

A Parent's Story:

Chatting about reducing
gaming and gambling harm



A Quick Note...

This booklet is designed for parents, caregivers, or adults who are concerned or curious about their child or young person's gaming and/or gambling habits. This booklet shares ideas you can use, through the story of a parent, Jess, it's not a set of strict rules.

This is many parents' stories, it may be overwhelming, but you're not alone.



“This booklet will raise your awareness of types of gambling, to help you help your children manage these risks.

Open the conversation and model how to manage the temptation.

You're not alone.”

- Quote from a parent during a training session

Hi, I'm Jess, an average parent doing my best day to day.

This is the story of how I noticed my child was at risk from gaming harm and how I reduced that risk.

My story isn't the only approach, but there are a few tips you might find useful.



I started to worry about my child's gaming and internet use when I noticed a few new unusual behaviours. They had been happy-go lucky and chatty but became very quiet and kept to their room.

Usually, they ate with the rest of the family, except for when they had too much homework, and could have dinner in their room, but they started asking to eat in their room more often.



One day when I brought their dinner, I noticed that they were playing video games online, not doing homework.

They also started asking for advances on their pocket money.

I really started to get concerned when the school called to say they had been nodding off in class and getting behind in their work.



I felt really alone, not knowing what to do or how to help my child.

I spoke to my friends and found that they were noticing the same signs in their children too, and that they were spending more time online.

I thought, wow, if they're experiencing the same thing, maybe I need to look into this more.



Signs Your Child May Be Experiencing Gaming or Gambling Harm

- Losing sleep (either to gamble/play video games or due to stress)
- Peer pressure from friends when trying to cut down on gaming or gambling
- Isolating themselves from peers or other loved ones
- Spending more money more quickly (i.e., spending more money on gaming or gambling than intended)
- Thinking about gaming or gambling constantly

Signs Your Child May Be Experiencing Gaming or Gambling Harm

- Gaming or gambling to cope with negative emotions or to escape problems
- Lying or hiding how much money they are spending
- Borrowing money or stealing to game or gamble
- Less involvement with usual activities/hobbies
- Lower performance at work or school
- Coming into contact with strangers online
- Falling out with friends/family/loved ones

What I discovered shocked me.

Video game companies have been intentionally designing their products to mimic gambling to make their games as addictive as possible.

Research has found a connection between young people buying in-game items, including surprise boxes called lootboxes, and gambling harm.



When young people open lootboxes it activates the same psychological reaction in their brains that gambling does.

The happy chemicals in their brains, like dopamine, fire more than usual, these are the same brain chemicals associated with other harmful behaviours like drinking alcohol and substance use.



Gambling is a far bigger concern than I thought it was, I read in the Gambling commission's website that only between April 2023 to March 2024, the UK's gambling industry has a profit of about £15 billion a year!

£15 billion a year is more than the UK's music and film industries profit combined.



This profit has grown every year due to the rise in online gambling.

People don't need to go somewhere in-person to gamble any more. They can gamble while watching TV with their families, in the break room at work or lunchroom at school, or in bed at 3am.

This means that gambling has become a lot more hidden when compared to other risk-taking behaviours.



I didn't realise gambling was so common among young people, as the legal age to gamble is 18.

Yet, as of 2024, in the past 12 months 14-17-year-olds were more likely to have gambled than drink alcohol, vape, or use illicit substances including cannabis.

(The Gambling Commission)

This is partly due to online gambling. When registering for most online gambling apps people just click a checkbox to verify their age.



Only when people win are they required to verify their age with ID. And, naturally, winning is rare. So, if a young person does win, the gambling companies have a reason not to pay them their winnings.

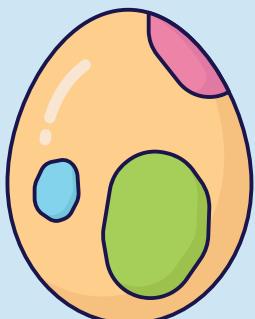
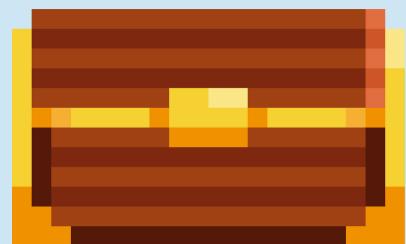
The industry is priming, targeting, and taking advantage of our young people.

I realised I needed to talk to my child about this. But how?



Key Definition and In-Game Gambling Mechanics

- **Gambling:** risking something of material value on something with an uncertain outcome in the hopes of winning additional money or a prize.
- **Gaming:** playing a game on an electronic device such as a PC/laptop, games console, tablet, phone, or other handheld device.
- **Lootboxes:** items in video games that you can purchase with real money or in-game currency that contain a randomised reward. E.g. a loot box might contain points, equipment, or ‘skins’ (see below) for the player to use within the game. Examples are the llamas in Fortnite, FIFA Packs, or crates in games like Call of Duty.



Key Definition and In-Game Gambling Mechanics

- **Microtransactions:** small in-game purchases. Real money is often exchanged for in-game currency to buy items to improve gameplay. Examples of in-game currency are VBuck in Fortnite or Robux Gold Coins in Roblox.
- **Skins Gambling:** players use websites to trade, bet, or sell their skins in exchange for cash. Skins are in-game items that change the way your character, avatar, or weapon looks within a game.



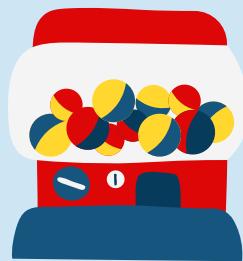
Key Definition and In-Game Gambling Mechanics

- **Cryptocurrency** or crypto is a digital or virtual form of money that uses encryption to keep transactions secure, such as Bitcoin. It is used for investments and trading similar to the stock market. However, unlike the stock market it is not regulated in the UK and therefore buyers have no protections if something goes wrong. It has features that are similar to gambling (e.g., high event frequency and chance based) and are also used for online gambling.
- **Social Casinos**: casino games that are free to play, with no money either to play or to win. These are most often promoted through social media websites. Because they're free to play they fall under marketing laws instead of gambling laws.



Key Definition and In-Game Gambling Mechanics

- **Gacha Games:** a type of mobile game where you can purchase loot box style items to make the game easier to play or unlock different upgrades of play. These rewards are randomised but the odds of you getting a valuable item are low. These games also include the following gambling style mechanics:
 - Increased odds - the more you pay to play the better chance you have of getting the reward you want
 - More rewards - often offered more free opportunities to win items to keep players playing
 - Introduction of new and better characters- often vital for making the games easier and usually referred to as power creep.



I knew I needed to talk to my child to make sure they were safe and understood the risks of gaming and gambling. But I had no idea how.

I kept trying to make time to speak to them, but between work and school, housework, homework, cooking dinner, taking them and their siblings to after school activities and bed-time routines, there never seemed to be a good time.



I realised that trying to find that perfect time to sit down and have a conversation wasn't working.

I decided to think of it as having a chat, to check in with my child, and plant the seeds of gaming and gambling risks and harms instead.

At school they'd already been talking about online safety so I planned to use that to start a conversation, and link it to gaming and gambling harm.



I used car journeys to/from school or dinner-time to chat about the games my child was playing on their computer.

I checked if they needed help setting money limits when they asked for an advance on their pocket money.

I asked what they know about gambling and gaming harm and shared what I'd found out.



Making gambling and gaming harm chats an everyday thing made the conversation feel more natural.

It also helped encourage my child and I to check in and update each other on any changes in gambling and gaming behaviour, rather than treating it like a ‘one-and-done’ conversation.

I realised that my child responded best when the chat was more on their terms and I didn’t put pressure on them.



Tips and Tricks to Start a Chat

1. Understand the issues, take time to educate yourself about the topics, like you're doing right now by reading this booklet. Being well-informed allows you to answer questions more confidently and demonstrates that you know the appeal of these products.
2. Create a safe space where your young person feels comfortable. Young people are more likely to engage in difficult chats when they feel safe and not judged. Let them know your intent is to help, not criticise.



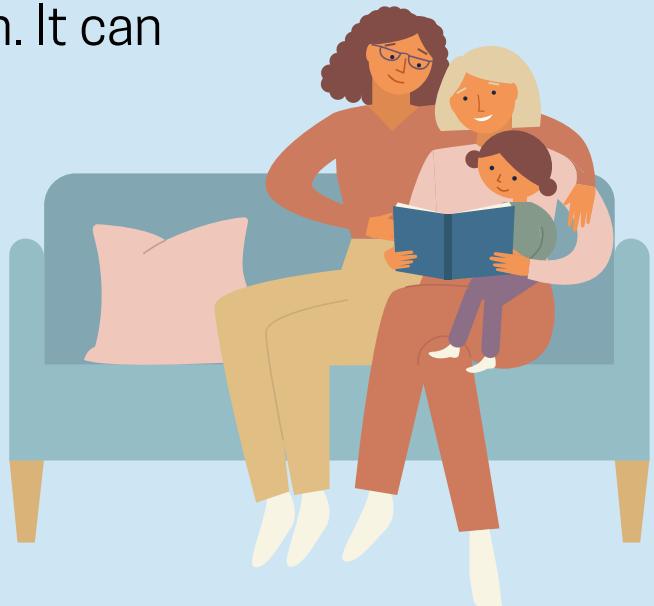
Tips and Tricks to Start a Chat

3. Start with open-ended questions.

Who/What/Where/Why questions, that can't be answered with 'yes' or 'no.'

Ask your child what they think this helps to begin the chat and gives you an idea of their current understanding and experience.

4. Use a third-person approach. It can help to focus on an external topic to ease into the conversation and avoid defensiveness. e.g. referencing an article or video you saw.



Tips and Tricks to Start a Chat

5. Explore and share in your child's knowledge. This will help them feel more in control of the chat and that their opinions are being heard.

For example, play one of their favourite games together and talk through some of the mechanisms in it.



Tips and Tricks to Start a Chat

6. Frame the conversation around values and setting goals.

Young people might resist chats that feel like rules or restrictions. Instead, it can help to focus on how gaming and gambling could affect their goals or what's important to them, such as how it could impact their ability to save money for the new skateboard they've been wanting.

7. Talk about risks and harms without fear mongering. Fear mongering and exaggeration may make young people dismissive. Instead, focus on facts and things the young person can relate to.



Tips and Tricks to Start a Chat

8. Listen to them and validate their feelings, and agree ways they can keep themselves safer.
9. Encourage two-way communication, to help the young person feel respected and involved, it's a chat not a lecture.



Tips and Tricks to Start a Chat

10. Follow up regularly.

One conversation often isn't enough.

Check in and chat about their gaming and gambling habits and experiences when opportunities arise.



Turning a Chat into Action

It is also important to teach children and young people skills they can use to make safe choices about their gaming and gambling, i.e.;

- Agree how much money they can spend and review regularly.
- Lead by example. Be aware of your own gambling or gaming behaviours (e.g., lottery tickets, raffles, candy crush on your iPad, etc.).



Turning a Chat into Action

- Limit screen time for everyone before bed to help with sleep
- Find other family activities to enjoy together
- Where possible have digital devices in shared spaces instead of their bedroom to be more aware of who they are playing with and how much time they are spending on-line



With regular chats and check-ins and the tips we talked about, my child's behaviour slowly started to change. They got more sleep, stopped nodding off in school, and their grades improved.

They started eating dinner with the family and spent less time in their room playing games.

They kept using their devices and playing video games, and we worked on building skills and identifying boundaries to reduce gaming and gambling harm as much as possible.



There may not always be a perfect, or even happy, outcome to your children engaging in risky behaviours like gambling or gaming, but you are not alone in this.

It's important that parents and caregivers support each other and chat about it. Don't feel judged, we are in this together, there is support available. The next page has some of the resources I've found.

It is also important to prioritise your own mental health, seek support and practice self-care.





SGEH Podcast

Check out our podcast for deep dives into different topics like young people's lootbox engagement. Each podcast features a lived experience story.



Gambling Mechanics

Use this QR Code to watch our video on what kind of gambling mechanics are common in video games. Or go to @GamblingEduHub on Youtube.com



Good Conversations

This QR Code links to our video on how to have good conversations with young people about gambling, gaming, and internet safety.

Local support at RCA Trust

Phone: 0141 887 0880
Email: info@rcatrust.org.uk

GamFam

GamFam support for those impacted by someone else's gambling:
www.gamfam.org.uk

Parentzone Scotland

<https://education.gov.scot/parentzone>

Parent Guide to PEGI Ratings

<https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/by-activity/online-gaming-advice-hub/online-gaming-safety-advice/>

Self- Exclusion Resources

GAMBAN

blocking software on your device:
www.gamban.com

GAMSTOP

Free online self exclusion service:
www.gamstop.co.uk

Please cut these bookmarks out for use.



It's Okay to Bookmark Your Chat!

National
Gambling Helpline

0808 80 20 133

fast forward



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