

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

SPORTS BETTING

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WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Sports betting refers to placing a wager on the outcome of a sporting event. Online gambling has made this far easier to do than the days of traditional land-based bookmakers, with services like in-play betting enabling people to wager money even after the game starts. Widespread promotions on social media are often used to tempt people into taking part and are still seen quite often by children online.

BETTING FOR 'FUN'

A group of young people who use gambling platforms were asked to consider why they gamble, and the most common reason given was 'because it's fun' (55%) with 'to win money' and 'it gives me something to do' (31%) second on the list. The thrill of placing a bet can sometimes be used to alleviate boredom, which can pave the way to it becoming a habit.

CROSS-SELLING OF PRODUCTS

Cross-selling is a critical marketing strategy for sports betting operators, and it is a concern because it can lead users of one gambling platform to another, and then to another. These other gambling apps include casino games, which financially thrive on engaging the user to gamble, and can result in addictive behaviours.

UNDERAGE GAMBLING

According to the UK Gambling Commission, there are 140,000 children aged between 11 and 16 who have, or risk having, a gambling problem. Underage betting is illegal, but with weak age verification processes, it is possible for children and young people to sign up to platforms and place wagers using their own card details, or those of someone over 18.

SPOT THE SIGNS

Gambling problems can be very isolating for an individual, and although awareness is being raised around the issue, it can be difficult for them to seek help, or even tell someone that they're struggling. Talk with your child if they show any signs of becoming withdrawn, having a variable mood, performing worse in school, regularly borrowing money or losing money inexplicably, or growing anxious.

FINANCIAL RISKS

In addition to the obvious risk of building up large debts, there have been instances where children have spent a lot of money in a short space of time and parents have had to file a complaint with the operator and try and prove that it was their child – not them – who had placed these wagers (which can be extremely difficult to do, and comes with no guarantee that you will see your money again).

ADDICTION

When we take risks and it pays off, our brain releases dopamine, which makes us feel good. When a person places a bet and wins, the reward pathways are triggered in the brain, and it is this physiological response that can become addictive for some people.

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Gambling can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, anger and even suicidal thoughts. In fact, research suggests that gambling disorder is highly correlated with suicide and disproportionately affects those under 30.

Advice for Parents & Educators

TALK ABOUT THE RISKS

Talk to your child about gambling and its potential dangers, even if your child has not asked about it. Children and young people are exposed to gambling through social media and, occasionally, through word of mouth with their friends. It can be extremely beneficial to offer input about the risks of using gambling apps and platforms.

SUPPORT CRITICAL THINKING

Try to encourage children to think critically and explain how limited the chances of winning a bet actually are, as opposed to what online promotions might suggest. Make sure they understand that the whole goal of gambling companies is to take money from their customers – not to make them rich.

INSTALL PROTECTIVE SOFTWARE

Install software on your child's devices to protect them from being tempted to place bets online. A good example of such software is Gamban – a user-friendly, transparent and non-intrusive piece of software that can be downloaded on an Android, iOS, Windows and macOS device, blocking its users from thousands of gambling websites and apps.

LIMIT ACCESS TO FUNDS

Make sure your card details are not saved on a child's phone from a previous purchase. This will limit their access to money and prevent them from taking part in gambling if they do not yet have their own debit card. If a child has their own bank account, talk to them about finances, and explain to them that gambling can leave them without money to spend on things they may want in the future.

BE A ROLE MODEL

Try to avoid exposing children to gambling through your own actions, as doing so can suggest to them that it is risk-free and harmless. It could also mean you are less likely to be taken seriously when talking to the child about the dangers of gambling.

SEEK SUPPORT

If you are concerned that a child may be gambling, it's important that you step in early on. Don't be afraid to ask for guidance. Remember that what starts as the odd gamble here and there can very quickly become a habit, and an especially serious issue for a child. Gambling under the age of 18 is illegal, and we strongly encourage those affected to seek help.

Meet Our Expert

TalkGEN is a non-profit organisation that was formed by individuals who have lived experiences of gambling harm. As well as their own direct efforts to reduce the dangers through research, education and treatment, TalkGEN actively campaign for reform of the sector to eliminate the potentially devastating effects of problem gambling on current and future generations.

