

BIG MONEY, BIG PROBLEMS

Risks and Reasons

So, with so much at stake, why do teens gamble?

- To get easy money or win quick cash and digital rewards
- To cope with, overcome, or escape problems like boredom, loneliness, or anxiety
- Peer pressure, trying to impress others, or wanting to be the center of attention
- To make friends, fit in with a crowd, or add excitement to sports and gaming
- Initial early success, which tricks many kids into getting hooked before realizing the trap

The consequences **WILL** catch up to you!

Here are some of the major risks involved:

- Severe financial debt, loss of income, and strain on family trust
- Damaged relationships and loss of close friends
- Falling behind or failing in school, or getting kicked off your athletic team
- Feelings of isolation, intense guilt, depression, and overwhelming stress
- Arrests or legal trouble for crimes related to gambling (like stealing or fraud)
- Significantly increased risk of self-harm or suicidal thoughts



OUT OF CONTROL

Getting Help

If gambling is affecting your life or someone you know, reach out to a parent, counselor, or professional immediately.

Help is free, confidential, and available 24/7:

- National Problem Gambling Helpline:
Call or Text 1-800-GAMBLER (1-800-426-2537)
or chat at ncpgambling.org/chat
- Gamblers Anonymous: gamblersanonymous.org
- Gam-Anon (Support for Families): gam-anon.org

YOUTH GAMBLING



Printed on 30% Post-Consumer Recycled Paper

STAY SAFE SERIES

© 2026 PRIMO PREVENTION, LLC • PO Box 371 • Reserve, LA 70084
985-359-7848 • www.primoprevention.com • PAM-SSMH-05

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

GAMBLING

So What is it Anyway?

You and your friends are playing a game of basketball or hanging out playing video games. Everyone is having a blast when someone says, "Let's make things interesting," and suggests that everyone put up \$5 or bet digital items on the winner. It seems harmless enough, so you decide to join in—it's just a friendly wager, right? It's not really gambling, is it?



The answer is YES! Gambling is when someone takes a risk with something of value (usually money, skins, or items) on an event or activity in which the outcome is uncertain. The primary intent of gambling is to win additional money or items. No matter how small the wager or what form it takes, it's still a risk, and it's still gambling.

PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING

Can't Fight the Urge

Problem gambling occurs when an individual cannot control the impulse to gamble, leading to personal, legal, and financial difficulties. Studies indicate that young people develop gambling-related problems at higher rates than adults due to ongoing brain development.

Warning Signs of Problem Gambling:

- Stealing or lying to get money for betting
- Gambling to escape sadness, anxiety, or stress
- "Chasing losses" (gambling more to try to win back lost money)
- Spending excessive time thinking about betting or gaming mechanics
- Unexplained drop in school grades or sports performance

DISTORTED THINKING

"I Don't Have a Problem"

Youth struggling with gambling often use common rationalizations:

- "I have a system to beat the odds."
- "I'm just one win away from getting all my money back."
- "Sports betting apps are just games, not real gambling."



GAMBLING YOUR FRIENDS AND YOU

Know the Signs

You're not sure, but you think one of your friends might have a problem with gambling. Here are key warning signs to look out for to determine if a friend needs help:

- Unexplained absences from school, dropping grades, or skipping sports practices
- Constantly asking to borrow money or owing unexplained debts
- Frequently checking sports betting apps, odds, or online gaming bets on their phone
- Stealing money or valuables from family or friends
- Skipping meals or using lunch money to place wagers instead of buying food
- Lying to people about where they go or how much money they have
- Using gambling as a way to escape worries, frustrations, or disappointments

WHAT CAN HAPPEN?

Stephen's Story

Stephen was a normal 15-year-old kid. He loved playing video games, hanging out with his friends, and was a pretty good soccer player. The summer of his sophomore year in high school, Stephen went to his friend John's house to play a new video game that John had received for his birthday. A few of his other friends were already there when he arrived. After a while of competing with each other, John suggested that they each put up five dollars, and the one with the highest score would win the pot. They all decided that would be fun. After hours of playing, Stephen was the winner. The high he got from winning was awesome!

By the time he reached his senior year in high school, Stephen's gambling problem was out of control. He was now the star player on his soccer team, and they were very good. He bet one of his friends from another school that they would win their upcoming game. Somehow, the principal found out about their "friendly wager," and he was kicked off the soccer team and suspended from school.

That wake-up call finally forced Stephen to realize how much gambling was taking away from his life. He sat down with his parents, admitted he had a problem, and called a helpline to get professional counseling. It wasn't easy rebuilding his family's trust and working off his debts, but through hard work, support groups, and therapy, Stephen turned his life around. Today, at 28, Stephen is fully recovered, debt-free, and coaches youth soccer, sharing his story to help other young people avoid the same trap.

