



Teen Gambling: Understanding a Growing Epidemic

Jeffrey L. Derevensky

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Today's children and teens are the first generation of youth to grow up in a society where a multiplicity of gambling activities exists and where gambling venues are not only generally accessible but also heavily advertised and promoted. Gambling, once considered to be a harmless form of adult entertainment and recreation has become mainstream. While most forms of regulated gambling are prohibited for underage youth, the age varying depending upon the type of gambling activity and jurisdiction, a growing number of young people are gambling in spite of such restrictions. With increased exposure to different types of gambling, including Internet gambling, more youth are yielding to the temptation and social pressures to engage in these activities. The thrill, excitement, the adrenaline rush, and the potential for 'easy money' makes gambling an alluring activity. Yet, problematic gambling among adolescents has been associated with a number of negative individual mental health outcomes, interpersonal problems, school-related academic difficulties, financial difficulties, and legal problems. Equally disturbing is the fact that while parents are well aware of the risks associated with other adolescent risky behaviors (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, and drug use), recent research suggests that teen gambling is not viewed as a risky behavior. Here, Derevensky offers an overview of the problems associated with underage gambling, and provides a roadmap for parents and educators, and anyone who works with youth, to help underage problem gamblers address their addictions and get the help they need.

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