



One minute guide

Gambling and young people

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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 forms of gambling, including gaming centres, betting shops, bingo halls, casinos, racetracks, online gambling sites, and the purchase of National Lottery tickets and scratchcards, have age restrictions and should not be accessible to young people. However, certain types of gambling, such as arcade machines, category B fruit machines, and gambling-like features in online games like FIFA and Fortnite, remain unregulated.

Why can gambling be a problem?

Around half of the UK population engages in gambling, with most seeing it as a social or entertainment activity without significant harm. However, increasing evidence suggests that frequent gambling can elevate the risk of financial difficulties and mental health challenges.

Indicators of harmful gambling may include chasing losses, overspending, dishonesty, and difficulty focusing on other aspects of life. It can often result in debt, anxiety, depression, relationship breakdowns, and, in some cases, criminal activity to sustain gambling habits.

The challenges caused by gambling can lead to suicidal thoughts, with [research](#) showing a significantly higher suicide rate among individuals with gambling disorders compared to the general population. Additionally, there is growing concern about the rise of [cryptocurrency](#) and its impact on mental health, particularly among young men.

How prevalent is gambling amongst young people?

The annual [Leeds My Health My School survey](#) asks young people specific questions about gambling. According to the 2023-24 survey, 27.8% of school-aged young people reported participating in gambling activities—a higher percentage than those who had smoked or used drugs, but lower than those who had consumed alcohol. Among post-16 respondents, 28.8% had gambled within the past year.

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 (potentially connected to gambling opportunities and advertising, particularly in sports like 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 find online gaming enjoyable, social, and interactive, offering opportunities for learning and problem-solving. However, many games also include gambling-like features that can increase the risk of harmful gambling. Two common examples 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 staying alert to the risk of harmful gambling among young people and looking for potential warning signs, such as preoccupation, loss of control (e.g. anger or aggression), dishonesty, social withdrawal, low mood, anxiety, chasing losses, damage to relationships, and involvement in criminal activities like 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 initiate a conversation. You could start by asking whether they are worried about their gambling or the gambling of someone close to them. This approach can help open up a discussion about how gambling may be affecting their finances, relationships, development, and overall 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 is a partnership between GamCare, NECA and the NHS Northern Gambling Service with support from Leeds City Council. The service provides integrated Gambling support services to anyone experiencing gambling harms across Leeds and the surrounding area. 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](#), and [ParentZone](#).