Parents As Partners:
Talking to Your Child About Responsible & Problem Gambling

BC Problem Gambling Help Line
1.888.795.6111 (24 hrs)
Dear Parents,

Thank you for taking the time to read Parents As Partners: Talking to Your Child About Responsible & Problem Gambling. We hope you will find this booklet useful. It contains information on both gaming and gambling and ways to speak to your child about both issues. Even though you may feel like you have little influence over the choices your teenager makes, research shows that parents play a vital role in helping to reduce the risk of teenage problem gambling.

After reviewing this booklet, if you have questions or would like more information, please visit our website at www.bcresponsiblegambling.ca or ask to speak to a Prevention Specialist in your area by calling the BC Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-888-795-6111 (24hrs).

You can also learn about and arrange a free education presentation for any adult, youth, or community group or Parent Advisory Council by calling the Helpline number above.

Your feedback about this booklet is important to us. After reviewing the information, please take a minute to complete the feedback form located on the last page. We believe that you will find this information valuable.

The BC Responsible and Problem Gambling Program

All images in this booklet are for illustrative purposes only.
What is Gambling?

Gambling is any activity involving the betting or risking of money or valuables (sports equipment, iPods, music, games, etc.) on an activity of chance, where money or other valuables may be won or lost. Teens most often refer to this as betting.

Did you know...

- The average age for teens to start gambling is 13, but some start as young as 10.
- 67% of Canadian youth studied report that their parents are buying lottery or instant win tickets for them to play.
- Parents’ behaviour affects kids’ behaviour. Youth who report that their parents have gambled in the past year show a significantly higher participation in various gambling activities than youth who report that their parents have not gambled in the past 12 months.
- 56% of parents rarely/never discuss gambling related issues with their teen.
- The legal gambling age in British Columbia is 19.


It is important to talk to your kids about gambling.

Studies indicate that problem gambling in teens is higher for those teens whose parents did not know about their gambling. The earlier a young person starts gambling, the more likely they are of developing a problem.

The good news...

Parents are the number one resource that youth say they would turn to if they ever experienced any problems as a result of gambling.
The Link Between Gaming and Gambling

Young people today have access to forms of electronic entertainment that we as parents may know very little about. With the proliferation of MMORPG’s (massively multiplayer online roleplaying games) and internet connected console games through systems like Xbox 360, we have begun to see the potential significance that gaming can have on the life of a young person.

What’s the big deal? – The numbers are becoming alarming!
Some studies indicate anywhere from 8% to 25% of youth playing video games have a problem. These issues are beginning to surface at school; kids are tired and moody because they have stayed up all night playing games. They cannot function effectively in the classroom or with peers because they lack social skills due to the lack of face-to-face exposure with friends.

So what are the links?
Where gambling and gaming were once two distinct behaviours, we are now seeing an increase in risky betting among heavy video game users. The fact that gambling is based mostly on chance and gaming is based on the development of skill is often forgotten, especially when considering the transfer to online gambling, such as poker. **With gambling, practise does not make perfect because of the element of chance...a fact many adolescents don’t realize until it’s too late.**

Both gaming and gambling:

- Provide an intermittent positive reinforcement schedule so that prolonged behaviour is rewarded with occasional wins, bonuses or extended play.

- Can create a sense of immersion that can lead to losing track of time.

- Involve taking risks (which is what this age is all about!) without being fully aware of the consequences.

- Share a similar justification process when problems develop: the player believes that they will stop once they win, even though most gaming and gambling opportunities are designed so you can continue indefinitely.

- Can cause a shift in mood when the “game” is left (such as anger, depression or other symptoms similar to withdrawal).
So how do we tell if these behaviours are getting out of control?
A useful guideline is the amount of time, money and energy spent on the behaviour and a shift in attitude toward the “game.” The symptoms of any problem related to these issues will mirror substance use problems:

- Preoccupation
- Sleep problems/ agitation
- Fluctuating loss/gain of money and/or possessions
- Increased stress
- Increased time isolating self
- Withdrawing from relationships
- Slipping school grades
- Changing attitudes toward adults
- Abrupt or exaggerated emotions

It doesn’t help that most of these can be typical adolescent behaviours, but consistency in these symptoms should be a warning to parents.

Managing the Risk

Too much of a good thing is not necessarily a good thing! These “harmless” behaviours can become problems.

Limiting the potential negative consequences of either gaming and gambling can be done by:

- Limiting the amount of time and money your teen spends on the activity.
- Supervising play time.
- Not allowing online play to take place in the teen’s bedroom.
- Removing TVs and technology from the teen’s bedroom.
- Limiting screen time and breaking it up during the day.
- Encouraging other options such as sports, clubs and extracurricular activities.
- Maintaining strong family rituals, like dinner, recreational activities and talking together.
Teen Trends in Gambling

Online Gambling
Youth are gambling online; 13% of youth that gamble online started playing on free sites. Know the facts about internet gambling:

- On unregulated gambling sites, you never know who you are playing against – it could be a rigged game or a computer program.

- Unregulated online gambling sites may collect personal information about you to sell to other companies.

- Odds are increased on “.net” sites, leading to a false sense of skill and control and giving the illusion that it is easy to win at internet gambling.

- Many “.net” sites link to “.com” sites, offering “free” credits to start playing for money.

- Most “.com” sites are outside of Canadian jurisdiction – unless regulated by law, you play at your own risk.

- For young people, the rush of risk taking coupled with the intermittent reinforcement of gambling, can lead to powerful associations that may end up the antecedents of addiction.

Computer Tips for Parents

- Do not leave your computer unattended when you are logged in.

- Don’t share your credit card or bank account details with your teen and ensure credit/debit cards remain in your possession at all times.

- Create separate profiles and passwords for everyone who uses a shared computer.

- Keep computers in a central location, so you can monitor the sites your teen is visiting and the amount of time spent on the internet.

- Set parental controls on your shared computers. Consider putting a control on your computer to avoid sites of concern.

- Visit GameSense.ca to download BetStopper, free software that blocks kids’ access to gambling content on the internet.
Poker
Contrary to what many TV stations would have us believe, poker is not a sport. It has become one of the most frequently played games, and many parents don’t object to their kids playing poker in their house...at least they aren’t out “drinking and using drugs.” However, gambling involves risk and can become just as problematic and harmful as a problem with drugs or alcohol.

Many teens **overestimate their skill** and **underestimate the role chance plays** in the outcome of poker games. Many teens believe that if they practice, they may be able to become professional poker players. Advertising doesn’t help: look at the number of books available that promise to teach you how to become a poker star in no time at all.

Remember, card games are based on chance and the outcomes are unpredictable. While you may be skilled at reading other players, another player may be able to read you better than you think. You can’t control what cards are dealt to you or your opponents. There is no system that can guarantee you a win.

Sports Betting
Some youth will bet on anything—personal games, video games, etc—but one of the most common forms of informal betting youth do is sports betting. In sports betting, the person tries to predict the results of a game and wagers on the outcome. Many teens believe that if they know the athletes and teams well enough, they can predict a “sure win.” But all games still involve an element of chance and many teens don’t understand that betting on sports can result in serious problems.

For those who make bets with bookies, the risk increases significantly. While bookies may offer credit, the credit is subject to high interest rates. When they demand payment, teens may get into debt or turn to illegal activities to try to make the payment.

**There is no system that can guarantee you a win.**
Talking to Your Kids About Gambling

Ask questions and listen for their attitudes around gambling.
Ask questions first and see what they think about gambling before offering your own opinion. This could be a good opportunity to find out what they know and dispel any misconceptions they have. An attitude that shows a young person is thinking of gambling as a way to make money or as a career choice is a red flag that they have some distorted ideas about gambling. Talk about the difference between skill-building games where practice pays off (playing sports) and gambling where skill may/may not play a role but the outcome is ultimately determined by chance.

Find the right time to have the conversation.
Look for a time to bring up the topic naturally. Kids are quick to spot a lecture coming and often react negatively to this approach. Bring the topic up when viewing a program featuring professional poker players on TV, or during an announcement about the current lottery winner. The key to avoiding a conversation from turning into a perceived lecture is all about context.

Be specific and concrete.
When you talk about gambling, make sure they understand it does not just involve games in a casino. When you discuss gambling, give specific examples such as betting on sports, playing poker or cards for money, or gambling on the Internet. These are the types of gambling that kids most likely will be engaged in.

Be careful about the language you choose to use.
Avoid sweeping statements or threats. Whenever possible try and avoid the word “don’t.” Research indicates that youth do not respond positively to this message. Instead give them information about odds, randomness, the consequences of developing a problem or how someone can gamble responsibly once they reach the legal age to do so (19+).

Be clear about your own values.
Discuss what your family and friends think about gambling and the way your family chooses to participate (or not) in gambling. Let your kids know that gambling isn’t a way to make easy money. Teach them that the fun from playing games is from the activity itself, not from walking away with someone else’s losses.

Don’t tell them, show them.
Parents are important role models for their children and kids are quick to spot discrepancies between what you say and what you do. Demonstrate your values by the way you live. Convey to your kids the role (or absence) of gambling in your own life. Let them know that if you gamble, it is from a conscious, informed position. Share the responsible guidelines you use when you gamble, such as setting a time or money limit.

For more information, visit www.bcresponsiblegambling.ca.

Remember, actions speak louder than words. Make sure your own behaviour is consistent with what you say to your teen!
Common Myths Teens Believe About Gambling

“I can make a lot of money playing games like poker or betting on sports.”
Some skill may be required to play poker or bet on sports, but these games still involve chance. In the long run, you are more likely to lose.

“Learning certain tricks or strategies will help me win.”
There are no tricks or systems that allow you to overcome the odds of playing games of chance.

“The more I play, the better I’ll get.”
With gambling, practice does not make perfect. Every game has an element of chance. There is no sure way to win.

“I’m great at video games, so I’m sure I’ll be good at internet poker.”
Gambling involves risk and is based on chance. The skill involved in video games has no relevance to any type of gambling.

“If I keep playing, I know I will win eventually.”
The odds are generally against you so continuing to play can result in even more losses. The more you gamble, the more you lose in the long run, no matter how skilled you think you are or how great your “system” is.

“So Close.”
Have you ever almost won something? Did it make you want to do it again? Almost winning in gambling is not a sign that you are about to win. Each game is random and unrelated to the one before or after.
Signs of Adolescent Problem Gambling

The following is a list of possible warning signs of adolescent problem gambling. Many of these signs can be consistent with normal teenage behaviour. **Just because your teen displays one or more of these signs, it does not necessarily mean they are problem gamblers.**

### Signs May Include:

- Prefers gambling to other activities.
- Boasts often about winning, and talks a lot about gambling.
- Shows off new clothes or other purchases.
- Steals money or sells valuables.
- Refuses to explain behaviour or lies about it.
- Has frequent emotional highs and lows (mood swings).
- Skips school, forgets about homework, or has slipping grades.
- Seeks to gamble with friends and/or parents.
- Lies about where they are going.
- Shows an interest in parent’s or sibling's gambling activities.
- Enjoys watching gambling on TV (such as Texas Hold’em).
- Possesses cards, lottery tickets, sports betting sheets, IOU’s, etc.
- Is a high frequency video game player, especially enjoying computer/video simulated gambling-type games.
- Carries unusually large amounts of cash and/or asks to borrow money.
- Asks parents to place bets for them or wants to pick 6/49 numbers.

If you are concerned about your child’s gambling, please call the BC Problem Gambling Help Line at **1-888-795-6111** (24hrs).

Adapted from McGill University, Saskatchewan Healthline, and [www.bcresponsiblegambling.ca](http://www.bcresponsiblegambling.ca).
Parents As Partners: Feedback Form

Your feedback on this booklet is important to us. Please complete this form and return it to the address on the back page of this booklet. Thank you!

1. What grade is your child in?

☐ Grade 8  ☐ Grade 9  ☐ Grade 10  ☐ Grade 11/12

2. Please check the appropriate box in response to the following questions, using the following key:

1 = Strongly Disagree  2 = Disagree  3 = Undecided  4 = Agree  5 = Strongly Agree

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<td>b. I know more about teen gambling than I knew before reading this booklet.</td>
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<td>c. I know how to get help if I want to talk to someone about my teen’s (or my own) gambling.</td>
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<td>e. I think this booklet is a good way to get information to parents.</td>
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3. Additional Comments:

Notes
Contact Information

BC Responsible and Problem Gambling Program
If you would like more information or would like to mail your feedback form to our program, please contact:
Help is available. All day. Every day.

BC Problem Gambling Help Line
1.888.795.6111 (24 hrs)

The Problem Gambling Help Line and counselling services are offered free of charge. Funding is provided by the Province of British Columbia. For more information please visit: www.bcresponsiblegambling.ca