Show Me the Real Odds

WHAT DOES YOUTH GAMBLING ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?



Most people don't recognize a gambling problem because it rarely begins with one big warning sign.

Instead, it often shows up through small changes that become easier to see over time.

Maybe a young person who loved watching sports suddenly seems more interested in the odds than the game itself. Maybe they're spending more time on betting apps, becoming more secretive about their phone or money, borrowing cash, or reacting unusually strongly to the outcome of a game. [3]

Individually, these changes may not seem unusual. Together, they can be a sign that gambling is becoming more than entertainment.

Research suggests that boys are more likely to engage in sports betting and strategic forms of gambling, while girls who develop gambling problems are more likely to gamble to cope with stress, loneliness, anxiety, or depression. [2] These are trends, not rules. It helps to stay mindful that any young person can be at risk.

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The most important question isn't, "Do I see one warning sign?" It's "What has changed?" Pay attention to changing patterns and how they may be affecting the young person's schoolwork, friendships, family relationships, finances, and emotional well-being.

Every behavior is communicating something. Approaching the behavior with curiosity can help you understand what the young person may be communicating. A calm, caring conversation can uncover concerns long before a gambling problem becomes a gambling disorder. [1] When young people feel understood instead of judged, they are much more likely to be honest, accept support, and ask for help.

Trust what you've noticed, then lead with curiosity instead of conclusions.

TRY SAYING:

"I've noticed a few changes lately. Help me understand what's been going on."

"What do you enjoy most about sports betting or gaming?"

"What do you think gambling has given you? What has it taken away?"

These conversation starters are intended to invite reflection, create opportunities for insight, and help young people begin recognizing their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The goal is not to diagnose.

A caring conversation today may prevent a much bigger problem tomorrow.

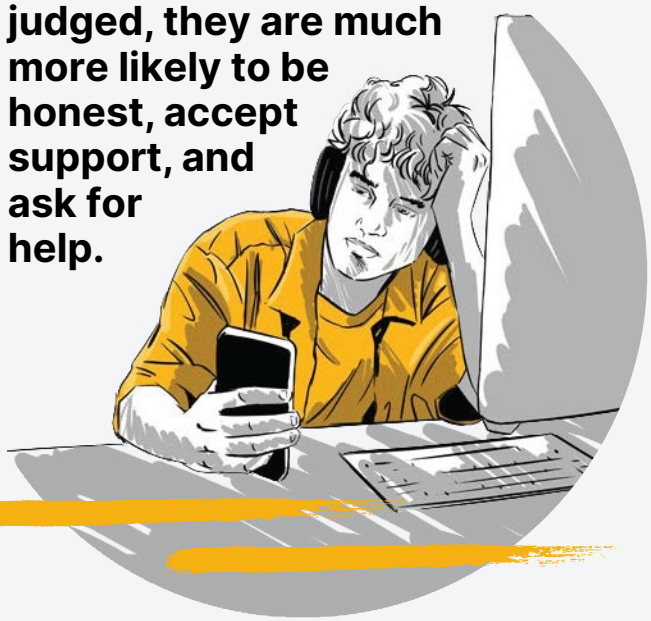
REFERENCES

[1] American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed., text rev.; DSM-5-TR).

[2] Calado, F., & Griffiths, M. D. (2016). Problem gambling worldwide: An update and systematic review of empirical research (2000–2015). Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 5(4), 592–613.

[3] National Council on Problem Gambling. (2024). Sports Betting and Problem Gambling.

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