of Work”, complete with a Wheel of Fortune, often include children in Ireland. The thrill of their first win could come at such an event. This may not seem like a problem when your child is 10 or 11 but research tells us that children who are introduced to and begin gambling by age 12 are four times more likely to become problem gamblers.

Betting amongst peers at sporting events

Friends from school/sports sometimes introduce gambling opportunities to groups of friends and convince others to participate in bets. Underage betting is common among sports players in particular due to their natural competitiveness. A number of high profile GAA stars and soccer players have spoken out about their gambling addiction and indicated that their gambling began while underage.

Betting on significant sports events

Watching sport with family and friends should be enjoyable and a learning experience for a young person as they support their team/competitor through wins and losses. It is important to consider how you speak about sports betting around your children. Are you live betting while watching sports, focusing on the odds and outcome, instead of enjoying the game? Would you bet against your national or county team if you liked the odds and what values does that set for your child? If children see that betting on the outcome becomes more important to the adults in their lives than enjoying the sport what influence does that have on them?

Sponsorship and advertising

Widespread betting sponsorship and advertising contribute greatly towards normalising gambling. Images of gambling are found on TV, billboards, posters and other forms of traditional and online advertising. These adverts show gambling as something fun and normal to do, which could encourage young people to gamble themselves. There are restrictions around alcohol sponsorship but advertising of gambling is still on the rise and bookmakers are expecting to self-regulate.

There is a strong link between sports and gambling in particular because sports teams and athletes rely on gambling sponsorship. Our President, Michael D. Higgins, has suggested that sponsorship from betting companies should be banned and in 2018 the GAA voted to ban all sponsorship from gambling companies. Unfortunately the FAI established a new sponsorship deal with sports betting operator Sports Pesa in 2019, further strengthening the link between soccer and betting.

Within the English Premier League, which is followed avidly by so many Irish children, 9 of the 20 clubs are sponsored by betting companies in 2018/2019. When children watch a soccer match they see betting company logos on the shirts of players they idolise and ads for betting

companies on the electronic hoarding around the pitch and during every commercial break. There are restrictions preventing the display of betting logos on junior shirt sizes but from the age of 13 children could be advertising a gambling company when they wear the shirt of their favourite soccer team. We are in danger of raising a generation of children that associate something they love, i.e. soccer, with having a bet.

Unfortunately this kind of advertising and sponsor is also becoming more common in esports (professional gaming) where mainstream operators like Betway have sponsored some of the biggest teams and competitions. If your child is watching esports, usually found on streaming platforms like Twitch, then they will be exposed to gambling company adverts.

Social media has a big role to play also especially Facebook which facilitates 61% of social casino game play. There are no research figures for Ireland but in the UK the Gambling Commission has reported that 59% of 11- to 16-year-olds have seen gambling advertisements on social media, compared with 66% on television. More than one in 10 11-16 year olds follow gambling companies on social media, and they are three times more likely to spend money on gambling. Of those who have ever played online gambling-style games, 24% follow gambling companies online.

Education about gambling

While it is not possible to protect your children from exposure to the world of gambling you can educate them about the potential risks involved. Unlike substance abuse, awareness of gambling related harms is not part of the current SPHE curriculum taught in Irish schools. It falls to parents to explain the world of gambling to their children and highlight the risks involved.



When you start the conversation with your children consider where their interests lie, for example are they more into sports or gaming? Here are some suggested conversation openers:-

- Ask them to tell you about ways they or their friends are gambling
- Ask if they feel pressure from peers to gamble
- Ask if they have come across advertising by betting companies online
- Ask about their in game purchases and their take on loot boxes

Once you have started the conversation you can talk to them about key gambling messages and dispel myths they may have about gambling: -

- Tell them that gambling is not an easy way to make money. Talk to your children about house advantage and the reality of gambling as an industry: it exists to make a profit.

- Explain to them the rules of probability:- the odds of winning do not change no matter how long you play or how much you may have lost. Advise them to set spending limits in advance and caution them against chasing losses.
- If they are interested in sports betting let them know that it is a myth that knowing a sport well will improve your chances of winning. Chance always comes into play and talk to them about what influences winning.
- If they are playing free casino style games warn them that these games allow more wins than real life casino games. Agree set time limits on play and set spending limits on in-app purchases to avoid compulsive behaviours.
- Talk to them about betting on esports (professional gaming competitions) and spending on virtual items, like loot boxes, in games and its links to gambling.
- Tell them to be cautious about online gambling and advertising they will see. Explain to them how betting companies use free bets and special offers in emails or through social media ads to entice people to join up and ultimately spend their own money.
- Explain to them that gambling can be addictive. They may be more familiar with the concept of substance addiction but explain to them that gambling has the same effect on the brain. It causes a similar “rush” or “high” and overtime tolerance levels are increased and impulse control decreased. This causes the addict to gamble more and more without taking into account the risks involved.
- Highlight the cautionary stories of people who have become problem gamblers and that they come from all walks of life and all age groups. A number of books by gambling addicts are available, as well as youtube videos of interviews with problem gamblers.
- Encourage them to look out for their friends and talk to their peers about the risks of gambling.
- Acknowledge that gambling can be a form of escape for people who are feeling lonely or isolated. Let them know who they can talk to if they need help.

If you already have concerns about your child’s gambling there is more information available on our website, www.problemgambling.ie/resources.html. This includes guidance on recognising the signs of problem gambling and possibly safeguards against gambling in your home, such as blocking access to betting sites.