



One minute guide

Gambling and young people

No. 204, May 2022

What is gambling?

The act of [gambling is defined](#) as 'to stake or risk money or anything of value on the outcome of something involving chance'.

Most types of gambling—for example gaming centres, betting shops, bingo halls, casinos, racetracks, online gambling sites and the buying of National Lottery tickets and scratchcards—have age limits and so should not be accessible to young people. Some other forms of gambling such as machines in arcades, category B fruit machines and gambling-type activities within online games such as FIFA and Fortnite are not regulated.

Why can gambling be a problem?

Half of the UK population gamble and most view it as a social or entertainment activity that does not cause serious harm. However, there is growing evidence that frequent gamblers are at a higher risk of experiencing financial and/ or mental health problems.

Signs that a person may be affected by harmful gambling could include chasing losses, overspending, lying and difficulty concentrating on other things. Harmful gambling will often lead to debt, anxiety, depression, relationship breakdown and occasionally to committing crimes to fund gambling. The difficulties experienced as a result of gambling may lead to suicidal thoughts, and [research has shown](#) that suicide incidence among those with gambling disorder is significantly higher than among the general population.

How prevalent is gambling amongst young people?

The annual [Leeds My Health My School survey](#) asks young people specific questions about gambling. In response to the 2019-20 survey, 26% of school-aged young people said they had taken part in gambling activity, which was higher than the proportion who had smoked or taken drugs but lower than those who had drunk alcohol. For the post-16 respondents to the survey, the proportion rose to 33%.

There are some known factors which increase the risk of young people developing harmful gambling behaviours, including:

- Parental gambling and early exposure to gambling;
- Being male (possibly linked to the proliferation of gambling opportunities and advertising in relation to sports such as football);
- Existing mental health difficulties;
- Tendencies towards, or preferences for, risk-taking behaviours;
- Coping strategies—the way in which people deal with life circumstances, where gambling can represent an escape;
- [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background](#); gambling participation tends to be lower amongst these groups, but when people do gamble they are at higher risk of experiencing harm as a result.

For young people, the impact of gambling can be significant, including the disruption of peer and family relationships, poor attendance and performance at school, and mental health difficulties. A young person does not have to participate in gambling themselves to be affected by the impact of harmful gambling; [there is also hidden harm caused by others' gambling.](#)

Gambling within online gaming

Many young people enjoy online gaming as fun, sociable and interactive, with opportunities for learning and developing problem-solving skills. However, many online games also offer opportunities for gambling-type activities that can contribute to or exacerbate harmful gambling. Two examples of common types of gambling within online gaming are:

- [Loot boxes](#). These are in-game rewards paid for by credits purchased with real money. A loot box is a virtual treasure chest containing random items that can be used either to enhance progress within the game or to improve status. For example, in football games, a loot box (or ultimate player pack) may contain a world-class player.
- [Skin betting](#). Skin betting is a way of converting the contents of loot boxes ('skins') into chips or credits, which can be used for betting or gambling. There are a number of (illegal) digital goods casinos which allow players to exchange items from loot boxes into virtual chips for casino-style games, or to bet on the outcome of 'battles' between gamers that are live-streamed (e.g. on YouTube or Twitch).

How can practitioners help young people?

Practitioners can help by being aware of the potential for harmful gambling amongst young people, and watching out for possible warning signs, such as pre-occupation, loss of control (e.g. anger, aggression), lying, withdrawal, low mood, anxiety, chasing losses, risking relationships and criminal activity such as stealing to fund gambling.

If you are concerned that a young person you are working with may be at risk of harmful gambling, it is important to start a conversation with them, perhaps by asking whether they are worried about their gambling or the gambling of someone close to them. This can be a good way to explore with the young person the impact that gambling is having on their finances, relationships, development and wellbeing.

If you identify that a young person you are working with does have concerns about their gambling or that of someone close to them, the information in the following box may help.

Key contacts and further information

There is a page on [gambling](#) in the young person's section of the Leeds MindMate website, which includes links to national resources such as [Big Deal](#).

GamCare operates a Young People's Support Service for anyone aged 18 and under in the UK who is either at risk of or experiencing harm due to gambling; either their own or other people's. Support available includes information, advice and guidance via their national helpline (0808 80 20 133), brief and more structured interventions and a range of self-help tools. More details and a referral form are available from the [GamCare website](#) and they can be contacted via YoungPeopleService@gamcare.org.uk.

Leeds Community Gambling Service (part of GamCare) was established in partnership between the NHS Northern Gambling Service and Leeds City Council. The service offers a range of support, including services for both young people and adults, community outreach, treatment, and training for practitioners and services. You can contact them on 0113 388 6466 or via leedscommunitygamblingservice@gamcare.org.uk.

There are several downloadable resources available for both practitioners and parents, including from the [PHSE Association](#), [YGAM Parent Hub](#), [ParentZone](#) and [Know the Stakes](#) (ParentZone and Gamble Aware).