

ADHD and Gambling Problems: Understanding the Risks for Young People

Introduction

The rise of online gambling and widespread gambling advertisements has made gambling more accessible than ever before. For people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), this creates special risks. This summary explains the connection between ADHD and gambling problems, with specific focus on young people who are particularly vulnerable.

The Strong Link Between ADHD and Gambling Problems

Research shows a powerful connection between ADHD and gambling disorders:

- People with ADHD are **more than twice as likely** to develop gambling problems compared to the general population.
- Studies of people seeking treatment for gambling addiction found that **43% had ADHD as children**, with 11% continuing to have adult ADHD <https://kindbridge.com/gambling/adhd-and-gambling/>
- In the adolescent population specifically, those diagnosed with ADHD show significantly higher rates of problematic gambling behaviors <https://bircheshealth.com/resources/adhd-neurodiversity-gambling-addiction>

Why Young People with ADHD Are Particularly Vulnerable

Several factors make young people with ADHD especially susceptible to gambling problems:

1. **Impulsivity:** The impulsive traits common in ADHD directly increase the risk of problematic gambling behaviors <https://chadd.org/adhd-weekly/gambling-and-adhd-what-to-watch-for-when-rolling-the-dice/> Young people may act without considering consequences.
2. **Novelty-seeking behavior:** Many with ADHD are drawn to new, exciting experiences, which gambling provides in abundance.
3. **Emotional regulation challenges:** Difficulty managing feelings can lead to using gambling as a way to cope with negative emotions or enhance positive ones.
4. **Risk assessment difficulties:** Young people with ADHD often struggle to properly evaluate risks and may not recognize the true odds of gambling activities.
5. **Co-existing mental health issues:** The combination of ADHD with anxiety or depression (common co-occurring conditions) can further increase vulnerability.

Warning Signs for Educators to Watch For

Teachers should be alert to these potential indicators of gambling problems in students with ADHD:

- **Preoccupation with sports betting or gaming:** Excessive interest in scores, odds, or gambling-related activities.
- **Money issues:** Unexplained need for money, borrowing from peers, or selling possessions.
- **Changes in behavior:** Increased secrecy, withdrawal from usual activities, or declining academic performance.
- **Digital device fixation:** Unusual focus on phones or devices, particularly with reactions of excitement or frustration that may indicate online gambling.
- **Gambling language:** Increased use of gambling terminology or discussion of wins and losses.

The Serious Mental Health Impact

The combination of gambling problems and ADHD creates significant mental health risks:

- Young people with both conditions face **elevated risks of depression**.
- Studies show **increased suicide risk** when gambling disorder and ADHD occur together
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2773021223000585>
- The challenges of managing both conditions can intensify feelings of shame, failure, and helplessness.

Prevention and Support Strategies for Educators

1. **Early intervention for ADHD:** Proper treatment of ADHD symptoms may help prevent the development of gambling problems. **Financial literacy education:** Teaching practical money management skills can help young people understand the true cost of gambling.
2. **Critical media literacy:** Help students recognize and critically analyze gambling advertisements and understand how games are designed to be addictive.
3. **Impulse control strategies:** Teach specific techniques for "stopping and thinking" before making decisions.
4. **Healthy risk alternatives:** Channel novelty-seeking tendencies into positive activities that provide excitement in controlled environments.
5. **Open conversations:** Create safe spaces to discuss gambling without judgment, helping students understand the special risks they may face.
6. **Educational programs:** Targeted prevention programs for students with ADHD can be particularly effective.

When to Seek Help

If you notice signs of gambling problems in a student with ADHD, early intervention is crucial. Professional support may include:

- **Specialized therapy:** Approaches that address both ADHD and gambling behaviors simultaneously.
- **Medication review:** Ensuring ADHD medication is optimized to help with impulse control.
- **Family support:** Engaging parents/guardians to create consistent oversight of online activities and spending.

By understanding these unique risks and implementing targeted strategies, educators can play a vital role in preventing gambling problems in young people with ADHD and supporting those who may be developing issues.



<https://grins.info>

<https://gamblingriskinformednovascotia.ca/odds-and-ends-youth-workshop>