



Let's talk risk

A GUIDE TO DISCUSSING
GAMBLING WITH YOUR CHILD

**How can
I keep my
child safe and
healthy?**

DEAR PARENT,

Every day since your child was born, you've likely asked yourself: how can I keep them safe and healthy?

The reality is that risks are everywhere. They're a part of life. As parents, we can't control every risk our child takes. But we can guide them away from more problematic risk-taking behavior— like alcohol, substance use, vaping, and *gambling*.

While drugs and alcohol are a common concern for parents of adolescents, gambling often gets overlooked. That's totally okay—it's why this toolkit was created.

If the enclosed information is new to you, don't worry! It's never too late to have these important conversations with your child. You're taking the right steps by helping them build healthy habits so they can explore risk safely and with confidence.

Note: *Although this toolkit was designed for parents of youth ages 10-13, you can use any of the conversation pointers with children of other ages.*



DEFINITION

Gambling:
**When you risk
something of value,
and you don't know
if you will win or lose.**

Youth and Gambling: A risk without reward

Surprising stats

From alcohol to drugs and vaping, certain addictions, especially ones that impact the adolescent brain, are front-and-center among parents' concerns. Problem gambling is a less-recognized risk that affects youth more than you may think.

Problem gambling impacts 4-5% of youth ages 12-17 compared to just 1% of adults. That means more than 40,000 adolescents in Massachusetts struggle with problem

gambling. In fact, 60-80% of high school students report having gambled in the past year, and gambling disorders can develop in children as young as 10. Overall, the number of children with gambling problems has quadrupled in just two years.

50%

of 6th-8th graders are engaged
in some form of gambling

80%

of high school students
report having gambled
once in the past year

4-8%

of youth are impacted by
problem gambling, compared to
just 1% of adults

10 years

The age gambling disorders
can begin to develop in children





How it starts

Even if youth can't go to a casino or buy a lottery ticket, they can get involved in gambling in a number of ways, such as:

- Observing or joining adult poker games or sports betting
- Scratching off a lottery ticket purchased by a parent or other adult
- Playing an online or mobile app game with pay-to-play activities

**So why
is this a
problem?**

It can impact youth for life

So, why is this a problem? How can playing a game that involves imaginary pets or magic coins lead to a lifelong gambling addiction?

Research shows that children introduced to seemingly harmless betting by age 12 are *four times more likely* to engage in problem gambling later in life. The parts of the brain that receive a “rush” of reward from substances are also stimulated by gambling. Since their prefrontal cortexes (the brain’s logic center)

aren’t fully-developed, youth often have difficulty assessing risk and making healthy choices for themselves. So that “win” on a mobile app or Roblox® game today can lead to unhealthy real-life gambling, and all its negative side effects, tomorrow.



Children introduced to betting by age 12 are 4x more likely to engage in problem gambling later in life.”

Reduce the risk

There are plenty of ways you can reduce your child's risk of developing problem gambling. To help you get started, we've include some recommended steps below:

01

Reduce your child's exposure to gambling. Since children often mirror what their parents do, consider skipping that next lottery ticket or weekend poker game.

02

Establish clear rules around your child's screen time. This will decrease opportunities for online gambling.

03

If you notice your child playing any gambling-related apps or games, speak up and start a conversation. You can always use the tips included in this toolkit!

04

Keep an eye on your child's spending habits. Get more information the next time they ask for your credit card to make a purchase.

Know the warning signs

Understanding the warning signs of youth problem gambling can help you recognize it and prevent it from becoming an issue down the line. This is especially important if there is a history of addiction in your family. Warning signs from your child might include:



Changes in attitude around school (missing classes, not completing assignments, showing less interest in extracurricular activities, and/or getting lower grades)



Changes in mood or behavior (aggression, defensiveness, signs of anxiety/depression and/or secrecy)



Noticeable interest in competition (winning or being right)



Money allotted for routine expenses (e.g. lunch money) or household cash going missing



Stashes of money and/or new possessions appearing

Even if you don't observe these warning signs, it's important to talk to your child about healthy vs. unhealthy gambling behavior — just as you would discuss other threats to their well-being.





Start talking

Even if your family does not participate in betting or gambling, chances are your child has been exposed to gambling behaviors through media and advertising. Talking with your youth today can help them establish healthy ways of thinking so that these exposures do not lead to problem gambling.

How to have a conversation about gambling

Set the tone

Try to avoid challenges such as “I bet you can’t make it down the street in under 30 seconds,” which can normalize gambling behavior. Instead, encourage your child to enjoy activities that are traditionally associated with wagers—such as card games or sports championships—without placing bets.

State the facts

Youth often overestimate the likelihood of winning a bet or a game. Level-setting those odds can help reduce the appeal of gambling. For instance, you can compare the odds of winning the lottery (1 in 292 million) to the odds of being struck by lightning (1 in 3,000).

Flip the script

Remind your child that gambling rarely results in winning. Allow them to consider what they can do with the money they save by not gambling.

Explain the science

Talk with your child about the dangers of gambling as you would talk to them about the risks of drugs and alcohol. Explain how their underdeveloped brains aren't yet ready to make fully-informed decisions and are still susceptible to addiction's most harmful effects.

Promote healthy activities

As youth get older, they might be better able to identify when gambling is just for fun versus when it becomes a problem. Until then, make sure family fun activities focus on experiences other than betting.

Be in the know

Be aware of the games and apps your child uses. Identify those that mimic gambling behavior. Ask questions and gauge your child's understanding of their own relationship with gambling.



How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help you and your child have meaningful conversations about the risks of gambling. When going through the activities, try to use them as a conversation starter. Ask follow-up questions, challenge their responses, and encourage them to think of alternative ways to approach these issues. Specific follow-up questions are included in each activity, so keep an eye out for those.

REFERENCES

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**Learn more at
mass.gov/YouthGambling
or scan the QR code**



Massachusetts
Department of
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**LET'S GET REAL
ABOUT GAMBLING**