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## section 3.

### poker and youth

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- ⌘ "All In": Fast Facts on the Poker Craze
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## poker and youth: an overview

If you've been watching television or been to the mall lately, you may have noticed that poker has become a big trend. From TV shows to poker kits in toy stores, the interest in poker (particularly the Texas Hold'em game) has recently enjoyed an upswing in entertainment popularity. However, this trend is causing concern among many public health experts about the rise in youth gambling.

Many prevention experts believe that education about the risks and consequences of youth gambling is key in helping youth, parents, educators, and communities make informed and responsible choices about gambling. This section was created to help providers educate communities about the potential problem gambling concerns related to youth poker playing.

### Included in this section:

- 🎗 Facts about poker
- 🎗 Potential risk factors for problem gambling as connected with youth poker
- 🎗 Handouts for educators and parents
- 🎗 Website links to youth poker information/news, and
- 🎗 Copies of recent youth gambling news stories

Keep in mind that other areas of this resource guide (including Sections 2, 6, and 9) provide additional information and educational materials on youth gambling.

### More on Youth Gambling...

**Section 2:** Youth gambling: concerns, risk/protective factors, and more.

**Section 6:** Educational materials on youth gambling.

**Section 9:** A ready-made presentation for adults on youth gambling.



## "all in": fast facts on the poker craze

### Tidbits on a Trend

- ✂ The U.S. Playing Card Company produced more than 1 billion poker chips in the last three years, nearly half of them since 2004 (U.S. Playing Card Company, 2005)
- ✂ Worldwide online poker revenue jumped to more than \$1 billion last year, up from \$365 million in 2003 and is expected to hit \$2.4 billion in 2005 (Christiansen Capital Advisors, 2005)
- ✂ The "World Poker Tour" series on cable's travel channel drew an average of 1.5 million viewers in 2004 (Nielsen Media Research, 2004)
- ✂ A search on the word "poker" on Amazon.com (Hynes, 11/15/05) revealed:
  - 2,738 links in "Sports & Outdoors"
  - 264 links on "Apparel"
  - 191 links on "Toys & Games"
  - 170 links on "Software"
  - 158 links on "Computer & Video Games"

### What is "Texas Hold'em"?

Texas Hold'em is a type of poker game that is extremely popular; it is the game featured on such TV shows as "World Series of Poker," "World Poker Tour," and others. How it is played:

- ✂ Each player gets two pocket cards, while five community cards are dealt face-up on the table.
- ✂ The strength of a player's hand is the best five-card hand that can be made with these seven cards.
- ✂ There are four rounds of betting: after the pocket cards are dealt, after the first three community cards (the "flop"), after the fourth, or "turn" card, and after the final, or "river" card.

#### 2004 Survey of 16 and 17-Year-Olds

42%: Played poker in the previous month.

37%: Watched the World Poker Tour on TV.

*(U.S. Playing Card Company, 2004)*



# youth and poker: five “a’s” for alarm

In substance abuse prevention, there are many well-known “risk factors” that increase the likelihood for a youth to develop a problem behavior. There are several similar factors that may also contribute to **problem gambling among youth**. The following list outlines many of the risks involved with youth poker playing; many of the points apply to all forms of gambling.

## Availability

- ⌘ High availability to kids
  - poker kits/toys in stores
  - poker games at schools/in homes
  - video games
  - Internet
- ⌘ Societal availability:
  - “Social gaming” ordinances in many cities (allows for such games as poker in public and private places)

## Age

- ⌘ Easy to start early: available to even the youngest youths (video and handheld games, poker kits, etc.)
- ⌘ Pathological gamblers and youth in general report early gambling in the home and with family members (Dickson et. al, 2002)

## Accessibility

- ⌘ Kids can play right from their own homes
  - Poker nights
  - poker kits sold to anyone
  - lack of monitoring on Internet
  - trend toward mobile gambling: handheld games, software on mobile phones
- ⌘ Greater access is shown to increase gambling, money spent, and rate of problem gambling (Dickson, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2002)

## Advertising

- ⌘ More positive exposure/messages than ever
  - TV shows
  - school casino nights
  - poker tournament fundraisers
  - Internet banner ads



Above: 2005 Oregon Problem Gambling Awareness Week poster search winner. Created by Aimee Johnson, Monroe Middle School, Eugene.

## Acceptability

- ⌘ More accepted than ever among youth
  - poker viewed as “cool”
  - high imitation among peers: 44% youth gambled because friends did (Dickson et. al, 2002)
- ⌘ Ways to gamble/play poker are more attractive than ever
  - video games
  - handheld toy games
  - first generation to use Internet
- ⌘ Gambling often viewed by adults as harmless
  - seen as healthy alternative to youth drug or alcohol use
  - problem gambling often seen as a “victimless” habit
- ⌘ Gambling has become a family activity: 80-90% of parents report knowing their children gamble for money and do not object (Ladouceur, Vitaro, Cote & Dumont, 2001)

### For More “Risk Factor” Info...

Section 2 of this guide provides more resources on potential risk factors for youth problem gambling.



## majoring in wagering: *teen gambling facts for parents*



### If they're not drinking or using drugs, what's the big deal?



Heard your kid talking about getting together with friends for poker? With the increasing availability, accessibility, and acceptability of gambling, more young people are playing poker—and betting in general—than ever. But what may seem like harmless fun can develop into a serious problem.

*As parents, you play the most important role in the prevention of problem behaviors in your kids.*

### Three key points you need to know about youth gambling:

1. **Gambling is not a safe alternative to alcohol or drug use.** Many people think that poker cards among friends is totally safe because young people are not drinking or smoking. The truth is, while most people don't develop problems with gambling, more youth than ever are developing problems with gambling. Consequences of problem gambling include more than lost money. Depression, social withdrawal, and school dropout are just a few of the consequences that could result from a gambling problem.
2. **Teens are only a few years away from being adults who can gamble legally.** Minimum legal ages to gamble are set up for a reason—young people don't always have well-formed coping or decision-making skills. Honest education about gambling is important to preparing young people to make responsible choices.
3. **Many teens already have gambling problems.** An Oregon study showed that one in every 25 teens (4%) have a gambling problem. An additional 15% are at risk for developing a gambling problem. Many young people drop out of school or college because of their gambling problems. But since there are few outward signs, a problem can be very easy to hide.

## Do you hold the cards to your kid's winning hand?

- ⌘ Gambling isn't a way to make easy money. "Professional poker player" is about as likely a career as NFL player.
- ⌘ Kids need to know the true odds—and to set limits. And they need you to set good examples.
- ⌘ Kids need to know that problem gambling can lead to serious consequences.



Above: Poster created by Bryant King for 2005 Oregon Problem Awareness Week poster search.

## Talk to your kids about gambling. Help them beat the odds.

- ⌘ Look for a time to bring up the topic naturally. Bring it up when running across a poker show on TV, or finding out that a friend has won or lost money gambling
- ⌘ Ask questions—and *listen*.
- ⌘ Be patient.
- ⌘ When you talk to your kids about drugs or alcohol, include problem gambling in "the conversation."

### Don't know what to say or how to say it?

Visit the Anti-Drug's website for practical, ready-to-use tips on talking with your teen:

[www.theantidrug.com/ei/conversations.asp](http://www.theantidrug.com/ei/conversations.asp)



# majoring on wagering: *teen gambling facts for educators*



## If they're not drinking or using drugs, what's the big deal?



Heard your students talking about poker night? With the increasing availability, accessibility, and acceptability of gambling, more young people are gambling than ever. But what may seem like harmless fun can develop into a serious problem.

*As educators, you play a key role in the prevention of problem behaviors among youth.*

## Three key points you need to know about youth gambling:

1. **Gambling is not a safe alternative to alcohol or drug use.** Many people think that poker cards among friends is totally safe because young people are not drinking or smoking. The truth is, while most people don't develop problems with gambling, more youth than ever are developing problems with gambling. Consequences of problem gambling include more than lost money. Depression, social withdrawal, and school dropout are just a few of the consequences that could result from a gambling problem.
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## Why should I be concerned about my students?

- ⌘ Gambling can interfere with studies, and youth problem gamblers are prone to drop out of school.
- ⌘ Over 75 percent of Oregon teens have gambled, and about one in 25 gambles every day.
- ⌘ Young people don't always yet have the best coping or decision-making skills.
- ⌘ The problem typically develops over several years. It won't happen today, but small problems can escalate into serious consequences down the line.
- ⌘ Many problem gamblers say they started out gambling at an early age--approximately 10 years old.

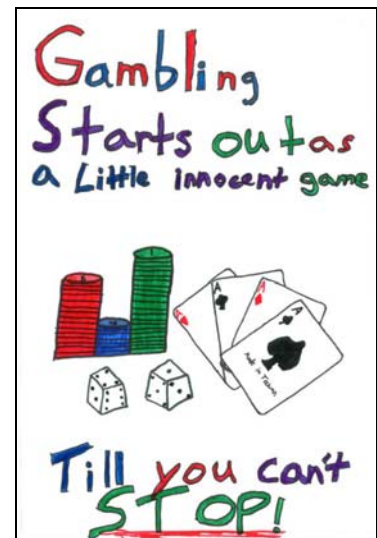
## How we can support you—and not add extra work!

Problem gambling prevention efforts are meant to supplement your current classroom activities—not to add more work for you.

Here are some resources we can offer you:

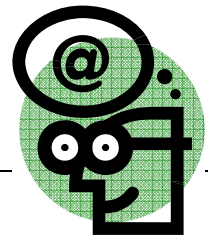
- ⌘ In-class awareness lessons
- ⌘ Adding an easy plug-in component to your existing alcohol, tobacco, or other drug curriculum
- ⌘ Presentations to educators, administrators, and parent groups
- ⌘ Problem gambling awareness poster search
- ⌘ Consultation on school gambling policies
- ⌘ And more—contact us!

*[Place your business card here.]*



Above: Poster created by Bryant King for 2005 Oregon Problem Awareness Week poster search.





## on the web: youth and poker

### Poker Brochure

A ready-to-go resource, "Talk to Kids About Poker," is available at Connecticut's prevention website (*right*).

[www.youthpoker.org](http://www.youthpoker.org)

Information for parents and educators on young people and poker issues.

[www.ctprevention.org/necasa/gambling.pdf](http://www.ctprevention.org/necasa/gambling.pdf)

"Talk to Kids About Poker" brochure from the Connecticut DMHAS Problem Gambling Services and Northeast Communities Against Substance Abuse.

[www.usatoday.com/educate/challenge/2005winners/winner2-page1.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/educate/challenge/2005winners/winner2-page1.htm)

Series on the poker trend, including teen poker concerns, published by *USA Today* in December 2004.

[www.responsiblegambling.org/staffsearch/latest\\_news\\_articles\\_details.cfm?intID=8048](http://www.responsiblegambling.org/staffsearch/latest_news_articles_details.cfm?intID=8048)

"Gambling for kids may be risky business," published by the Lincoln Journal Star on July 22, 2005.

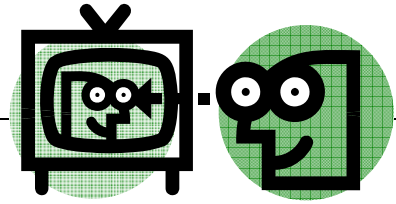
[www.statesmanjournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050216/OPINION/502160310/1050](http://www.statesmanjournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050216/OPINION/502160310/1050)

"For many teens, poker isn't about gambling" opinion published in the Salem *Statesman-Journal*, February 16, 2005.

[msnbc.msn.com/id/6613001](http://msnbc.msn.com/id/6613001)

"Poker for teens: How far is too far? Gambling opponents worry over game's popularity with youth." Published on MSNBC.com, November 29, 2004.

## poker in the news



### Poker tournaments in bars, clubs, online ... everywhere

September 9, 2005

By I. NELSON ROSE

Source: BASIS Online;

[www.basionline.org/backissues/2005/vol10pdf/editorialsept9\\_2005.pdf](http://www.basionline.org/backissues/2005/vol10pdf/editorialsept9_2005.pdf)

The astounding success of poker on television and the Internet has created a poker phenomenon in the United States. And everyone wants a piece of the action.

Toys R Us ran out of poker gift sets at Christmas, and so did Nordstrom. Run a search for "poker" at BarnesandNoble.com and you get 670 titles, including kits for home Texas Hold 'Em tournaments. Stores sell poker clocks, lamps and bed sheets. For \$5, I bought a computer game of Dogs Playing Poker from Office Depot.

(Incidentally, *The Art of Gambling: Through the Ages* by Arthur Flowers and Anthony Curtis asserts that those poker dogs are America's best known art -- and I believe them. I've had "Bold Bluff" and the others as the background on my personal checks for years.)

The craze cuts across all lines. A couple of 12-year-old kids I know decided not

to go trick-or-treating, because they had a big poker tournament set for Halloween. Leo Chu, owner of Hollywood Park casino, told me a little old lady came in and said she wanted "to learn how to play that game where you push all your chips into the middle of the table." Even the states are getting into the act. The North Dakota House of Representatives voted to allow the state to license and tax online poker operators. A bill in Connecticut would make poker legal in restaurants and bars. The Mohegans have said that if that happens the tribe will withhold the state's share of slot machine revenue. After a bowling alley was raided in St. Cloud, Minnesota, the local State Senator introduced a bill to make it clear Hold 'Em tournaments are legal if there's no prize money. The County Attorney did not file charges, deciding poker might not be illegal even under present law.

## “Poker tournaments” (cont.)

Poker got its biggest push through the new mass media: cable T.V. and the Internet. When the World Poker Tour introduced the sophisticated use of lipstick cameras to let home viewers see players' down cards, the show broke records at the Travel Channel.

It also spawned imitators.

There are now at least seven TV shows and movies either on-air or being made. As for the Net, PartyPoker has 60,000 players online at any time.

There are no accurate figures on the industry, but a conservative guess is that Internet poker sites will take in more than \$1 Billion this year.

So, every day I get at least one inquiry about whether it is legal to operate poker games, perhaps as a membership club, or as a game of skill, or with the operator not making any money off the games, etc., etc.

I have seen literally a thousand variations. The proposed locales range from homes and clubs to bars. Lots of bars. It seems everyone with a liquor license wants to set up poker tables.

The Internet is also a hot alternative. Some want to set up kiosks or computer

terminals in bars, linked to online poker websites.

Everyone recognizes there are legal barriers. Entrepreneurs can be pretty inventive in trying to get around the law. How about turning a bar into a dues-paying private club run by a non-profit company incorporated in Uzbekistan and licensed by Rwanda, where players pay nothing to participate in poker tournaments, and the winners receive points redeemable only on the Internet for merchandise shipped by monks from Belize? If only it were that easy.

Enforcement actions are beginning against bar-owners and others who have set up poker tables. For example, the Louisiana Office of Alcohol and Tobacco Control is trying to close down the no-limit Texas Hold 'Em tournaments that have become common in barrooms throughout the state. Whether it succeeds will depend upon subtle and complex questions of state law, such as, Is a bar owner "profiting from gambling" if he takes no direct cut, but increases his business by having poker tournaments?

It is usually, but not always, easy to know what is clearly permitted. Most casinos can spread poker under state



law. California, the biggest poker jurisdiction, also has "local option," meaning clubs have to have licenses from their local cities or counties. Some states, like Florida, allow commercial poker but put severe limits on how much can be bet.

The law for licensed operators and tribes can be very complicated. For example, California has a statute that allows a club to rake the pot only three times. An operator who takes money out of the pot four times is committing a misdemeanor. And so, unknowingly, are all the players at that table.

Tribes in states with legal poker can operate their own games. But in a little-known twist in the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, poker is one of the very few forms of gambling where the tribes must follow state law on stakes and hours of operation. So, any high-stakes poker game you see in a tribal casino in Florida is illegal. Florida tribes could run games with limits higher than state law, but only if they first have compacts with the state.

Operators in a few states have found obscure exemptions from the general prohibitions on operating poker games for profit. In Kentucky, it is apparently perfectly legal for a licensed charity to run poker games, as long as they are

## "Poker tournaments" (cont.)

limited to six-hour stretches. In New Hampshire, entrepreneurs run up to ten poker tournaments a year for nonprofit organizations. Many states have express exemptions for social games played in private homes. In California, there is no state prohibition on a home poker game, where no one can make any money other than what they win. Note, this still could violate a city or county ordinance, although you have a better chance of winning the World Series of Poker than of being arrested.

Poker could also be legal if it lacked one of the elements of gambling: prize, chance or consideration. Games where players pay, but can win nothing of value, are usually legal as amusement games. I believe it is possible to run poker tournaments as contests of skill. And operators are taking the "no purchase necessary" approach and opening poker games which can cost nothing to enter.

The only way to be sure your plan for a poker tournament is legal is to have a lawyer apply your state's laws to your idea. It is very difficult, but not impossible, to operate poker games that won't get you thrown in jail. But the next problem is figuring out how to be both legal and still make money.

## Youth gamblers on the rise

March 25, 2005 | By ALEXANDRA MARKS

Source: Christian Science Monitor/ published on CBS News website;  
[www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/03/25/national/main683088.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/03/25/national/main683088.shtml)

For the first time, experts and treatment centers that deal with problem gamblers across the country are seeing an increasing number of adolescents who have developed serious gambling problems.

In Connecticut, for instance, it was rare for any treatment center to have clients younger than 18. That's until this year. Now, 11 youngsters are in formal programs getting help.

In Minnesota, a pioneering youth gambling-education group is seeing "a tremendous increase" in schools and youth organizations looking for tools to help kids deal with problem gambling.

And in Washington, experts are calling on Congress to hold hearings on the issue — in part because more than a dozen gambling shows air on prime-time television in an average week, and none routinely carries warning messages or public-service

announcements on "responsible" gambling, according to the National Council on Problem Gambling.

"It is a major, growing issue," says Barbara Raimundo, a mother of a recovering gambling addict who now counsels other parents in Connecticut.

"Our youth need major help, and someone has to be willing to step up to

**"A key reason for the increase in youth gambling is that it's now seen as 'cool.'"**

the plate before they start getting

really devastated."

A key reason for the increase in youth gambling is that it's now seen as "cool." In fact, the once disreputable pastime that was confined to a handful of shady destinations a quarter century ago is now legal in all but two states, and is touted as glamorous entertainment.

Casinos heavily advertise their lavish, exciting amenities. Celebrities play poker on TV, and poker players become celebrities, winning millions of dollars. At the same time, gambling is heavily

advertised on the Internet and is easy to access, no matter how old one is.

Research shows that more than 70 percent of kids between 10 and 17 have gambled in the past year, according to the National Council. That's up from 45 percent in 1988. Experts also say they're gambling younger and playing for more money.

And, just as a percentage of adults who gamble are likely to develop a gambling addiction, so, too, are young people. Research shows that as many as 4 to 5 percent of adult gamblers will develop a serious gambling problem. Kids are at three times the risk of adults for developing a problem.

"We know that the earlier you start gambling, the more likely you will be to have a gambling problem. The National Academy of Sciences found that in 1999," says Keith Whyte, executive of the National Council on Problem Gambling in Washington.

But for many parents, whose kids are growing up in an age of drugs and AIDS, gambling is seen as a relatively safe pastime. Teens can be at home, playing a game that's thought of as fun. And for

## "Youth gamblers" (cont.)

many people, a regular poker night or fundraising casino event at school may present no problem, but experts are concerned that a lack of education about gambling's potential pitfalls could feed an already alarming increase in younger problem gamblers.

"It is a situation where many parents still do assume that it's better for a kid to be gambling than to be out on the streets doing drugs or whatever," says Dr. Rachel Volberg, president of Gemini Research, which specializes in gambling studies in Northampton, Mass.

The primary risk is that kids can get so caught up in the thrill that they begin to gamble regularly. Eventually, they start risking money that they don't have – and losing it. When that starts, they're called problem gamblers, and the consequences include what doctors diagnose as depression as well as criminal behavior, according to the National Council.

One student at a Midwest college wrote the National Council asking for help. He said he'd started playing online poker and is now \$5,000 in debt. His e-mail continued: "I want to quit gambling but at the same time I have to make the \$5,000 back [because] I don't have it



## “Youth gamblers” (cont.)

and it was written through IGM e-checks. I think that could be considered a felony for writing bad checks. Any suggestions?"

Researchers are also beginning to believe that gambling is a "gateway" activity to riskier behaviors. Indeed, kids who gamble are also much more likely to binge drink, smoke marijuana,



skip school, and have unsafe sex, according to several studies cited by the National Council.

Experts would like to see media outlets that air gambling

events also show public-service announcements or other types of advertisements that talk about gambling's potential health risks, list warning signs, and provide information about responsible gambling — such as setting limits, never gambling during anger or depression, and never gambling on credit.

Whyte says the council has offered the Discovery Channel, Bravo, NBC, and others free public-service announcements, but so far they've declined them. ESPN, however, has

aired some PSAs that included the council's help number, 800-522-4700. There are also resources on the Internet for parents and kids who are interesting in learning about the risks involved with gambling and the attendant warning signs. The North American Training Institute (NATI) in Duluth, Minn., has designed a Web magazine for kids to learn about the risks involved with gambling: [www.wannabet.org](http://www.wannabet.org). It also has resources for parents at [www.nati.org](http://www.nati.org).

NATI's executive director, Elizabeth George, says it's crucial for parents to learn the warning signs. "If the child talks about gambling as the most exciting and important thing in their life, if it's superseding other things like a girlfriend or hockey practice, or if he is missing other activities because he's gambling, it could be the sign of a problem," says George.

Other indications of a problem include: lying about whether they are gambling; using money to gamble that's supposed to be used for other things like a winter jacket; borrowing money to gamble or, in a worst case, stealing it; and letting schoolwork suffer.

"Parents have to get gambling on their radar screen, they have to say, 'Tell me about your gambling,'" says George.

## Youth betting on cards rising, National Annenberg Risk Survey shows

March 2005

Source: The Annenberg Public Policy Center,  
[www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/07\\_adolescent\\_risk/2005\\_03\\_gambling\\_among\\_teens.pdf](http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/07_adolescent_risk/2005_03_gambling_among_teens.pdf)

### Abstract:

Card playing for money has risen among male youth ages 14 to 22, according to the National Annenberg Risk Survey of Youth (NARSY) conducted in 2003 and again in 2004. The increase is primarily among those young people who attend high school or post-secondary schools. In 2004, 11.4% of in-school male youth reported betting on cards at least once a week. In 2003, only 6.2% reported the same activity. This 84% increase in weekly card playing represents a statistically significant change in this behavior over a one-year period.



Increases in card playing were observed for male high-school youth (5.7% to 10.8%) as well as for those in college or other post-secondary programs (7.3% to 12.5%) (see Table 1). There was actually a drop in the proportion of male youth ages 14 to 22 who played

cards weekly and were out of school, going from 20.0% in 2003 to 6.6% in 2004.

Across both years of the survey, weekly card players accounted for 44% of all weekly gamblers identified in the NARSY. The influx of high-school youth into the card-playing routine has also lowered the average age of the card playing population in this age range. In 2003, 25.9% of youth who bet on cards weekly were under 18, while in 2004, this went up to 43.2% (see Table 2).

“The rise in weekly card playing among young persons is worrisome.” said Dan Romer, Director of the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute. “These latest results suggest that the fad among teens is real and raise concerns that more young people will experience gambling problems as they age.”

## Teen gambling

March 2, 2005 | By KATIE HARLAN

Source: KVAL original news story,

[www2.kval.com/x30530.xml?ParentPageID=x2649&ContentID=x49415&Layout=kval.xml&AdGroupID=x30530](http://www2.kval.com/x30530.xml?ParentPageID=x2649&ContentID=x49415&Layout=kval.xml&AdGroupID=x30530)

Northwest Eugene-- As educators constantly updates their curriculum, the risks of gambling in schools is gaining some attention. It's a situation many health officials say could cause major problems in the future.

One in 25 Oregon teens is a problem gambler, meaning almost one in every classroom in Oregon. That is why Lane County Health Department hosted a gambling prevention class on Wednesday.

Cascade Middle School students learned gambling doesn't always need to involve money, just risk. "Some people, especially young people like you said, are vulnerable. Some people think that they see these people on T.V. winning and they think, "Wow --my odds are pretty good. Why don't I keep playing? I can win, too", said Julie Hynes, Lane County Department of Health.



One of the students we talked to on Wednesday said lots of kids his age already gamble. On everything from sporting events to school plays. "On the Super bowl game, I bet you a hundred dollars this and everybody's like okay, deal. I think it is for fun because nobody ever gives up the money", Sanjay Mungra, 6th grader, Cascade Middle School.

Lane County officials spoke to two classes on Wednesday. They played games and talked about gambling being a game of chance.

Officials say popular gambling television shows and video games have increased the problem. In Oregon, the odds of winning Powerball are one in eighty million.

## Card-carrying kids

Gambling and poker are on the rise at area high schools – but is it a big deal?

February 18, 2005 | By BEN JACKLET

Source: *Portland Tribune*, [www.portlandtribune.com/archview.cgi?id=28464](http://www.portlandtribune.com/archview.cgi?id=28464)

James is way into gambling.

The 16-year-old sophomore says he hasn't lost a sports bet in months. He's been doing pretty well at poker too: Texas Hold 'Em, of course.

"That's what everyone wants to play," he says of the card game featured on several popular television shows.

James (not his real name) watches televised poker constantly and plays poker with his friends most weekends. He described his love of gambling as an obsession, but he doesn't see how it's a big deal. Neither did other local teens who spoke openly with the *Portland Tribune*.

Gambling experts said betting is on the rise among high school students. An informal survey at a half-dozen Portland high schools found anecdotal evidence of weekend poker games at home and sometimes in school, dice games on school grounds, and a growing tendency among young poker enthusiasts to try to strike it rich on the Internet.

Technically, all of this is illegal, which is why James didn't want his real name used. Online gambling is supposedly closed to anyone under 18, but teens who want to enter Internet gambling sites generally can.

Under Portland's city code, minors are not allowed to participate in "social" gaming – where players compete for money at a private residence. But poker games and sports bets are far from the top of the priority list for Portland cops or school administrators.

The city has had social gambling laws on the books for years, but no one has ever applied for the supposedly mandatory permit for a home poker game.

Only one of the eight high school principals contacted by the *Portland Tribune* returned phone calls, and he said that gambling wasn't a problem as far as he could tell.

"We haven't seen any evidence of a problem here," said Cleveland High

## “Card-carrying kids” (cont.)

School Principal Paul Cook. “We haven’t disciplined any students for gambling.”

### Troubling trend

But experts said that more kids gambling means more kids with gambling problems.

“The main thing that we’re seeing with youth and gambling is that they can really get caught up in it,” said Jeffrey Marotta, problem gambling services manager for the Oregon Department of Human Services. “Once somebody starts down the path of becoming a problem gambler, it can quickly escalate to something that’s out of control.”

Marotta said roughly 4 percent, or one in 25, of Oregon teenagers have a gambling problem.

He said that youths who gamble are more likely to smoke, drink, take drugs, steal from their parents and get in trouble with the law. In his view, setting up a casino night as a healthy alternative to teen drinking parties is not a good idea.

But at the same time, Marotta acknowledged that poker’s surge in popularity does create an opportunity for skilled players.

“There are so many new players coming into the fold who are inexperienced that the more experienced players can take advantage of them and do pretty well for themselves,” he said.

Thomas Moore, director of the Oregon Gambling Addiction Treatment

Foundation, said that only about 5 percent of problem gamblers who seek help for

their addiction list poker as their main problem — as compared with 70 percent for state-run video poker.

Moore also noted that some teens with gambling problems simply grow out of it. “We see higher rates of problem gambling in teens because they are more likely to take risks,” he said. “But that doesn’t necessarily translate into gambling problems when they become adults.”

**“Youths who gamble are more likely to smoke, drink, take drugs, steal from their parents and get in trouble with the law.”**

### Such a nice boy

It would be a stretch to describe James as a problem kid. An enthusiastic athlete who scored 1,400 on his PSATs and works part time at a local department store, he doesn't drink or smoke. He just likes to gamble. One of his favorite bets was that Britney Spears would have a kid before the Yankees won the World Series again.

He remembers betting for cookies or potato chips before he had access to money.

"Ever since I was 5, I've been obsessed," he said.

That obsession has worked out just fine for him, he argued. But that hasn't been the case for some of his friends.

### "Card-carrying kids" (cont.)

One got caught gambling online with his mom's credit card, and got into major trouble, he said.

Several high school students interviewed randomly in Portland described playing poker online under assumed names, getting people over 18 to buy lottery games for them, and playing dice for money in the basements and bathrooms of city schools.

One teen said he and his buddy even played poker in the back of a social studies class run by a clueless teacher.

"I don't really care if he catches me," the teen said of his teacher. "He's going to fail me anyhow."

