Tips for Having an Age-Appropriate "Gambling Talk"

High School Age

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Most parents are worried about their children and teens gambling before they're old enough, but only half of parents with school-age kids (51%) have had "The Gambling Talk" with them. This document provides tips on how to have an age-appropriate conversation about gambling and expectations. It includes guidance on language, tone, and how to convey the risks of underage gambling while facilitating open communication between parents and teens.

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1. **Ask open-ended questions**
   Start conversations with curiosity rather than confrontation. Ask questions that encourage your teen to share what they know, think and have experienced with gambling. Listen without jumping to conclusions, and use their responses to guide the conversation.
   a. "How do you think about gambling? Why do you think it's become so popular?"
   b. "What are your friends saying about sports betting? Is it something people at school talk about?"
   c. "Have you been tempted to place a bet? What made it seem appealing?"
   d. "If you've gambled before, what interested you about it? Was it the chance to win money, the excitement or something else?"
   e. "Have you ever gambled and lost money on a bet? How did that make you feel?"

2. **Acknowledge the appeal of gambling while setting clear expectations**
   Recognize that gambling can seem exciting or appealing to teens, especially when it's promoted through sports, social media and online platforms. Acknowledging that appeal can help build trust and encourage

honest conversations. At the same time, make it clear that gambling carries real risks and is not an acceptable activity for minors.

a. "I understand how betting might seem like part of watching sports, especially when you see it advertised everywhere. But you don't need to gamble to enjoy the game, and betting isn't something you're allowed to do at your age."
b. "I know your friends are using apps to gamble, and maybe their parents are even okay with it, but that doesn't make it safe or appropriate. Our rule is that you don't gamble, even if other parents allow it."
c. "It might seem like everyone your age is betting on things right now, and it's valid to feel that way. But not everyone is gambling, and you don't have to participate just because others are."

3. **Explain the long-term risks of underage gambling and addiction**
   Remind them that high school is a period when their bodies and brains are still growing, and will continue doing so into their 20's. Explain that gambling during adolescence can be especially risky and that starting young increases the likelihood of developing gambling problems later in life. Help them understand what those problems can look like, both now and in adulthood.
   a. "Did you know that gambling can become addictive, just like alcohol or drugs? Some people find it difficult to stop gambling, even when it's causing problems in their lives."
   b. "The younger someone starts gambling, the greater their risk of developing gambling problems later in life. Those problems can affect their finances, relationships, education and even their career."
   c. “People struggling with gambling may experience depression, anxiety or even thoughts of suicide. That's why it's important to recognize the risks and ask for help early.”
   d. If you have a family history of gambling addiction, substance abuse, alcoholism, or another addiction, ensure they understand it can place them at a higher risk of gambling problems even as an adult.

4. **Review social media and advertising tactics**

Help your teen recognize how gambling advertising and social media content can make betting seem exciting, easy or risk-free. Explain that promotions often emphasize winning while leaving out the likelihood of losing money and other potential consequences.

a. Talk about gambling advertisements or activities they may be encountering online, like sports betting promotions, influencer posts, or livestreams. Ask what messages they're seeing and how those messages make gambling appear.
b. If your teen is seeing advertising offering "free bets" or positioning gambling as a way to make money, ask, "Why do you think they're offering that? What do you think they want you to do next?" Explain that these promotions often come with conditions and are designed to encourage gambling.
c. Discuss how social media can create a misleading picture of gambling. For example, "If an influencer only posts videos of winning bets, what do you think they're leaving out? How might that affect someone watching?"

5. **Check in on peer pressure**

Talk to your teen about the pressure to fit in, especially when gambling seems common among friends. Remind them that they never have to gamble just because others are doing it, and help them feel confident saying no.

a. Practice hypothetical situations such as friends asking them to bet on a game, join a betting pool or place a wager through someone else's account. Practice simple, confident responses like "No, I'm good" or "I'll just watch the game."
b. Remind them that it's always okay to say no, even to a close friend, and that good friends won't pressure them.
c. Encourage your teen to talk to you if they're feeling pressured to gamble.

6. **Encourage ongoing, open communication – not lectures**

Keep conversations about gambling open and ongoing rather than trying to cover everything at once.
Continue to ask questions and check in as your conversations progress, especially if your teen encounters something that feels confusing or scary to them.

a. Make the conversation a two-way exchange. Ask what your teen thinks about gambling, listen to their perspective and avoid turning every discussion into a warning or lecture.
b. The more you lecture your teen, the more they can learn to tune it out. Keeping them an active participant in the conversation allows them to feel like part of the "team."
c. If they admit they've encountered gambling, or have gambled themselves, keep your response neutral and curious. Reacting with anger or consequences may make them less likely to be honest with you in the future.
d. Let them know they can always come to you or a trusted adult with questions or concerns, whether they're worried about their own gambling or someone else's.
e. Make sure you're a resource, not a punishment. The more comfortable your teen is, the more they'll tell you about what they're experiencing.
f. Be clear about your expectations around underage gambling while reassuring your teen that asking for help won't lead to judgment. Your goal is to keep them safe and help them make informed decisions.

7. **Avoid scare tactics and ultimatums**

When talking about the risks of underage gambling, stay grounded and realistic. Don't jump to worst-case scenarios, exaggerate the consequences or rely on fear to make your point. Avoid adding in ultimatums ("If you gamble, you're getting kicked out of my house") or you risk closing your line of communication.

a. Use realistic examples of gambling-related harm rather than focusing on extreme outcomes or frightening stories, particularly those

involving family members. Centering extreme examples of harm has been proven to be ineffective in mitigating risky behavior.

b. Creating "ultimatums" such as strict rules or consequences can backfire and put distance between you and your teen. Set reasonable expectations and limits, such as screen time or parental controls, and make sure your teen understands why these protections are in place.

8. **Always know where to get help – and make sure your teen knows they can ask you for it at any time**
   Make sure your teen knows they can come to you for help if they have questions or concerns about gambling, whether it's their own behavior or someone else's. If you discover your teen is gambling, respond calmly, take their concerns seriously and seek support when needed. You don't have to navigate the situation alone.

   Visit TooYoungToBet.org for information, guidance and resources to help protect your teen from gambling-related harm.

Help for Problem Gambling

If you or someone you know may have a gambling problem, contact the National Problem Gambling Helpline™ that offers hope and help without stigma or shame. Call or text 1-800-MY-RESET or visit http://www.1800myreset.org. Free and confidential help is available 24/7.