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## **COULD YOUR CHILD BE A COMPULSIVE GAMBLER?**

Parents (and educators) will list drugs, alcohol, bullying, sex, and grades among their concerns for their children. The list is incomplete if it does not include gambling. Could your child have a gambling problem or the beginnings of one? We know that many children are introduced to gambling at a young age, often innocently, since the adults in their lives have no knowledge of the potential consequences.

Gambling may be part of their parents' social lives or vacations, or perhaps members of the family gamble on sports, play poker, buy lottery tickets or "scratch offs", go to racetracks or casinos, or gamble on the internet. Children receive the message that gambling is great fun and if you are lucky or good at it, you can make lots of money gambling.

Even if there are none of these activities in the home, our children receive this message through a variety of media. Even seemingly harmless internet games introduce children to the "fun", "challenging", and "winning" experiences of gambling. Gambling is easily accessible on computers, tablets, and mobile phones in formats that many adults are not even familiar with.

Some children may be unaffected by all of this. It is very difficult to know in advance which ones may be affected. When the invisible line is crossed from social gambling to problem or addictive (compulsive) gambling, it is a life altering change for the gambler and loved ones. Compulsive gambling is not just about the money won or lost, but also about the drastic changes in behavior and the growing unmanageability of everyday life.

Our experience with our own compulsive gamblers has taught us that compulsive gambling can begin at any age. Many of our gamblers, men and women, began gambling in childhood. Based on our experience and the numbers of parents of teens and young adults joining our meetings, we believe that gambling has a place among the list of parents' concerns.

What are the signs that your child may have a problem with gambling?



1. Are you concerned about the amount of time your child spends on the computer, on mobile devices, watching sports, playing cards, etc., or how often these activities distract from family activities, sleep?
2. Are you uncomfortable with your child's friends or their activities together?
3. Are you aware of bets your child is making with friends or classmates?
4. Has your child lost interest in activities he or she once enjoyed?
5. Have your child's grades slipped or does your child miss school or classes?
6. Does your child work but never seem to have money?
7. Does your child have more money or unexplained money, or does your child spend money beyond his/her apparent means?
8. Have you experienced money or items missing from your home? Do you suspect your child might be stealing?
9. Has your child asked to borrow large amounts of money?
10. Do you find yourself rescuing your child from financial crises resulting from gambling?
11. Does your child have an intense reaction during sporting events when one team is either losing or winning?
12. Does your child promise to never gamble again – and then gamble?
13. Have you noticed changes in your child's personality, including mood swings?
14. Has your child become secretive?
15. Does your child lie about money or about gambling activities?

If you think your child may have a gambling problem, you are welcome to come to a Gam-Anon meeting. The Gam-Anon members, including parents, will share their experience with you. Gam-Anon is a fellowship of those affected by someone else's gambling problem whether or not the gambler acknowledges the problem.