

RAISING SMART RISK-TAKERS:

A Parent's Guide to Preventing Youth Gambling



Tips, tools, and real-talk to help your child make safe, empowered choices.

Welcome, Parents!

Raising children today means navigating a fast-changing world—and one of the growing challenges is youth gambling. With digital platforms, mobile apps, and in-game purchases making betting more accessible than ever, it's more important than ever for parents and caregivers to stay informed, connected, and proactive. Why this matters: early exposure to gambling—even when it seems like harmless fun—can shape how your child thinks about risk, money, and control. Over time, it can lead to gambling problems and affect their emotional wellbeing, school performance, relationships, and even future work opportunities. By learning about these influences now, you're giving your child the gift of guidance, support and the confidence to make choices that protect their future.

This guide is here to support you—parents navigating the ups and downs of raising healthy children with practical, values-driven, heart-centered strategies that strengthen your connection with your child. You'll find tools to help set healthy boundaries, spark meaningful conversations, and build your child's confidence to make safe, empowered choices.

Throughout this guide, the term “child” or “kid” is used inclusively to refer to individuals across a broad development range, including children, youth, and teens. This approach ensures consistency while honoring the unique needs and experiences of each age group. In some instances, we may use more specific terms like “youth” or “teen” when referring to particular age groups or to align with the language used in research, programs or policies.

We'll begin by unpacking what youth gambling looks like today—how it shows up in gaming, social media, and peer culture. Then we'll explore five simple strategies you can use to guide your child toward a bright, healthy future—one grounded in purpose, resilience, and self-belief.



Understanding Youth Gambling

What is Youth Gambling?

Youth gambling refers to any activity where a young person risks something of value—like money, possessions, or digital currency—on a game of chance with the hope of winning something in return. While traditional gambling may bring to mind casinos or lottery tickets, today's youth gambling often shows up in more subtle and digital forms.

Here are common examples:

Betting on games of skill – Wagering on video game outcomes or competitions

Sports betting – Wagers on school games or professional teams are increasingly popular either in person or through apps or websites

Fantasy Sports – Often involves money or prizes and feels like friendly competition

Card games for money – Playing poker or other card games with real winnings

Online casinos – Accessing virtual slot machines, roulette, or other casino-style games

Lottery tickets & Scratch-Offs – Many youth access these through older friends or family members

Trading Card Games – Buying or trading cards in hopes of scoring a rare or valuable one

Dares and Challenges – Risking chores, money, or privileges on a dare is a form of gambling

Video Games & Apps – Features like loot boxes, skins, or in-game currency simulate or mimic gambling in mechanics

Internet Challenges – Online trends sometimes involve betting or risky behavior with rewards

Role-Playing Games – Some in-game betting or gambling-like features

Blind Box Toys (e.g., Labubu Dolls) - Buying collectible toys or figures without knowing what's inside, encouraging repeated purchases

Warning Signs to Watch For

Gambling can be hard to spot—especially when it happens online or through games that seem harmless. Here are some signs that may indicate your child is struggling:

Behavior

What to look for

Constant talk about betting or “winning big”

Frequent mentions of odds, bets, or gambling terms—even casually.

Unexplained spending

Missing money, frequent requests for cash, or unexpected or excessive purchases on in-games/apps.

Mood changes when offline

Irritability or anxiety when they can’t access certain games or features.

Secretive screen use

Quickly closing tabs or avoiding questions about online activity.

Drop in school performance

Missed homework, slipping grades, or loss of interest in hobbies.

Dishonesty about time or money

Inconsistent stories or hiding how they spend their time.

Emotional withdrawal

Increased anxiety, sadness, or signs of depression.

Important note: Just because you notice one or more of these behaviors doesn’t necessarily mean your child is gambling. These are signals that it may be time to check in, open a conversation, and explore what might be going on. Gambling is one of several risk behaviors that can emerge during adolescence—and being aware of it helps you stay one step ahead in supporting your child’s wellbeing.

Why it Matters:

To many teens, gambling might seem harmless—just another way to have fun, compete, or pass the time. But engaging in gambling at a young age can have serious consequences, both now and in the future. That's why it's so important to start the conversation early.

Youth gambling can lead to:

- **Academic struggles:** Time spent gambling or obsessing over wins and losses can distract from schoolwork. It can lower motivation, and impact grades. Over time, this can impact their academic confidence and future opportunities.
- **Emotional struggles:** The emotional highs and lows of gambling can take a serious toll on a young person's mental health. Stress, anxiety, mood swings, and even depression may develop as gambling becomes more frequent or problematic. Some youth may experience intense feelings of shame or isolation, which can lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
- **Substance misuse:** Youth who engage in gambling may be at greater risk of substance misuse of alcohol and other drugs.
- **Increased risk of addiction:** Youth are at a higher risk of developing addictions—including gambling—because their brains are still growing and changing. The parts of the brain responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and understanding long-term consequences are not fully developed, making youth more vulnerable to compulsive behaviors. This can increase the risk of long-term dependency and make it harder to stop once a habit forms.
- **Relationship issues:** Gambling can strain a young person's relationships with friends, family members and even teachers.
- **Behavioral problems:** Youth gambling can contribute to increased aggression, irritability, or even physical fights. It may disrupt healthy routines like regular sleep and eating habits.
- **Financial problems:** Even small bets can add up fast. Youth may start by using allowance or lunch money, but as gambling continues, they might borrow from friends, dip into savings, or make risky financial decisions they can't afford. This can lead to debt, broken trust, and long-term money management issues.

What's Next: Your Role, Your Impact

As parents and caregivers, you are the real MVPs when it comes to helping kids navigate life's tricky stuff—like risk, responsibility, and making smart choices. In today's digital world, where online gaming, sports betting, and gambling apps are just a click away, these conversations are more important than ever. It's not just about saying "don't gamble." It's about helping kids recognize the risks, think critically, and build the confidence to make smart decisions.

How this Guide Helps you Get Started:

Conversation starters to break the ice and talk openly about gambling

Practical tips for setting boundaries and monitoring online activity

Resources to help you stay informed and get support if needed

Together, we can help protect our kids from the hidden dangers of youth gambling—and set them up for a safer, healthier future.

Step One: You Got This - Talking it Out Together

Starting the conversation early—and keeping it going—can help protect your child from the risks of gambling. Here are some practical ways to open up the dialogue and stay connected:

- **Keep it casual:** Chat during everyday moments, like while watching TV, driving or playing games together. It doesn't have to be a formal sit-down.
- **Ask open-ended questions:** "Have you ever seen games with loot boxes?" or "What do your friends think about betting on sports?"
- **Be curious, not judgmental:** Create a safe space to listen to their thoughts and experiences without reacting harshly.
- **Explain the risks:** Help them understand how gambling works and why it's risky, and how it can affect their mental health and future.
- **Set clear boundaries:** Talk about your family's values around money, gambling, and online behavior. Be consistent and transparent.
- **Model healthy habits:** Kids learn a lot by watching how adults handle risk, money, and stress—your example matters.

5 Tips as conversation starters:

Tip #1: Dream Big—Then Make a Plan

Why it matters:

- Ever asked your child what lights them up about the future? Maybe it's becoming a vet, launching a YouTube channel, traveling the world, or owning their own business. Helping them dream big and set goals gives them something exciting to work towards—and something worth protecting.

Try this:

- Sit down with your child and kick off a casual chat with: “What’s something you’d love to do in the next 5 or 10 years?” Then talk about the steps to get there. When teens have a vision for their future, they’re more likely to make choices that support it—including saying no to risky behaviors like gambling.

Connect it to real life:

- Tie the conversations to money goals. For example, “If you want to buy a smartphone or car or go to college, how can we start saving now?” This builds financial literacy (money smarts) and shows how gambling could throw those plans off track.

Give them hope:

- Sometimes teens turn to gambling or substances because they feel stuck or hopeless. Remind them that their past doesn’t define their future- and that you believe in their ability to build a life they’re proud of. Your belief in them can be a game-changer.

Build confidence and resilience:

- When teens can picture a future they’re excited about, they feel more in control. That sense of purpose helps them stand strong against peer pressure and make choices that keeps them on track.

Tip #2: Help Kids See Through Media's Influence

Why it matters:

- From flashy ads to video games, media often makes gambling look fun, easy, and glamorous. But when kids understand how these messages are designed to influence them, they're more likely to think twice before buying into the fantasy.

Try this:

- Ask your child: "Have you noticed how often gambling shows up in video games or ads?" Explore together how media creates a fantasy, sells excitement—one that hides the risks and rarely shows the downsides or consequences.

Raise thoughtful kids:

- Teach your child to question what they see. "Who's behind this message? What are they trying to sell or get me to do or feel?" Help them understand that true success, connection, and belonging comes from real-life choices – not gambling.

Encourage responsibility:

- Talk about how their actions—especially online—can influence others. Sharing, liking, or commenting can influence others—positively or negatively. Help them to be thoughtful digital citizens who make safe, smart choices, not just for themselves, but for their friends too.



Tip #3: Share Stories that Shape Values

Why it matters:

- Kids absorb the stories they hear—and the ones they see you live. These stories help them make sense of the world and guide their choices. When you tell honest, thoughtful stories, you're helping build their values from the inside out.

Try this:

- Skip the jokes or casual comments that glamorize gambling or substance use. Instead, share real-life stories—whether from your own experience or others'—that highlight the risks, consequences, and paths to recovery.

Be real, not scary:

- You don't need to exaggerate. Just be honest. Talk about how people can get caught up in gambling, what it can cost them, and how support and change are possible.

Show, don't just tell:

- Have fun with your kids in ways that don't involve gambling. Playing games, exploring nature, cooking, or creating something. Let your actions tell the story: joy, connection, and fun don't come from gambling—they come from being present and fully engaged in the moment – laughing, learning and growing together.



Tip #4: Set Expectations and Boundaries that Builds Confidence

Why it matters:

- Kids may push back on rules, but they crave structure. Clear expectations give them a sense of safety and help them make better choices—even when you're not around.

Try this:

- Set firm but fair boundaries around things like screen time, social events, and spending money. Let them know what's okay and what's not-- and explain why. Boundaries aren't punishments; they're protection.

Give them an “out”:

- Let your kids know they can always use you as an excuse to leave a risky situation. A simple line like, “My parents would be really upset if I stayed,” gives them a face-saving way to exit without pressure or embarrassment. Let them know you're okay being the “bad guy” if it helps them make a safe choice — it's a powerful tool they can keep in their back pocket.

Show you care:

- Encourage them to stay engaged in school, sports, hobbies, with friends, or volunteering. High expectations show you believe in them—and when they make healthy choices, celebrate it! A little praise goes a long way in building their confidence and reinforcing good habits.



Tip #5: Stay Curious--Casually

Why it matters:

- When you show genuine interest in your child's world, you build trust. The more you understand their world, the better you can guide and support them through life's tricky choices.

Try this:

- Ask open-ended questions like, "What's something funny that happened at school today?" or "What do your friends think about gambling in video games?" These questions open the door to deeper discussions—without pressure.

Listen for cues:

- Pay attention to what they're watching, listening to, or sharing online. Media, music, and social posts are great entry points for talking about values, peer pressure, and decision-making.

Make time for connection:

- You don't need hours—even 10 minutes of quality time a day can make a difference. Use everyday moments like car rides, dinner, or bedtime to check in. Even short chats can build closeness and help your child feel seen and supported.

Why Monitoring Matters

Kids today are growing up in a world where the internet is always just a tap away. From games and social media to videos and chat apps, there's a lot to explore—and a lot to be cautious about. While the online world offers amazing opportunities to learn, connect, and have fun, it also comes with risks like exposure to gambling content, inappropriate material, and online pressure.

The good news? You don't need to be a tech expert to help your child stay safe online. What matters most is being present, setting clear boundaries, and keeping the conversation going. On the next page are 8 practical tips to help you guide your child's online habits in a way that supports their safety, confidence, and healthy development.



Stay Ahead: 8 Ways to Protect and Empower Your Child Online

Tip #1: Screens Where You Can See ‘Em

Encourage your child to use phones, tablets, or computers in common areas like the kitchen or living room. This makes it easier to stay involved without feeling like you’re spying.

Tip #2: Make the Rules Together

Work together to create family guidelines for screen time, app use, and online behavior. Be specific about what’s okay—and what’s not—including gambling-related content.

Tip #3: Tech That Has Your Back

Take advantage of built-in device settings or trusted parental control apps to filter content, manage screen time, and monitor downloads or purchases.

Tip #4: Keep the Chat Going

Keep the conversation open and judgment-free about online activity. Ask questions like, “What games are you into lately?” or “Have you seen any ads that ask for money?”

Tip #5 Spot the Signs Early

Look out for signs like secrecy, mood swings, or unexplained spending. These could be clues that your child is encountering risky content online.

Tip #6: Play Detective (In a Fun Way!)

Some games include gambling-like features, such as loot boxes or virtual casinos. Check app ratings and reviews and explore the games together when possible.

Tip #7: Unplug to Reconnect

Support hobbies, sports, and face-to-face time with friends to help your child build a healthy relationship with technology.

Tip #8: Be a Role Model

Your habits matter. Show your child what balanced screen time looks like by practicing it yourself—they’re more likely to follow your example than your rules.

Final Thoughts

You don't have to be an expert to make a difference in your child's life. Just by being present, asking questions, and setting clear expectations, you're already helping them build the confidence and resilience they need to make healthy choices. Keep the conversation going, stay curious, and remember—your influence matters more than you think.

And if your child's gambling is creating challenges, you don't have to face it alone. Support is available—from school counselors, healthcare providers, community organizations and helplines. Reaching out is a powerful step toward protecting your child's wellbeing and helping them get back on track.



Resources

If you or someone you know needs support or more information about youth gambling prevention, here are some helpful resources:

Oregon-Based Services

Oregon Health Authority – Problem Gambling Services offers free prevention, treatment, and recovery services for individuals and families affected by gambling. Oregon uses a public health model to address gambling-related harms. Reach out to PGS.Support@oha.oregon.gov for assistance connecting with programs in your area.

Oregon Problem Gambling Resource (OPGR) – Connects individuals and families to professional counseling and recovery services. Trained specialists are available to listen, guide, and help you take the next step—no judgement, no pressure. Call [1-877-MY-LIMIT \(877-695-4648\)](tel:1-877-MY-LIMIT) or visit www.oprg.org

The Oregon Council on Problem Gambling (OCPG) – A statewide advocacy group that supports efforts to reduce gambling-related harm and provides education and tools to promote healthy choices. Visit <https://oregoncpg.org/learning-center/>

Helpful Resources for Parents and Caregivers

These resources offer tools, tips, and educational materials to support conversations and prevention efforts around youth gambling and other risky behaviors:

Parental Controls as A Barrier Against Underage Gambling – Parental controls make it easier to establish a safe digital environment. Utilizing settings to limit access to gambling sites and other unsuitable content. <https://www.igaming.com/igamingcare/parental-controls/>

Youth Gambling Awareness Program (YGAP) – Educational resources and prevention strategies for youth and parents. www.ymcagta.org/ygap

Talk. They Hear You. (SAMHSA) – Tips and tools for having open conversations with kids about risky behaviors. www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you

New York Council on Problem Gambling – “Talk2Kids” Campaign Videos and conversation starters to help parents talk with their children about gambling. <https://talk2kids.org>

Know Your Neuro – Brain-based prevention education created by Dr. Crystal Collier, offering tools for families and schools to protect youth brain development. www.knowyourneuro.org