

Who Gambles and Why 1 of 2

Gambling is playing a game of chance. It is betting money or some other valuable on the outcome of a game, contest, or other event. There are many different forms of gambling, from betting on horses at the track to playing bingo at the community center. Most adults who gamble are social gamblers. This means their gambling typically occurs with friends or colleagues and lasts for a limited period of time, with predetermined, acceptable losses. (For example, friends who get together to play cards once a month for minor amounts of money.) Social gambling has little or no adverse effects on one's personal, family, or vocational pursuits. However, many people begin to lose control of their gambling and may become either problem or pathological gamblers.

Problem or Pathological Gambling

The following behaviors are used to diagnose problem or pathological gambling. When fewer than five of these behaviors are present, the diagnosis is problem gambling. If five or more of the behaviors are present, the diagnosis is pathological gambling. A problem or pathological gambler:

- Is preoccupied with gambling (e.g., preoccupied with reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping or planning the next venture, or thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble)
- Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement
- Has repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling
- Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling
- Gambles as a way for escaping from problems or of relieving a bad mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)
- After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even ("chasing" one's losses)
- Lies to family members, therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling
- Has committed illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft, or embezzlement to finance gambling
- Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling
- Relies on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling

While many forms of gambling are lawful for adults, minors should be strongly discouraged from taking part in any gambling behavior.

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Youth Gambling: Who Gambles and Why

There is growing concern about youth gambling in this country. Adolescents are at particular risk of developing problems with gambling, leading to behavior that disrupts their family, friendships, and school performance. According to several studies summarized in Youth Gambling International, gambling is the most popular high-risk activity among teenagers. Between 4 and 6 percent of teens may be considered probable pathological gamblers and an additional 10 to 15 percent are considered at-risk of developing a gambling problem. In 1999, the National Gambling Impact Commission Study indicated that 7.9 million American adults were problem or pathological gamblers.

According to research, money is not the main reason that adolescents gamble. They gamble:

- To relax
- To make quick/easy money
- To gain attention
- Because it's fun, exciting, entertaining
- Because they thrive on adventure
- Because friends or family members gamble
- To avoid negative feelings, escape life's problems

Gambling is seen as a gateway behavior, leading to other youth behavior problems such as alcohol and drug use, delinquency, and home and school problems. In addition, those who begin gambling before the age of nineteen are more likely to become adults with a gambling problem.

Refusal Skills Students can apply the same refusal skills they've learned for avoiding tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and other high-risk behaviors to gambling. These include:

- Say no firmly.
- Make an excuse.
- Give a good reason.
- Suggest an alternative activity.
- Change the subject.
- Blame an adult.
- Reverse the pressure.
- Get support from a like-minded friend.
- Use humor.
- Walk away.

In many cases, the best option is to avoid gambling situations entirely. Students can avoid people they know take part in gambling activities, avoid parties where gambling is likely to occur, and spend time with friends who share their values.