What to Do if You Think Your Child is Gambling

Many people only associate gambling with adults, but it is unfortunately becoming an increasing problem among children as well. The Responsible Gaming Council of Ontario reports that over 65 per cent of Canadian youth participate in some form of gambling. Of this number, around 4 to 8 per cent are likely to become addicted. Furthermore, many teen gamblers are more likely to slip into other addictions, such as alcoholism.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

Recognize that most teens who become problem gamblers are seeking to escape other pressures and may be lonely, depressed, bored and lacking self-esteem. They may also feel peer pressure to gamble, or enjoy the attention that winning brings them.

Possible Warning Signs

- Do your child's friends gamble or do they argue about gaming?
- Is your child moody, distracted or withdrawing from the family?
- Does your child receive unusual or anonymous phone calls?
- Is your child showing a sudden and unusual interest in sports or in a particular sports team?
- Has your child been skipping school or other important events?
- Has your child missed an important event to gamble?
- Is gambling your child's favourite hobby?
- Does your child crave being the centre of attention?
- Does your child frequently ask to borrow money or do you suspect stealing?

Teens who enjoy gambling may not generally be "problem kids." They may seem to be motivated, intelligent young people. They are also often successful in school, prone to perfectionism, competitive and easily bored in social settings.

How You Can Help

- Examine your own attitudes and behaviours regarding gambling. Recognize that the behaviours you model will have more influence than anything you say.
- Understand that most children's gambling starts at home with card games, lottery tickets, etc.
- Learn the facts about problem gambling and talk to your children about the risks.
- Talk to school authorities and other parents. Discuss ways to make children more informed about the risks. Consider guest speakers at school or special "information days".
- Make your child's friends welcome in your home—it's easier to be alert for trouble when it's being planned under your own roof.
- Be alert for warning signs.
- Keep communication lines open and initiate supportive, non-judgmental conversations that make it easier for your child to discuss issues with you.

Gambling attracts young people from all types of families, income levels, ethnic groups and religious affiliations. If you suspect that your child is involved, it is important to understand that this does not make you a bad parent or your child a bad kid. It does mean that you should seek out resources to support you both.