

Talking to Youth About Gambling

Research shows that parents have the power to make a difference in how kids respond to risky activities like substance use or gambling. When asked, Oregon youth ages 12-17 reported their preferred method of getting information is from parents or other influential adults ¹.

Why Talk About Gambling?

Teens who understand gambling and its risk are less likely to develop a gambling problem. Talk directly with your teen about gambling to make sure that you are communicating exactly what you want him or her to know.

Youth Gambling

A recent study of Oregon youth ages 12-17, reflected that 40% of Oregon youth have gambled in the past year². They wagered money or something of value on a variety of activities like sports, charitable games, games of skill and cards. Youth were also engaging in “gambling like” activities on the internet without money.

Oregon youth gambling can look like the following:

- Two twelve-year old’s playing basketball in the gym after school bet a dollar on who can make the most baskets.
- Thirteen-year old’s betting with their friends on video games.
- A high-school student uses their parents credit card to gamble online.
- A group of middle-school aged youth purchasing a lottery scratch-off ticket from a machine.
- A group of high-school students play poker on Saturday night betting with cash or something of value.

Are There Warning Signs?

Some of these signs will sound very familiar, they are also “signs of adolescence or being in the teenage years.” But if they occur in an ongoing pattern, or if you have reason to be concerned about your teen’s gambling, here are some indicators to look for:

- Asking for or borrowing from the family or unexplained debt;
- Unexplained absences from school or a sudden drop in grades;
- Carries or posses gambling materials, such as dice, playing cards, or other gambling materials;
- Says gambling is one of the best ways to make easy money, and preoccupied with gambling;
- Uses desperate measures to get gambling money, such as stealing from the family;
- Gambles with money that is supposed to be used for something else such as lunch, bus fare, etc.;
- Neglects family/friends;
- Lies to people about gambling;
- Displays large amounts of cash and other material possessions.

What Can Parents Do?

Here are some tips on how to talk to your youth about risky behaviors:

- **Start Early** – Don't wait until adolescence to talk about gambling or other risky behaviors. Children often begin gambling during grade school.
- **Listen** – If your children don't think they'll be heard they won't come to you with tough questions or problems. Create an open environment for conversations about what is going on in their lives. Start by asking them, "so what do kids gamble on these days?"
- **Educate yourself and your kids about gambling** – Find out about the laws in Oregon as well as other states you might be visiting. Oregon requires individuals who gamble to be 21 or older to play Oregon Video Lottery games, and 18 years-old to purchase scratch-off tickets and play draw games. While legal provisions are in place to prevent underage gambling, online opportunities exist, and easy access to the internet poses a risk for young people. Monitor your youth's internet activities and online financial transactions.
- **Look for opportunities to discuss the risks of gambling** – The next time you see a news report about a lottery ticket winner or high jackpot, take the opportunity to talk to your kids about the reality of winning. Young people need to learn that winning is unlikely. Teaching your children about the odds will give them the tools to make better decisions when faced with gambling opportunities.
- **Know what behavior is normal** – Being emotional and impulsive is part of being an adolescent. Adolescents are more likely to take risk and are vulnerable to peer pressure. They tend to overestimate the short-term payoff and dismiss the longer-term consequences of what they do.
- **Monitor your children's activities** – Know your children's whereabouts. Know their friends. But try to avoid making them feel controlled. You can learn more about what they are doing if they trust you. Family meals are a great way to keep in touch with your teen about his or her everyday activities.
- **Be involved** – Parental involvement is one of the factors that can keep teens from engaging in risky behaviors.
- **Help your teen with coping skills** – Gambling often is an example of unwise coping strategy used to escape from problems or bad feelings. Effective coping strategies can substitute healthy for unhealthy behaviors. They focus on solving underlying problems instead of covering them up or avoiding them.
- **The importance of family** – Think about how your attitude toward gambling and your own gambling behavior might influence your kids. Be careful not to send mixed messages.

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Source:

1. Oregon Health Authority – Public Health Division. Oregon Healthy Teens Survey 2015.
2. Moore, T (2017), Oregon Adolescent Gambling Prevalence Study