

Youth Gambling: What Parents & Caregivers Need to Know



WHAT DOES GAMBLING LOOK LIKE TODAY?

Youth gambling is more common, more accessible, and more serious than most parents and caring adults realize. The good news is that early awareness and open conversation make a real difference.

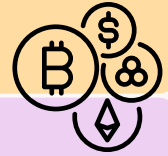
Most people picture casinos. Today's gambling is digital, embedded in everyday platforms, and largely invisible to parents/guardians.

Forms your child or young adult may already be encountering vary depending on their age.

Ages 10-17



- Loot boxes and in-game purchases
- Gacha gaming mechanics
- Card rips (live pack-opening streams)
- Skins betting in video games
- Peer betting among friends
- Robux betting on third party sites



Ages 18-26

- Sports betting apps (21+ in most states)
- Online poker and casino platforms
- Fantasy sports with cash stakes
- Prediction markets (Kalshi, Polymarket)
- Crypto trading with gambling dynamics
- Sweepstakes casinos

Warning Signs

Financial Signals

- Unexplained cash shortfalls/missing money
- Asking for money more frequently
- Borrowing from friends
- Selling belongings without explanation
- Unaccounted for windfalls

Behavioral Signals

- Secrecy around devices, especially at night
- Mood tied to outcomes: elated then flat or irritable
- Withdrawal from family, friends, or activities
- Declining grades
- Disrupted sleep
- Defensiveness when you ask about time online

Cause for concern...

Any gambling behavior for youth is cause for concern. Reducing screen time and promoting healthy recreational activities is the best protection for mental and behavioral health.

Has your child tried to cut back but can't seem to stop? Are they trying to manage stress? Has gambling already cost them money, relationships, or academic/work performance?

Two or more of these features warrant a professional conversation.



Gambling & Suicide Risk

Problem gambling carries one of the highest suicide risk rates of any behavioral health condition. The combination of shame, secrecy, financial desperation, and hopelessness can be overwhelming, especially for young people, whose capacity to imagine a way forward is still developing.

Take any expression of hopelessness or worthlessness seriously. Statements like, "Everyone would be better off without me" or "I can't fix this" are not melodrama. They are signs of an emerging crisis.

988 Suicide Crisis Lifeline
Call or text 24/7/365



Talk Early. Talk Often.



Like most risky behaviors, one of the best things you can do to protect the young people you care about is to foster open communication and start the conversation before a problem arises. Staying informed so you understand the risks and setting boundaries and expectations is a good place to start.

How to Start the Conversation & Access Support If You Need It

Children (Ages 10-13)

Name it explicitly and early.

Children this age are already encountering gambling mechanics in everyday games – loot boxes, mystery rewards, gacha pulls. Most have no framework for understanding what these mechanics are doing to their brains.

Try: “Have you ever spent money in a game to get a surprise item? Did you know that is a form of gambling?”

Adolescents (Ages 14-17)

Share the science and make it personal.

Their brains are more vulnerable to addiction right now than they will be in adulthood. This is not a character flaw – it’s a developmental reality. Ask what they see with their peers. Listen more than you talk.

Try: “Did you know your developing brain is more vulnerable to addiction right now than it will be when you’re 30? It’s not about willpower – it’s biology.”

Young Adults (Ages 18-26)

Shift from authority to availability.

Discussion and agreements work better than rules. The goal is to make sure your young adult knows you are a safe person to come to if things go wrong – or to talk things out. Even when you’re worried, it’s important not to make them feel worse about something they likely already feel ashamed of.

Try: “I’ve noticed some things and I’m concerned about you. I want to understand what’s going on.”

Seek professional support if your child:

- Is trying to cut back or stop and cannot
- Gambles to escape stress, anxiety, or a bad mood
- Has lied or become secretive
- Has experienced real consequences related to money, friendships, grades or work
- Has expressed hopelessness, shame, or despair

Look for a clinician who is experienced working with adolescents/young adults. A thorough assessment looks at severity, function, and co-occurring issues such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, substance use.

Support is Available – And Help helps.



Suicide & Crisis Support	988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline	Call or text 988. Available 24/7/365
Regional Problem Gambling Support	Mid-Hudson Problem Gambling Resource Center	Call or text: 914-215-6440 Visit: nyproblemgamblinghelp.org/mid-hudson Free services in Westchester & the region
National Problem Gambling Support	National Council on Problem Gambling	Call 1-800-522-4700
Financial Counseling	GamFin Website	Visit: gamfin.org Education and counseling resources for families in financial distress due to problem gambling
School Based Support	School Social Workers & Psychologists, Student Assistance Counselors	School based mental health support and referral resources for students and families. Check with your child’s school.
Westchester County Counseling Support	Student Assistance Services Counseling Center	Call: 914-874-1660 Practice includes clinicians who specialize in youth, addiction
Local Counseling Support	M. Kim O’Connor & Associates	Call: 914-315-9368 Visit: mkimoconnor.com Practice includes clinicians who specialize in youth, addiction