

Understanding and Managing Gambling (teens)

Objective

To identify ways to reduce gambling behavior.

What to Know

Gambling is any activity where you bet something of value in hopes of winning something else. “Betting” or “gaming” can be games played between people where one or more would like to win something of value, like cash or credits, favors (like chores, doing homework, or other activities), or anything valuable such as clothes, shoes, cell phones, food, and so on.

Gambling is not just going to a casino, betting on a football game, playing poker, or trying to win money in other ways. There is a strong possibility you will lose something of value, and it can happen anywhere and involve anything of value. Here are some common examples:

- **Card Games:** Texas hold 'em, blackjack, hearts, spades, gin rummy
- **Dice Games:** craps
- **Electronic Games:** online poker, bingo, Keno, slots, video games
- **Sports Betting:** basketball, hockey, football, baseball, tennis
- **Cultural Games:** Mahjong, Native American stick games
- **Other Activities:** pitching quarters, buying lottery tickets (“scratchers”), playing pool

Compulsive gambling is a term that means betting or gaming is compromising or damaging personal, family, or academic pursuits. This behavior may interfere with your future goals, relationships, and responsibilities. Here are some warning signs.

- Secrecy about online activities.
- Increased interest in sports—not just a favorite team, but scores from many games.
- Constantly checking your phone during sporting events.
- Losing interest in other activities.
- Talking about, thinking about, or planning to gamble and avoiding other activities.
- Lying about gambling habits.
- Gambling alone or gambling more often.
- Getting into arguments about gambling.
- Going without basic needs to gamble.
- Needing to gamble more and more money to get the desired effect.
- Having financial problems caused by gambling.
- Borrowing or owing money.
- Stealing or lying about money.
- Neglecting basic needs.
- Gambling to calm nerves, forget worries, or reduce depression.

- Health problems like headaches, stomach pain, anxiety, and depression associated with gaming or betting.

Can you relate to any of these problems? If so, explain.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions as honestly as possible.

How often do you gamble? _____

What do you usually gamble on? _____

How much time and money do you spend on gambling? _____

Have you ever lied about your gambling to friends or family? Yes / No

If yes, what happened?

How does gambling make you feel before, during, and after?

Before: _____

During: _____

After: _____

Identify situations or emotions that trigger your urge to gamble. Describe the emotion or trigger and how often you feel this way (sometimes, frequently, rarely). Then, brainstorm some ideas of what you can do instead to manage the emotion or cope with the trigger. Fill out the chart below.

Trigger (Situation/Emotion)	How Often?	What Else Could You Do?

List three healthy activities you enjoy that could replace gaming, betting, or gambling.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Next, set specific, achievable goals to reduce or stop gambling. Use the SMART goal format (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound).

Goal: _____

Specific. What exactly do you want to achieve? _____

Measurable. How will you track your progress? _____

Achievable. Is this goal realistic? Yes / No

Why or why not? _____

Relevant. Why is this goal important to you? Be specific!

Time-bound. When do you want to achieve this goal? _____

Identify people who can support you in managing your gambling. This could include friends, family, a coach, or a counselor.

Name	Relationship	How They Can Help

Finally, you can practice mindfulness to manage the urge to gamble. Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and take deep breaths. For the next two weeks, do this exercise daily. Focus on your breathing and let go of any thoughts about gambling. Record your progress in the chart.

1. Set a timer for 5 minutes.
2. Close your eyes and take deep, slow breaths.
3. Focus on the sensation of breathing in and out.

Resources for Help:

- **National Problem Gambling Helpline:** 1-800-522-4700
- **Gamblers Anonymous:** <https://www.gamblersanonymous.org/ga/hotlines>

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help you reduce your gaming, betting, or gambling behavior? Why or why not?

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
