



RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF TEENAGE GAMBLING

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The prevalence of problem gambling among children is rising fast. This is due to a range of factors including the normalisation of gambling through widespread advertising by betting companies and the strong culture of gambling in Ireland. With substance abuse it is often easier for parents to spot the signs but gambling is known as a “silent addiction” as it is easier to hide. This is even more true today with betting apps making it easier than ever to gamble in private. There are some indicators that you can use to recognise when your teenager has developed a problem with gambling:-

Problems with gambling usually start during adolescence or young adulthood



Problem gambling in children, age 11-16, has quadrupled to 1.7% in last two years

UK figures, 2018

Money issues

- More and more money is being spent on gambling
- Money is going missing that was provided for food, transport or rent
- Unexplained debt that may indicate a gambling loss
- Sudden influx of cash or ability to purchase expensive items that may indicate a gambling win
- Increased interest in money and the value of possessions
- Requests to borrow money to pay debts or gamble
- Money going missing from parents or household

Changes to behaviour and personality

- At school/college unexplained absences or late arrival to classes
- A sudden drop in grades or late delivery of assignments/homework
- Spending less time with family and friends and more time online
- Losing interest over recent weeks or months in activities they used to enjoy
- Taking a greater interest in sports results
- Expressing an increased interest in gambling
- Accessing gambling apps and websites from their phone or computer
- Partaking in regular card games or gambling situations
- Following gaming competitions and increasing their spend on loot boxes and in game purchases
- Bragging about gambling wins and downplaying any losses
- Lying or becoming aggressive when asked about time and money spent on gambling
- Prone to mood swings after a win or loss

- Increasing interested in winning and “being right”

Starting the conversation

Even if these signs are present the young person who has developed a problem may not be aware of it themselves. Talking to your teenager about their gambling will be challenging so before you start the conversation consider the following:-

- Pick the right time and place to have the conversation. Let them know you are concerned because you care and avoid being judgemental. Try to use positive communication and talk about how you feel rather than assuming that you know how they feel. For example, you might say "I'm worried because I see you doing things that are really risky" or "I can see you're unhappy and I want to help". Listen patiently to their response without interrupting.
- Do not allow them to make excuses for their gambling and do not agree to lend or give them money unconditionally that they could use to gamble or pay off gambling debts. Instead you could set out rules around gambling and agree on resulting consequences or rewards, such as help in paying off a gambling debt if the rules are followed.
- Talk to them about the gambling industry; it exists to make a profit so the house will always have the advantage. Tell them that through advertising and offers, such as free bets, gambling companies entice people to sign up and spend more and more of their own money over time.
- Discuss common gambling myths, e.g. gambling is an easy way to make money, it increases your chances of winning if you know a sport well, your chances of winning changes the longer you play.
- Make sure they realise that gambling can be an addiction. 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. It may help to highlight cautionary stories of famous and ordinary people who have suffered gambling related harms.
- Talk to them about support they can get to help them change their gambling habits. Discuss changes that could be made to help put obstacles in the way of their gambling, e.g. installing blocking software to prevent access to betting sites.

More support and advice is available for friends and family of problem gamblers from <https://www.problemgambling.ie/problem-gambling-support-for-family--friends.html>