

# ADOLESCENT A Prevention Guide for Parents PROBLEM GAMBLING



# Adolescent Problem Gambling: A Prevention Guide for Parents

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# Introduction

This guide is for parents, guardians or caregivers who may have concerns about gambling behaviour in an adolescent or young adult aged 12 to 24. We will use the term adolescent throughout the guide, but we are also including young adults, aged 18 to 24, in this description. Although this guide is aimed at caregivers, it may also be beneficial for other family members, friends, as well as helping professionals who would like to better understand adolescent problem gambling.

If you are a caregiver and are coping with your own gambling concerns, please see the booklet *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Parents*. If someone close to you gambles too much, consult the booklet *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Families*. If you are a helping professional, the booklet *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Helping Professionals* and the pamphlet *Problem Gambling: Working with Parents* may be invaluable. Additionally, online self-help tools are available for those who gamble, as well as for families and friends. All of these are available without cost at [www.problemgambling.ca](http://www.problemgambling.ca).

This guide has been developed to help you:

- understand adolescent problem gambling
- understand how gambling may affect you and your family
- understand how problem gambling increases the risks of mental health and substance use issues
- find ways to reduce the risks to your child, his or her siblings and you as a parent
- find resources that can help you and your family
- learn how mental health and addiction services can help you and your family.

You may feel a little overwhelmed right now. Gambling may be causing serious financial and family difficulties. You may have noticed changes in your adolescent's mood and behaviour. Your family can learn to better cope with, and even overcome, problems related to gambling. In fact, specially trained

counsellors have helped many people stop or reduce their gambling. People with gambling problems do recover, and their families do heal.

By picking up and reading this guide, you have taken an important first step.

# 1

# Adolescent Gambling

## What is gambling?

Whenever people take the chance of losing money or belongings and when winning or losing is decided mostly by chance, it is considered gambling.

There are many different ways that adolescents gamble, including:

- casino games
- cards
- dice games
- skill games, such as golf or pool
- sports betting
- race betting, including horse racing
- lottery tickets or raffle games, such as keno or tombola
- slot machines
- scratch or pull tab tickets, such as Nevada tickets
- bingo
- mahjong or dominoes
- stock market speculation.

Many adolescents are gambling both offline and online, despite age restrictions. Sports pools are the most common form of online gambling among students in grades 7 to 12 in Ontario (Boak & Hamilton, 2016). Some youth are starting

**Adolescents who gamble are more likely to have mental health and substance use concerns** (Afifi, Nicholson, Martins & Sareen, 2016).

with free online gambling games available through social media sites, such as Facebook (Griffiths & Parke, 2010). This can be risky as it normalizes gambling for youth (Elton-Marshall, Leatherdale & Turner, 2016).

Online gambling includes:

- online sports betting
- Internet poker
- other card games
- virtual casinos
- video games
- simulated gambling on social media sites
- free online gambling simulations.

In Canada, 2.4 per cent of the general population has a gambling problem (Williams, Volberg & Stevens, 2012).

Adolescents are particularly at risk and there are higher rates of problem gambling among adolescents than adults (Ferris & Wynne, 2001).

In Ontario, 24 per cent of Grade 7 students are gambling, and by Grade 12, 41 per cent of students are gambling (Boak & Hamilton, 2016).

In Ontario, 4.7 per cent of high-school students have a gambling problem (Boak & Hamilton, 2016).

Problem gambling is severe for 1.1 per cent of Ontario students in grades 9 to 12, which represents 7,500 students (Boak & Hamilton, 2016).

Males are at higher risk, with rates of gambling that are two to three times higher than the rates for females (Ferris & Wynne, 2001).

## What is problem gambling?

Problem gambling is not just about losing money. It is any gambling behaviour that causes problems for the adolescent and other people in his or her life, such as family and friends (Ferris & Wynne, 2001). Gambling problems can affect one or more areas of an adolescent's life. When the problem is more severe, it may affect many areas of the person's life.

Gambling is a problem when it:

- interferes with school, work or other activities
- causes problems with family or friends
- causes social problems, isolation and/or loneliness
- negatively affects the adolescent's physical and/or mental health (including mood and ability to concentrate)
- contributes to alcohol or other drug misuse
- creates financial problems
- creates safety concerns.

Gambling problems occur along a continuum:



### IS GAMBLING ADDICTIVE FOR ADOLESCENTS?

Problem gambling is an addictive disorder that has similarities to substance use disorders. People with gambling disorder and substance use disorders engage in patterns of behaviour that continue despite the consequences, feel a loss of control and have difficulty cutting down. Both of these disorders cause increases in dopamine levels in the brain, share co-occurring disorders and risk factors and have similar treatment approaches. Gambling can have harmful consequences even for adolescents who are not addicted. Adolescents with more severe gambling behaviours will have more gambling-related problems.

Not all people who gamble excessively are alike, nor are the problems they experience. People with gambling problems are found in all age groups, income groups, cultures and jobs. Some people develop gambling problems suddenly; others develop problems over many years. There are many reasons why a gambling problem may occur. Some people begin gambling excessively when they try to win back money they have lost or when they are coping with different life stressors. Others may gamble because they like to be “in the action.”

## Why can't people with problem gambling behaviours stop?

Most people with gambling problems slowly lose track of how much time and money they spend gambling. They have a pre-occupation with gambling that sometimes results in neglecting responsibilities such as school, work or relationships with friends and family. Some people who gamble excessively do not connect their life problems to their gambling behaviours.

Most people who gamble excessively have mixed feelings about gambling. They know that they are causing problems for themselves and the people they love. They may feel anxious, depressed, angry or ashamed. The urge to gamble is very strong though, and individuals with gambling problems may have difficulty stopping or putting greater limits on their gambling. Some feel irritable and upset when they try to make changes.

Some people with gambling problems fear their family or friends will realize that they have a problem. They also carry a lot of shame and may know from past experiences that their gambling causes conflict. They often feel that they have to lie about their gambling, which can sometimes result in a lot of debt. Some individuals with gambling problems continue gambling with the hope that a big win will pay off their debt.

Adolescence is a developmental stage with a lot of pushing and pulling. Adolescents may be more distant and may want to spend a lot of time outside of the house or with friends. Additionally, the adolescent brain is still under development. The frontal lobes, which are responsible for thinking and planning, continue to develop until age 25. This means that adolescents react based on feelings over thoughts, which often results in impulsive decisions. This normal developmental process, paired with worry, shame and secrecy about gambling behaviour, can make it particularly difficult for families to recognize signs and symptoms of problem gambling.

**Problem gambling has been called the hidden addiction because early signs are often not recognized** (Bond et al., 2016).

**Nena is worried about her 16-year-old son Asha. She noticed that he has been acting different lately. He has been quiet, spending a lot of time in his room and getting angry when she tries to limit the time he spends on the computer. Asha's grades have dropped, and recently, he stole Nena's credit card to buy video games and accessories for his computer. When Nena heard Asha telling his brother that he bet on a sports pool and lost \$350, she realized that there were a few signs that indicated he may have a gambling problem.**



## 2

# Consequences of Problem Gambling

Problem gambling can hurt both individuals and the people around them. In fact, for each person with a gambling problem, between eight and 10 other people are directly affected in some way.

Problem gambling can have many consequences for the person with a gambling problem and his or her family, including:

- financial problems
- legal problems, including stealing
- lying
- school issues, such as behaviour, attendance, academics and social concerns
- mood swings or irritability
- mental and physical health concerns
- substance use problems
- excessive use of technology, including a computer, phone or video game system
- parenting difficulties, such as disagreements between parents on how to deal with the gambling problem
- arguments between family members
- physical, verbal and emotional abuse between family members
- discomfort talking about the gambling problem with other family members or friends
- loneliness and isolation.

If you are experiencing any of these issues, you are not alone. Counselling or other professional services can help adolescents and families cope with these difficulties. Addressing the issues early helps reduce the harm and additional risks.

# 3

## Misconceptions about Gambling

Many people who gamble have mistaken beliefs about how much they can control the outcome and the negative effects of gambling. The following misconceptions are common among people who have difficulty with gambling (Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario, n.d.):

**Illusion of control:** Many people who gamble believe they can influence the outcome of random events through their skills and abilities.

**Gambler's fallacy:** Many people who gamble believe that a positive outcome is related to something that happened before it, even in games of independent random chance, such as thinking that red will follow a long string of black in roulette even though these two events are totally unrelated. This results in the person believing that he or she is due for a win.

**Economic perception of gambling:** Many people who gamble will often believe that gambling is a good way to make money despite the reality that, over time, people will lose more money than they win.

**Superstitious thinking:** Many people who gamble perceive a causal relationship between unrelated events, such as wearing a specific team's t-shirt to ensure they will win the Superbowl.

**Many forms of gambling use psychological strategies, such as varying the timing of winning to keep people playing and creating excitement with sounds and lights. Gambling manipulates people to keep playing by creating an engaging challenge and providing psychological rewards.**

Prevention and intervention efforts often focus on raising awareness about how games work and what the odds are of winning.

## Social attitudes that influence adolescent gambling

### MARKETING AND ADVERTISEMENTS

Canadian children regularly see advertisements for gambling. In fact, 61 per cent of young people report they have had gambling advertisements sent directly to their e-mail as spam and 96 per cent have seen gambling advertisements on television. These advertisements encourage problematic thinking about gambling, claiming that winning is easy, that it happens often and that you can become wealthy (Derevensky, Sklar, Gupta & Messerlian, 2010).

### PROBLEMATIC THINKING AMONG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

The messages delivered through marketing and advertisements influence a large percentage of youth to gamble and are particularly problematic for youth who are already having difficulties with gambling behaviour (Derevensky et al., 2010).

### PERCEPTIONS AMONG PARENTS

The attitudes and behaviours of parents and caregivers toward gambling have a significant impact on the gambling behaviour of adolescents (Shed, Derevensky & Meerkamper, 2011). Research has found that many parents do not think gambling

is a risky or problematic behaviour for their children (Campbell, Derevensky, Meerkamper & Cutajar, 2012). Children are greatly influenced by their biggest role models (their parents) and will observe, and may eventually share, their beliefs and behaviours toward gambling. Some children gamble for the first time with parents, and some parents involve kids in games such as poker, games of skill, sports lotteries and sports pools (Shead et al., 2011).

**One way of preventing problem gambling and reducing its risks is by raising awareness among parents and professionals (Derevensky et al., 2014).**

### PERCEPTIONS AMONG TEACHERS

Many teachers are aware that youth gamble and know that gambling can be addictive and have significant negative consequences. However, many teachers consider gambling a less serious issue than drug use and school violence (Derevensky, St-Pierre, Temcheff & Gupta, 2014). Gambling is sometimes linked with these other issues, but even when it isn't, gambling can be a serious concern for adolescents. However, it is not always seen as such. Teachers who pick up on signs of problem gambling should discuss this with the parents of the adolescent, as well as with the school social worker or other mental health professional.

### PERCEPTIONS AMONG MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Research across Canada has shown that social workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals think problem gambling is the least risky behaviour in adolescents (Dickson & Derevensky, 2006; Temcheff, Derevensky, St-Pierre, Gupta & Martin, 2014). Mental health professionals may not know a lot about problem gambling or about how to work with adolescents who have gambling issues. It is important for mental health professionals to screen and assess for gambling problems, even when this is not the presenting concern.



# 4

## Risk Factors Associated with Adolescent Gambling

There are many risk factors that may make people more likely to develop gambling problems.

Many adolescents with gambling problems are also coping with mental health concerns such as depression or with substance use issues, including alcohol and other drug use.

The following realities, behaviours and experiences increase the risks that an adolescent will develop a gambling problem:

- a parent or other family member with a gambling problem (Dickson, Derevensky & Gupta, 2008)
- several different kinds of gambling behaviours (Afifi et al., 2016)
- drug misuse or abuse (Afifi et al., 2016)
- selling drugs (Cook et al., 2015)
- alcohol misuse or abuse (Edgerton, Melnyk & Roberts, 2015a, 2015b)
- depression and/or anxiety (Chinneck, Mackinnon & Stewart, 2016; Edgerton et al., 2015b)
- mental health concerns and/or a high level of distress (Cook et al., 2015)
- suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviour (Cook et al., 2015)

**Ensuring that you are taking care of yourself can make a difference for your children. Children worry and are affected when either or both parents are not doing well.**

- abuse in childhood (Felsher, Derevensky & Gupta, 2010)
- major negative life events or traumatic experiences (Bergevin, Gupta, Derevensky & Kaufman, 2006)
- theft (Cook et al., 2015)
- excessive video game use (McBride & Derevensky, 2016)
- fighting and violence (Cook et al., 2015)
- impulsivity and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Derevensky, Pratt, Haroon & Gupta, 2007; Edgerton et al., 2015b)
- difficulties with friends and low social support (Edgerton et al., 2015b)
- a sense of not belonging at school (Dickson et al., 2008)
- disconnection from family members (Dickson et al., 2008)
- being male (Edgerton et al., 2015a)
- poor coping skills, such as escaping or avoiding (Bergevin et al., 2006).

### HOW CAN YOU REDUCE THE RISKS OF PROBLEM GAMBLING IN YOUR ADOLESCENT?

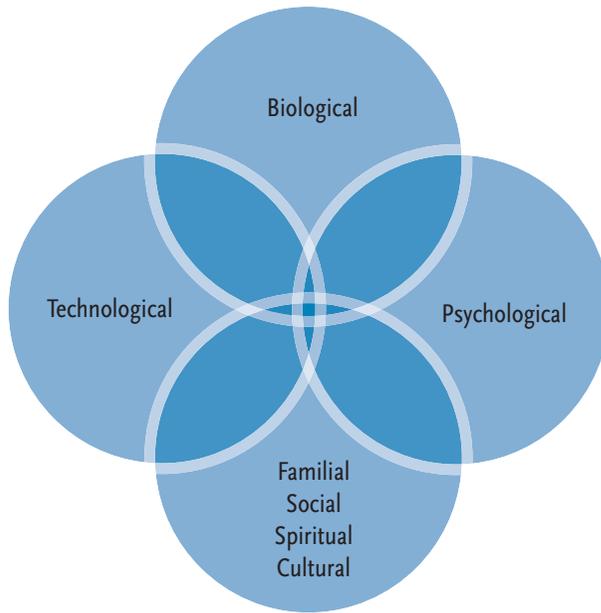
- Talk to your adolescent about the risks of gambling and problem gambling.
- Model appropriate responsible behaviour related to gambling and monitor your adolescent's computer and cellphone use.
- Strengthen important relationships for the adolescent, such as the parent-child relationship, as well as relationships with extended family, friends and other key adults.
- Get help for mental health and substance use concerns, as well as for problem gambling.

# 5

## Understanding Risk and Protective Factors Using the Biopsychosocial+ Model

Many parents want to understand the reasons for their adolescents' problematic gambling behaviours. Finding an exact cause is really difficult because there are many factors that can contribute to adolescent problem gambling. These can be considered **risk factors**, or factors that make an adolescent more vulnerable. There are also many factors that can help reduce the risks and these are considered **protective factors**. The biopsychosocial+ model can help us understand the types of risk and protective factors that can make adolescents more vulnerable or more resilient. The biopsychosocial+ model has different spheres—biological, psychological, social/familial/cultural/spiritual and technological. An adolescent can have risk and protective factors in some or all of these spheres. Each sphere is explained in the next section.

While factors in each of these spheres can contribute to the development of problem gambling, there are also many factors that can help reduce the harm and treat problem gambling.



This model is adapted from the original model created by Engel (1977).

## Biological factors

Some adolescents have a predisposition to develop physical or mental health concerns or addictions when they have immediate or extended family members who have also experienced these concerns. It is important to know that a family history of mental health or addiction problems may increase the risk, but it does not mean an adolescent is guaranteed to develop any issues. There are many protective factors that can reduce the risks, including good coping skills and positive family relationships.

## Psychological factors

There are many psychological factors that increase the risk for problem gambling, such as mental health concerns, substance use concerns, learning difficulties and ADHD. Adolescents with gambling problems may experience various mental

health concerns, including feeling down or depressed, feeling anxious or having thoughts of suicide. A child's temperament can also influence the level of risk or protection from problem behaviours, including gambling.

Good coping skills are important psychological protective factors. Coping refers to a person's understanding of a situation and his or her way of responding to or managing it (Orford, Copello, Velleman & Templeton, 2010). Parents have an important role in teaching their children positive ways of coping with stress. Adolescents and parents can also get help from a professional to improve coping skills.

## Familial/social/spiritual/cultural factors

Parent or caregiver attitudes and behaviours around gambling have a significant impact on the gambling behaviour of adolescents (Shead et al., 2011). Children of parents with problem gambling behaviours are more likely to develop a gambling problem than are children of parents who do not have gambling problems (Kourgiantakis, Stark, Lobo & Tepperman, 2016). In fact, parent problem gambling is the factor that most significantly influences the development of problem gambling behaviours among children and adolescents (Skokauskas & Satkeviciute, 2007; Versini, LeGauffre, Romo, Adès & Gorwood, 2012; Winters, Stinchfield, Botzet & Anderson, 2002). This does not mean that a child who has a parent with a current or past gambling problem will develop a gambling problem. It means the child is at greater risk, and for this reason, it is even more important to increase the protective factors.

Family relationships are a very important protective factor for adolescents. Close relationships or connections with immediate and extended family, as well as connections with cultural, religious and spiritual groups, can all have positive influences on adolescents and be protective factors for problem gambling.

Children who gamble may also be experiencing social difficulties outside of the home. Some children may choose to spend time with people who do not treat them very well, who support the gambling or who engage in risky behaviours such as substance use. Other children will isolate themselves from others to protect themselves and avoid feeling ashamed.

Adolescents who have problems at school may be at greater risk for problem gambling. This can include academic or social difficulties, attendance issues or bullying. Having good relationships with peers, teachers or other school professionals; being involved in extracurricular activities; and having an overall sense of belonging at school can be protective factors.

## Technological factors

In Canada, gambling falls under provincial jurisdiction. In Ontario, the legal age to purchase lottery tickets and enter a casino is 18. Even though gambling is illegal for adolescents under 18, technology has made online gambling more accessible for children and adolescents. Many adolescents and young adults gamble online. Additionally, those who spend a lot of time video gaming have a greater risk for problem gambling (McBride & Derevensky, 2016). In Ontario, 86 per cent of adolescents play video games and 12.5 per cent have a video gaming problem. Furthermore, problem video gaming is more likely among boys than girls (Boak & Hamilton, 2016). The psychological and behavioural aspects of some forms of gambling, such as slot machines or video lottery terminals, are similar to those of video games (McBride & Derevensky, 2016).

One way to reduce the risks of online gambling is to monitor adolescent technology use, establish guidelines around technology use and discuss these guidelines with your adolescent. It is important to understand how the factors in the different spheres influence one another.

Maria is 17 and lives with her mother and 22-year-old sister. Her mother has been coping with bipolar disorder for many years and has also struggled with a gambling problem. Maria started going to bingo with her mother when she was 12. Her mother frequently buys scratch tickets for her, and Maria has been finding this more frustrating because they have had a lot of financial problems. Maria often talks about this with her sister, which is really helpful. She also has a few good friends at school.

### HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT?

- Talk when you are calm, even if that means waiting until the next day.
- Be aware of your own stress level, as this will likely influence how you communicate with your children.
- If you had a moment where you responded very strongly and may have made a harsh comment to your adolescent, go back and talk about it. This helps you reconnect and teaches your child to problem solve and repair relationships.
- Try to use “I” messages such as “I would like,” “I prefer,” “I feel” and “I need” instead of “you” messages such as “You never” or “You always.”
- Make it brief. We lose adolescents’ attention when we talk for too long.
- Talk about only one subject at a time. Don’t bring up past subjects. Stick to the present.
- It’s not just what we say, but how we say it. Pay attention to your nonverbal communication, including tone of voice, facial expression and body language.
- Try to say something positive to your adolescent every day.



# 6

## Reducing the Risks and Consequences of Adolescent Problem Gambling

There are many ways to reduce the risks and consequences of adolescent problem gambling:

1. Adolescents and their families can seek help for problem gambling. For information on problem gambling treatment and services, see chapters 9 and 10. There are also services for parents and families, which can be used even if your adolescent is not ready to stop or get help.
2. Self-care is very important for parents who are coping with an adolescent's problem gambling. Ensuring that you are taking care of yourself is very important for you, the adolescent who is gambling and the other children in the family. It is harder to support your children if you aren't taking care of yourself. The School of Social Work at the University of Buffalo provides students with a lot of information about self-care on its website, which family members may also find useful: <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/introduction-to-self-care.html>

3. Gambling problems can create financial difficulties for adolescents and their families. Access to money is a trigger for gambling behaviour. Limit your adolescent's access to money, including to credit cards. For debts acquired through gambling, involve your adolescent in discussions and make a plan for paying off the debts.
4. It is important to treat or learn to cope with any mental health or substance use concerns. Some problem gambling services will also provide supports for mental health and substance use problems. More information about services is available in chapter 8.
5. If possible, discuss the situation with the other parent and try to find middle ground. Parents do not need to respond in the exact same way to their adolescent, but it is ideal if you both agree on important rules such as computer and phone use and access to money. It is also important for both parents to be involved in professional services if your adolescent needs help with a gambling problem.
6. Couples can be affected when they are coping with a problem in one of their children. Try to find "check-in" time as a couple to reconnect and strengthen your relationship.
7. If you and your child's other parent are separated or divorced, it may be more difficult, but it is important to avoid talking negatively about each other to or in front of your child. As much as possible, try to communicate about your concerns and agree on how to support your child and your family. When this is not possible, know that you can still support your child in your own ways.
8. For stepfamilies, there can be greater challenges and different ways of parenting. The parent should do the parenting/discipline and the stepparent can focus on slowly building relationships with the children. Most children in stepfamilies have experienced a few transitions and may need some time to adjust. They often need reassurance

and appreciate time alone with their parent (Papernow, 2013; Saint-Jacques & Parent, 2015).

9. Do not fight in the presence of children and do not involve children in arguments.
10. Improve communication with your adolescent and with your other children. It is helpful to have more frequent brief chats where children do not feel that they are being lectured. Talking often begins by listening.
11. Talk to your child about gambling facts and myths and explain the consequences associated with problem gambling. This can reduce your child's risk of developing a gambling problem or escalating a current problem.
12. Reduce your child's exposure to gambling and do not involve your child in your own gambling activities, even when they appear harmless.
13. Be aware of how your children are using technology (e.g., computers, smartphones, video games). Excessive gaming and Internet use can be problematic and can put children at greater risk for problem gambling (McBride & Derevensky, 2016).
14. Encourage your adolescent to participate in an extracurricular activity (e.g., sports, art, music). When adolescents are involved in an activity they enjoy, it can boost self-esteem, give a greater sense of belonging, help make friends, improve mood and serve as a positive coping strategy.
15. Teach children good coping skills so they can deal with various situations and emotions more effectively.
16. Try to dedicate a bit of time each week to your adolescent. This time does not have to be spent on an activity that costs money.
17. Many parents and their partners worry about talking about the gambling problem with relatives and friends, but this can make parents feel very isolated. Try to get

**Positive family relationships and being connected at school help protect youth from developing gambling and alcohol or other drug problems** (Derevensky, 2012).

support from other family members and friends. They may be able to listen and offer suggestions or spend time with your children to give you a bit of a break. It may also be helpful for your adolescent to connect with other family members or friends who are supportive.

18. Get support from your child's school. It can be helpful to let the school know if your child is having some difficulties. Gambling problems are still not well understood by many professionals so you may need to provide the school with some information.
19. Seek professional support for your family. There are many professionals who can help you, your children and your family. These services can also address discipline and other parenting issues. See chapters 9 and 10 for information on services for children and families.

**Marco is 19 years old and was diagnosed with ADHD when he was in Grade 3. He is in his first year of university and living away from home. He has some difficulties with organization and is finding it hard to keep up with the work. Since starting university, he has also been feeling lonely. As a result, he has been spending more time playing video games and betting online on sports, and has accrued \$2,500 in debt due to gambling. The gambling helpline he called gave him a list of services, and he decided to get help at the counselling centre at his university. Marco realized that he was gambling to cope with some of the other stressors in his life. He was nervous about his dad finding out, but the therapist offered a family session. This helped them talk about some of these difficulties and helped Marco develop better coping strategies. It also helped his dad understand problem gambling and how to support his son.**

## SAFETY CONCERNS

If you are concerned about your safety or the safety of your children, please get help.

If there is a risk of violence or suicide, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department.

You can also call any of the following helplines:

- Assaulted Women's Helpline: 1 866 863-0511 (24 hours a day, seven days a week and available in 154 languages)
- Ontario Distress Centres: [www.dcontario.org](http://www.dcontario.org) (click "Get Help" on the main page to find the phone number of the Distress Centre in your area)
- Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline: 1 888 230-3505

For more information on getting help, and where to get help, see chapters 8 and 9 of this guide.

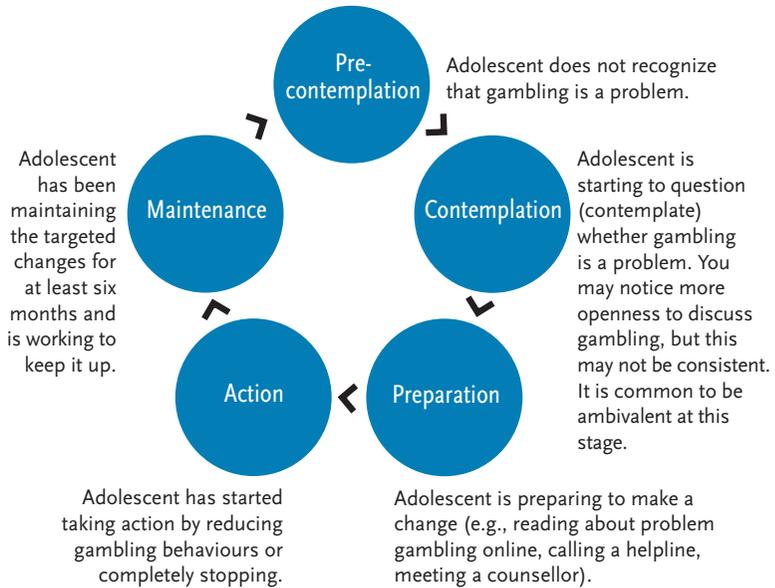


# 7

## How to Support Changes in Your Adolescent's Gambling Behaviour

It can be very frustrating and concerning when your adolescent does not acknowledge that gambling is a problem or admits that there may be a problem and promises to stop or cut down, but does not keep that promise. As you probably know, it is difficult to make someone change their gambling behaviour. However, having a better understanding of the process involved in making behaviour changes can help you support your adolescent in accomplishing his or her goals. The stages of change model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983) is a theory that explains how people with addictions can make changes and recover from substance use or problem gambling. There are several stages a person goes through when trying to make a change. Can you identify the stage of change that your adolescent is at with respect to gambling behaviour?

FIGURE 1. THE STAGES OF CHANGE MODEL



This model was created by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983).

## How to help your adolescent at each stage of change

### PRE-CONTEMPLATION

- This can be a very difficult stage because it may appear that your adolescent denies that there is a problem and blames others for his or her issues.
- The more your adolescent denies that there is a problem, the more it may feel necessary to explain why there is a problem and what your adolescent has done to cause it. Unfortunately, this does not help your adolescent recognize the issue and make changes. It is more helpful to gently explain your concerns without blaming and criticizing (e.g., “I worry about the way things have been and I would like for us to get some help”).

### **CONTEMPLATION**

- This stage can be confusing. One day, your adolescent may express wanting to stop gambling, and the next day may say something very different.
- When your adolescent shows some recognition of the problem, try to have a supportive discussion where you listen in a non-judgmental way.
- You can use statements or questions that encourage change and make your adolescent feel supported, such as “I appreciate you opening up to me” or “How can I help?”

### **PREPARATION**

- At this stage, your adolescent is preparing to make a change and may harbour many emotions.
- Encourage the efforts your adolescent is making and try not to put a lot of pressure on him or her.
- If your adolescent is getting professional services, find out how you can support treatment. Many addiction treatment centres involve families in the process and some offer services specifically for families. Attend any services available for families, because meeting other families coping with similar difficulties can be a source of support. Parents can also learn more about problem gambling and how to support changes and recovery in their adolescents.

### **ACTION**

- Your adolescent has started making changes in gambling behaviour. This can be a reduction in gambling or stopping gambling completely.
- Try to be positive about the efforts your adolescent is making to change.
- Learn about your adolescent's triggers and how he or she copes with the urges to gamble.
- Ask how you can provide support when your adolescent has urges to gamble.

## MAINTENANCE

- Continue supporting your adolescent's changes.
- Try to improve communication and problem solving in the family.

Relapse can happen during any of the stages of change. Try to provide support if there is a slip or relapse, as this will help your adolescent get back on track. Parents often get angry at the level of dishonesty and lying from an adolescent with a gambling problem, but it is important to remember that adolescents with gambling problems carry a lot of shame about their behaviours and worry about their parents' reactions. Let your adolescent know that you would like for him or her to be honest in the case of a slip. Assure your adolescent that you will be supportive no matter what happens.

# 8

## Getting Help

Problem gambling affects everyone in the family in many different ways. Families can access self-help tools online through the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario at [www.problemgambling.ca](http://www.problemgambling.ca). Additionally, many problem gambling treatment centres offer free services for families, which can include individual counselling, family counselling or family support groups. There are also services available through mental health centres, hospitals, schools, community centres and family health clinics.

- **For the adolescent who is experiencing a gambling problem:** Professional help can assist in controlling the problem. See chapter 10 for information about free problem gambling services across Ontario.
- **For the family of an adolescent who is gambling:** Even if the adolescent with the gambling problem is still gambling and not ready to get help, it can be beneficial for you and your other children to get support. When your child is ready to get help, it can be very valuable if you are involved in treatment. The rest of this section explains how you can be involved.

There are many services available for children and families through Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) centres ([www.kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca); see chapter 10). These centres can help you better understand your child and support you in your

parenting role. Many centres offer individual and family counselling, as well as family support groups. Walk-in services are also available and can provide support when you are ready, without having to make an appointment in advance.

Counselling is confidential unless there are safety concerns. Any counsellor you meet should explain these limits to you before counselling begins. His or her role and the services available should also be explained.

## How can professional services help me, my children and my family?

Professional services can support you, your children and your family in various ways. They can help you:

- gain a better understanding of problem gambling and how it affects individuals with gambling concerns and their families
- set a gambling treatment goal (reduce or stop gambling)
- make changes in gambling behaviour
- identify triggers to gambling behaviour
- develop coping strategies to manage triggers and urges to gamble
- improve communication in the family
- improve parenting and discipline
- learn about self-care
- improve relationships and rebuild trust with family members
- set more effective limits or boundaries
- put your finances in order.

# 9

## Where to Find Help

### **Assaulted Women's Helpline**

1 866 863-0511

[www.awhl.org](http://www.awhl.org)

- The Assaulted Women's Helpline offers free crisis counselling, emotional support, information and referrals via telephone and TTY to women in up to 154 languages.
- It is completely anonymous and confidential.
- It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)**

416 535-8501

[www.camh.ca](http://www.camh.ca)

- CAMH is Canada's largest mental health and addiction teaching hospital, as well as one of the world's leading research centres in its field.
- The central facilities are in Toronto, Ontario.
- CAMH combines clinical care, research, education, policy development and health promotion to help transform the lives of people affected by mental health and addiction issues.
- The CAMH website provides information about mental health and addictions, as well as information on how to access services at CAMH.

### **Children's Aid Society (CAS)**

416 987-7725 | 1 800 718-1797

[www.oacas.org](http://www.oacas.org)

- The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has the listings for CAS agencies across Ontario. This includes Catholic CAS, Jewish Family and Child and services for Aboriginal families. If you have concerns about a child's safety, contact your local CAS.

### **Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO)**

1 888 234-7054

[www.kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca)

- The CMHO website provides information on children's mental health and resources for accessing services for children and youth across Ontario.
- Services are free and each centre has trained professionals who can provide support to children and families.
- Some areas have walk-in clinics.

### **Community Information Centres (CIC)**

211

[www.211ontario.ca](http://www.211ontario.ca)

- CICs are not-for-profit groups that gather information on local government services, community services and social services. These include crisis services, shelters and counselling.

### **Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO)**

416 408-4420

[www.cleo.on.ca](http://www.cleo.on.ca)

- CLEO is a community legal clinic that produces clear-language material for people with low incomes. Main topics include social assistance, landlord and tenant law, refugee and immigration law, workers' compensation, women's issues, family law, employment insurance and human rights.

### **Distress Centres (DCs)**

[www.dcontario.org](http://www.dcontario.org)

- DCs offer support and a variety of services to their communities.

- DCS offer a listening ear for people who are lonely, depressed or suicidal, usually 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Many centres also have suicide survivor programs, support services for youth, telephone call-out programs for seniors and vulnerable people and mental health crisis line services.
- The website has a listing of DCS across Ontario.

### **Gamblers Anonymous (GA)**

1 855 2CALL-GA (1 855 222-5542)

[www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)

- GA is available in many communities.
- Based on Alcoholics Anonymous, GA uses a 12-step self-help approach to recovery.

### **Gam-Anon and Gam-Ateen**

1 855 2CALL-GA (1 855 222-5542)

[www.gam-anon.org](http://www.gam-anon.org)

- Gam-Anon is a peer support group available for family members and friends of people with gambling problems. It helps them cope, stop blaming themselves for the gambling problems of others and focus on their own health and well-being.

### **Good2Talk**

1 866 925-5454

[www.good2talk.ca](http://www.good2talk.ca)

- Good2Talk is a free, 24-hour confidential and anonymous telephone support line for postsecondary students in Ontario, with a primary focus on those aged 17 to 25.
- Services are available in English and French.

### **Kids Help Phone**

1 800 668-6868

[www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

- Kids Help Phone is a free, 24-hour telephone support and information line for children and youth.
- Services are available in English and French.

### **Lawyer Referral Services (LRS)**

1 800 268-8326 or 416 947-3330; e-mail [lawrefer@lsuc.on.ca](mailto:lawrefer@lsuc.on.ca)  
[www.lsuc.on.ca](http://www.lsuc.on.ca)

- LRS will give you the names of lawyers in your area, including those who accept payment through Legal Aid, who provide free 30-minute consultations.

### **Legal Aid Ontario**

1 800 668-8258  
[www.legalaid.on.ca](http://www.legalaid.on.ca)

- Legal Aid Ontario can help you pay for legal help if you have a low income. If you qualify, you can get financial help for a variety of legal problems, including criminal matters, family law and immigration and refugee law. You may also be able to get help with some civil cases and final appeals.

### **Ontario Association of Credit Counselling Services (OACCS)**

1 888 746-3328; e-mail [info@oaccs.ca](mailto:info@oaccs.ca)  
[www.oaccs.com](http://www.oaccs.com)

- OACCS is a not-for-profit organization that represents a membership network of accredited credit counselling agencies and certified credit counsellors. Its aim is to enhance the personal financial well-being of Canadians through financial literacy, education and industry leadership.
- OACCS establishes and regulates uniform standards of practice, knowledge, skills and ethics for the credit counselling and financial coaching profession.

### **Ontario Drug and Alcohol Helpline**

1 888 565-8603  
[www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca](http://www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca)

- The Drug and Alcohol Helpline provides information about alcohol and other drug addiction services in Ontario.
- It is a free, confidential and anonymous service. You can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- The Ontario Drug and Alcohol Helpline can:
  - provide information about treatment services and supports

- in your community
- listen, offer support and provide strategies to help you meet your goals
- provide basic education about drug and alcohol problems.

### **Ontario Mental Health Helpline**

1 866 531-2600

[www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca](http://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca)

- The Mental Health Helpline provides information about mental health services in Ontario.
- It is a free, confidential and anonymous service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- The Ontario Mental Health Helpline can:
  - provide information about counselling services and supports in your community
  - listen, offer support and provide strategies to help you meet your goals
  - provide basic education about mental illness.

### **Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline (OPGH)**

1 888 230-3505

[www.opgh.on.ca](http://www.opgh.on.ca)

- OPGH provides information about problem gambling services in Ontario. It is a free, confidential and anonymous service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- OPGH can:
  - provide information about counselling services and supports in your community
  - book your first appointment with a treatment provider
  - listen, offer support and provide strategies to help you meet your goals
  - provide basic education about gambling problems.

### **Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario (PGIO) at CAMH**

[www.problemgambling.ca](http://www.problemgambling.ca)

- PGIO serves as a hub resource by offering CAMH's diverse expertise in mental health and addiction.

- PGIO brings clinical professionals and researchers together with communication and knowledge translation experts. The combined knowledge is used to prevent and treat gambling problems in Ontario and around the world.
- The PGIO website has great information about problem gambling, as well as tools for families and for people who gamble.

# 10

## Mental Health Professionals

It is really important for clinicians to screen for gambling problems in order to provide early intervention and reduce the risks and consequences of problem gambling behaviour. Many adolescents or families may be seeking services at children's mental health centres or in other counselling services for other concerns. If you are a parent, let the mental health professional know that you have a concern about problem gambling.

If you are a mental health professional and are not familiar with problem gambling, we suggest using similar screening questions you would use for substance use and mental health concerns. You can also contact the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario for more information about working with adolescents with gambling problems and their families. The Problem Gambling Severity Index is a nine-item questionnaire that is a subscale of the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (Ferris & Wynne, 2001). Although it was developed to screen gambling problems in adults, it has been used in studies with adolescents and young adults (Huang & Boyer, 2007). It is available at [www.problemgambling.ca](http://www.problemgambling.ca). All mental health professionals should ask youth-specific questions about gambling behaviour. It is important to note that many adolescents will say that they are not gambling because they may not consider their activity a form of gambling.



# Problem Gambling Prevention

There are different methods of providing accurate information about gambling to adolescents, such as in-school videos, websites (Giroux et al., 2012) or interventions that use a number of mediums including videos, presentations, discussions and activities that demonstrate random events (e.g., coins, dice, card decks) (Donati, Primi & Chiesi, 2014). Prevention activities can teach children and adolescents about gambling and clarify misconceptions. For example, they can teach children about the rules of probabilities, help children understand that most gambling activities are based solely on chance and change false beliefs that children may have about gambling (Derevensky, Gupta & Baboushkin, 2007). Prevention programs can also include interventions. They can teach children to cope, solve problems and make good decisions (Versini et al., 2012). Prevention programs should start early and include other concerns associated with problem gambling, such as mental health and substance use concerns (Ferland et al., 2009).

## Three types of prevention: Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention

**Preventing problem gambling behaviour will also reduce the risks of developing other mental health and substance use concerns.**

**Primary prevention:** This type of prevention is for all adolescents and focuses on preventing problem gambling before it begins. It capitalizes on protective factors known to reduce the likelihood that gambling behaviour will become problematic, such as increased positive connection with school and family.

**Secondary prevention:** This type of prevention targets adolescents who may have higher risks, such as those who have a parent with a gambling problem. This form of prevention tries to identify, assess and provide rapid interventions to adolescents to prevent problem gambling from developing. These prevention strategies teach how to problem solve, cope and engage in healthier activities. If you are concerned about your own gambling behaviour and how it might be affecting your children, speak to a counsellor in problem gambling services or read PGIO's *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Parents*.

**Tertiary prevention:** These prevention programs are geared at helping adolescents and their families when there is already a gambling problem. Tertiary prevention strategies should involve both the adolescent and the family.

# Useful Websites

## **Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)**

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

## **Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO)**

[www.kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca)

This website provides detailed information on children's mental health.

## **Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)**

[www.greo.ca](http://www.greo.ca)

GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. It supports evidence-based decision making in the development and implementation of responsible gambling policies, standards and practices.

## **GamBlock**

[www.gamblock.com](http://www.gamblock.com)

GamBlock blocks access to Internet gambling sites. It helps people with gambling problems avoid the dangers of online gambling (US\$89.95).

**International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviours**

[www.youthgambling.com](http://www.youthgambling.com)

**Kids Help Phone**

[www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca) or [www.jeunessejeecoute.ca](http://www.jeunessejeecoute.ca)

1 800 668-6868

Kids Help Phone offers free and anonymous counselling, information and support services 24/7 for children and adolescents.

**Mood Disorders Society of Canada**

[www.mooddisorderscanada.ca](http://www.mooddisorderscanada.ca)

**National Center for Responsible Gambling (NCRG)**

[www.ncrg.org](http://www.ncrg.org)

**PlaySmart**

[www.playsmart.ca](http://www.playsmart.ca)

This website, sponsored by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, provides information about gambling in Ontario.

**Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario (PGIO)**

[www.problemgambling.ca](http://www.problemgambling.ca)

This website is a multimedia, bilingual website that provides online collaboration opportunities, screening tools, training and resources for professionals, people who experience gambling problems and their family members.

**Responsible Gambling Council (RGC)**

[www.responsiblegambling.org](http://www.responsiblegambling.org)

RGC helps individuals and communities address gambling in a healthy and responsible way, with an emphasis on preventing gambling-related problems.

**Youth Gambling Awareness Program (YGAP)**

[www.youthbet.com](http://www.youthbet.com)

YGAP is a free service that offers educational prevention programs designed to raise youth awareness about gambling, healthy/active living and making informed decisions.



# Suggested Reading

Kourgiantakis, T. & Stark, S. (2015). *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Parents*. Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Kourgiantakis, T. & Stark, S. (2015). *Problem Gambling: Working with Parents*. Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

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Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario. (2008). *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Financial Counsellors*. Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario. (2008). *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Helping Professionals*. Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

These booklets are free and available at:  
[www.problemgambling.ca](http://www.problemgambling.ca).

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**Problem Gambling**  
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Copies of this resource and others are available  
for download at [www.ProblemGambling.ca](http://www.ProblemGambling.ca).

**Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline**

**1 888 230-3505**