

Evidence Based Practices in School Mental Health: Awareness of Youth Gambling

What is youth gambling?

The definition of youth gambling is a modified definition of adult gambling: an activity which implies an element of risk, and money or something of sentimental or monetary value could be won or lost by a participant. Specifically, youth gambling activities can include sports betting, poker, crane machines, dice, board games, pitching quarters, internet gambling, other card games, lottery, and pull tabs. An example of an activity that is **not** considered to be gambling is a video game since one does not bet on the result of the game. Problem gambling is defined as a gambling behavior which causes disruptions in any major area of life (psychological, physical, social, and educational/vocational) and is considered to be a progressive addiction characterized by an increasing preoccupation with gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop, “chasing” losses and loss of control manifested by continuation of gambling in spite of mounting, serious negative consequences

How prevalent is youth gambling?

Canadian studies of students in the 7th through 11th graders (Ladouceur, Boudreaul, Jacques, Vitaro, 1999) and 4th through 6th graders (Ladouceur, Dube, Bujold, 1994) have indicated that approximately 87% have gambled at least once in their lifetime. 47.1% of seventh-grade children in Massachusetts purchased lottery tickets during their lifetime and 2.9% had purchased lottery tickets between 6 and 19 times during the past month (Shaffer, 1994).

How prevalent is youth problem gambling?

In a meta-analysis of United States and Canadian youth gambling studies, Shaffer and Hall (1996) found that between 4.4% and 7.4% of adolescents exhibit compulsive or pathological gambling behaviors, whereas 9.9% to 14.2% exhibited some problems associated with gambling but not at a clinical level. Approximately 5.4% of adults can be considered problem gamblers. Thus, levels of problem and pathological gambling in adolescents could possibly be more prevalent than in the adult population.

What are the signs of youth gambling?

- Unexplained absences from school.
- Drop in grades.
- Asking for/borrowing money from peers.
- Large amounts of money in student’s possession.
- Intense interest in gambling conversations.

- Displaying money or other material possessions.
- Behavior changes (e.g., day dreaming, anxious, moody, less participative, appearing tired in class).
- Using gambling “lingo” in conversations (e.g., bookie, point spread, underdog or favorite, exaggerated use of the word “bet”).
- Spending unusual amount of time reading newspapers, magazines, and/or periodicals having to do with sports.
- Selling personal belongings.
- Bragging about winnings.
- Lying, cheating, or stealing in school.

Is treatment/support available?

As awareness for the problem of youth gambling grows, knowledge of effective treatment and support practices continue to expand. An important difference between a gambling addiction and other addictions is that gamblers cannot easily get rid of their debt. Collaborative problem-solving about debt reduction can help the gamblers feel less desperate.

What can schools do to address youth problem gambling? (Derevensky & Gupta, 2002)

- Include gambling awareness information in curricula.
- Provide training for teachers and administrators.
- Train student assistance teams and school mental health personnel to assess for problem gambling and refer students to appropriate treatment resources.
- Review or establish a school policy on gambling and promote enforcement of the policy.
- Implement effective prevention models.

CDE acknowledges and thanks the authors of this document, Dr. Karin Dittrick-Nathan, Assistant Clinical Professor, University of Denver and Emily Verbeke, Graduate Student, Child & Family School Psychology Program, University of Denver.

Disclaimer

The information gathered for this evidence-based practice sheet is a summary of common practices and/or programs with a strong research base and definitions found in recent literature. This summary is by no means a comprehensive representation of all information, definitions, programs, and standards to be found. In addition this information is not intended to provide any type of professional advice nor diagnostic service. The listing of a specific program within this sheet does not constitute as an endorsement from CDE for the program.

Resources

Problem Gambling Treatment and Research Center
University of Denver
Phone: 303-871-3230
Email: bvollmer@du.edu

National Council on Problem Gambling
216 G Street NE, Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20002
Phone: 202-547-9204
Fax: 202-547-9206
Web: <http://www.npgaw.org> and <http://www.ncpgambling.org>

International Centre for Youth Gambling and High-Risk Behaviors
McGill University
3724 McTavish
Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 1Y2
Phone: 514-398-1391
Fax: 514-398-3401
Web: <http://www.youthgambling.com>

YMCA Youth Gambling Program
Web: <http://YouthBet.net>
Interactive site for youth, parents, and teachers. Includes articles, games, and other helpful information
Web: <http://www.ymcatoronto.org/gambling/>
Includes three different age level curriculum guides for teachers.

References

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- Ladouceur, R., Dube, D., & Bujold, A. (1994). Gambling among primary school students. *Journal of Gambling Studies, 10*(4), 363-370.
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