



# CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

## Gambling can adversely affect young brains

By Jane Sutter

What do celebrities Jamie Foxx, Wayne Gretzky and the Manning family have in common?

All have appeared in commercials touting sports betting, and all have appeal with impressionable young people.

In New York state, it's easier than ever for people to gamble. New Yorkers used their phones to wager around \$16 billion on sports in 2022, which was the first year of the state's legal mobile gaming, according to the governor's office.

Although an individual must be 21 years old to bet legally on sports games in New York (and 18 years old to buy lottery tickets), parents need to be aware of the many temptations that exist for kids and teens to get involved in gambling.

Scratch-off lottery tickets, bingo games, fantasy sports leagues, 50-50 raffles. These may seem like harmless forms of entertainment, but all are a form of gambling. They can have an adverse effect on developing minds and be a gateway to risky behavior for adolescents, according to Brandy Richards, director of prevention and special programs



at the NY Council on Problem Gambling.

The council defines gambling as any time someone risks something of value at the chance of gaining some reward. The organization's stance on gambling is neutral, Richards said. It's neither for it nor against it. The council does oppose underage gambling because it's illegal.

The council, which receives its funding from

the state Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS), works to raise awareness of problem gambling. For youth, parents and community members, the council has a specific website called You(th) Decide NY. The council also connects people to services such as counseling or inpatient care, whether they have a gambling problem or have been adversely affected by another person's gambling.

With the legalization of mobile gaming in New York State, Richards said the council is concerned about youths' increased accessibility to gambling. An OASAS-conducted survey published in 2015 showed that 39 percent of youth ages 12 to 17 said they had gambled in the last year. Perhaps surprisingly, 30 percent of kids who gamble said they started at age 10 or younger. Richards thinks that figure may be higher now.

She points out that the 30 percent statistic is much higher than the percentage of kids who said their first use of alcohol was at age 10 or younger (13.9 percent); first cigarette at age 10 or younger (13.8 percent) and first use of marijuana at age 10 or younger (12.5 percent).

The earlier that someone participates in risky behavior, the likelihood of them devel-

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### Teens who gamble are more likely to:

- Have depression issues
- Get lower grades
- Use illegal drugs
- Get into fights
- Have a low self-esteem
- Attempt suicide

Source: <https://youthdecideny.org/>



### Consequences of underage gambling:

- Increased risk for delinquency and crime
- Increased risk for substance use and abuse
- Increased risk for addiction
- Damaged relationships
- Poor academic performance
- Mental health issues including depression and anxiety
- Overall, poor general health

Source: <https://youthdecideny.org/>

oping a problem is greater, Richards noted. Yet, there is much less public concern about gambling when it comes to teaching kids about the risks of addictive substances such as alcohol and drugs. "Kids are hearing messages about substances, about marijuana use, about alcohol use ... (but) we're not giving that message to kids about gambling. In fact, that's probably the opposite. It's very much normalized behavior."

### Learning about the problem

The NY Council on Problem Gambling is trying to change that by raising awareness with parents, educators and community organizations to get them to include discussions on gambling in talks about other risky behaviors. The OASAS survey found that only 85 percent of students said their parents feel it's wrong for them to gamble, as compared to 95 percent who said their parents believe it's wrong for them to drink one to two alcoholic beverages or 94 percent who said their parents think it's wrong for their kids to smoke marijuana.

A major risk of gambling for youth involves brain development. A person's brain is not fully developed until age 25, especially the pre-frontal cortex (the decision-making center of the brain). Richards says that's why "kids can get into trouble with gambling because they are not able to assess and understand the risks involved."

In the brain's reward center, kids get a rush of dopamine when they win, and the more they get it, the more they want it. The Council on Problem Gambling has an informative website called MindRide that walks people through the affect of gambling on a brain that's not fully developed, thus making a youth more vulnerable to forming an addiction.

Underage kids who gamble are at increased risk for substance abuse and addiction and committing crimes. Their grades may suffer as

## What should parents do?

- Learn more about the dangers of underage gambling at <https://youthdecideny.org/>
- Talk to your children today about the dangers of underage gambling. Helpful videos on how to do that are available at <https://youthdecideny.org/>
- Teach your children how to analyze media messages by using teachable moments like advertisements, movies and music that you see or hear together.
- Join your teen in volunteering to talk to community leaders and groups in your community to raise awareness of the issue of underage gambling.

Source: <https://youthdecideny.org/>

can their relationships with family and friends. They may be depressed or feel anxious.

Richards points out that the earlier someone participates in risky behavior, the likelihood of them developing a problem is greater. Talking to kids at a young age is the best approach. "From research, we know that the earlier the conversation, the better," Richards said. Parents should think about how they may be unwittingly exposing their kids to gambling, through such activities as buying a scratch-off lottery ticket (or giving tickets to kids as gifts), or taking the family to a racetrack.

Parents need to educate themselves on loopboxes and fantasy sports leagues and make sure kids aren't using those to gamble. "Whether money is involved or not, parents just need to be aware and educated about the potential risk of harm."

Signs that a young person may have a gambling problem include a change in the young person's behavior; a decline in grades; and dropping out of activities they used to enjoy, Richards said. "Those are important things to be mindful of."

### Legislation to ban gambling ads

Concern about youth involvement in gambling has reached the halls of Congress, Richards noted. Congressman Paul Tonko, who represents the Albany region, has introduced legislation called "Betting on our Future Act." The act is modeled after the Federal Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act that banned tobacco advertisements. The "Betting on our Future Act" would make it unlawful to advertise a sportsbook on any medium of electronic communication subject to jurisdiction of the Federal Communications Commission, such as TV, radio or the Internet.

Tonko's office issued a press release in February about the legislation that stated that since the 2018 Supreme Court decision to strike down a federal ban on sports betting, at least 36 states have moved to legalize gambling on sports in some capacity, with 26 states legalizing mobile sports betting. In the first ten months of 2022, Americans wagered \$73 billion legally on sports, a 70 percent increase from the previous year, according to the American Gaming Association.

"In the years since the Supreme Court legalized sports betting, these unfettered advertisements have run rampant, with betting companies shelling out billions to ensure they reach every screen across America," Tonko stated in the release. "These ads pose a particularly dangerous threat to adolescents and young adults unaware of the risks involved in gambling, and to individuals prone to addiction."

The NY Council on Problem Gambling provided input to Tonko's staff for developing the legislation, Richards said.

*Jane Sutter is a freelance writer based in Rochester.*

### Additional resources

YOU(th) Decide is a project of the New York Council on Problem Gambling (NYCPG) and funded by the Office of Addictions Services and Supports (OASAS). The website <https://youthdecideny.org/> is chockful of information divided into sections for parents, youth and community organizations.

The NY Council on Problem Gambling operates a resource center for the Finger Lakes Region. To contact them, call (585) 351-2262.

To better understand how the brain reacts to gambling and how it affects the brain, go to <https://mindrideny.com/index.html>

The NY Council on Problem Gambling worked with the NYS Parent Teacher Association to develop a six-page guide of gambling-free fundraising alternatives. The guide offers more than 30 ideas of fund-raisers that don't involve gambling. To access the guide, go to <https://youthdecideny.org/for-community-influencers/>





# 5 FIVE WAYS

to protect your children from sexual abuse

*Parents play the primary role in educating their children about sexual abuse. Here are 5 tips for teaching safety to the little ones God has entrusted to you.*

1

**Keep it practical.** Teach your children the differences between safe touches and unsafe touches.

2

**Tell your children that saying “no” is okay.** Empower your children to say “no” if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable or touches them inappropriately.

3

**Give your children a way to alert you.** Tell your children they can use an excuse or share a special “code-word” with you to alert you about an unsafe person or situation.

4

**Tell your children to report an unsafe touch.**

Let your children know they should tell you if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe around any adult or peer. You can also identify other adults they can tell about unsafe touches.

5

**Tell your children you trust them.** If your child makes a report to you, believe him or her. Tell them it is not their fault and that you love them. Immediately bring the allegation to the attention of public authorities.



Promise to Protect

Pledge to Heal



ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

## Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:  
Tammy Sylvester,  
Diocesan Coordinator  
of Safe Environment Education  
and Compliance,  
585-328-3228,  
or [Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org](mailto:Tammy.Sylvester@dor.org).

*Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.*

*To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:*

Deborah Housel  
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;  
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,  
ext. 1555  
[victimsassistance@dor.org](mailto:victimsassistance@dor.org).

*All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.*

# ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

## ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

### CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

#### Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>  
*PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.*

#### NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>  
*A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.*

## FOR PARENTS:

### Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>  
*A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education*

#### Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

#### iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>  
*Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies*

#### Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>  
*Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America*

## LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

**Bivona Child Advocacy Center**  
(Monroe, Wayne counties):  
[www.BivonaCAC.org](http://www.BivonaCAC.org)  
585-935-7800

**Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:**  
607-737-8449  
[www.chemungcounty.com](http://www.chemungcounty.com)

**Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:**  
315-253-9795  
[www.cacofcayugacounty.org](http://www.cacofcayugacounty.org)

**Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program**  
(Ontario County):  
[www.cacfingerlakes.org](http://www.cacfingerlakes.org)  
315-548-3232

**Darkness to Light organization:**  
[www.d2l.org](http://www.d2l.org)

**STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:**  
[www.sthcs.org](http://www.sthcs.org)  
716-372-8532

**NYS State Central Registry**  
(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):  
1-800-342-3720

**NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)**  
866-313-3013

**Tompkins County Advocacy Center:**  
[www.theadvocacycenter.org](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org)  
607-277-3203

**Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:**  
585-786-8846

**Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:**  
315-531-3417, Ext. 6