

## How Gambling Hijacks the Brain Video Companion Guide

Gambling can become overwhelming for some individuals, including people navigating stress or trauma. The video “How Gambling Hijacks Your Brain” offers a clear, brain-based explanation that helps reduce stigma and supports meaningful conversation.

This guide provides conversation starters and key points for both adolescents and adults, along with practical suggestions for using the video across different contexts. Its purpose is to help you create safe, non-judgmental discussions that build understanding and resilience.

Most importantly, the video reminds us that the brain can heal. With support, connection, and healthy coping strategies, people can regain balance and control. This guide helps highlight the strengths individuals already possess and reinforces that recovery is possible.

### How to Use the Video

The suggested uses of the video below highlight several places where the video can support learning and discussion. This list is not meant to be comprehensive, and providers are encouraged to adapt the video for an environment where education, support, or conversation about gambling and the brain may be helpful.

#### 1. Youth and school-based presentations

- Show the video in health classes, advisory periods, or life-skill lessons as part of prevention education
- Use it in school counseling or student support sessions to introduce the topic safely.
- Incorporate it into youth groups, after-school programs, or prevention workshops.
- Pair it with discussions in community-based youth programs focusing on resilience and coping skills.

## **2. Clinical or Behavioral Health Contexts**

- Use the video in individual counseling to introduce brain-based explanations of gambling.
- Show it in group therapy or psychoeducation groups as a shared learning tool to spark discussion.
- Incorporate it into intake or assessment appointments to reduce stigma and build rapport.
- Use it within trauma-informed treatment programs to explore gambling as a coping strategy.
- Add video to your agency's website to build awareness and provide accessible education.

## **3. Community and Prevention Contexts**

- Use it in community centers, libraries, or recreation programs to spark open conversation.
- Show it within faith-based groups or community circles to build awareness and reduce stigma.
- Incorporate it into prevention coalitions or public health outreach events.
- Play it at wellness fairs or community education nights to introduce the science of gambling.
- Ask professional or medical organizations with waiting-room screens to include the video as part of their educational rotation.

## **4. Training and Professional Development**

- Use the video during training for mental health providers, school staff, peer support, or partner agencies.
- Incorporate it into workshops for social workers, case managers, or behavioral health teams.
- Include it in continuing education related to trauma-informed care or addiction science.

## **5. Family and Caregiver Contexts**

- Use the video in family therapy or parent-support sessions to build shared understanding.
- Incorporate it into caregiver workshops to reduce blame and increase compassion.
- Share it with families informally as a tool to help support a loved one.

## 6. Online and Hybrid Learning Contexts

- Show it in virtual support groups as a way to start discussion.
- Use it in telehealth sessions as a grounding or educational tool.
- Incorporate it into online classrooms or distance-learning workshops.
- Embed it in digital prevention campaigns, agency websites, or resource hubs.

## 7. Correctional or Reentry Contexts

- Use the video in reentry planning sessions focused on coping skills and stress management.
- Incorporate it into psychoeducational groups in correctional or transitional housing settings.

## Conversation Starter: Adolescents

Starter prompt: Did you know gambling can hijack your brain – just like drugs or alcohol?

- Emphasize that gambling addiction is often invisible and misunderstood.

## Key Messages

### 1. Hidden Addiction

- No physical signs like with substance use.
- Often mistaken for poor choices or lack of willpower.

### 2. Science Behind It

- Gambling disorder is a real, treatable medical condition.
- It affects the brain's reward system in similar ways as other addictions.

### 3. Why It Hooks the Brain

- Dopamine release during wins, near-misses, and anticipation.
- “Almost winning” can be as powerful as winning.

### 4. Brain Changes Over Time

- Everyday joys feel less rewarding.
- Gambling becomes the main source of pleasure or excitement.
- Tolerance develops — need more to feel the same high.

### 5. Withdrawal & Triggers

- Irritability, anxiety, restlessness, discomfort when stopping.
- Triggers include places, emotions, routines, or stress.

### 6. Not About Weakness

- This is about the powerful brain patterns – not character flaws.

## 7. Hope & Recovery

- The brain can heal.
- Support, therapy, and healthy habits help make recovery possible.

## Engagement Tips

- Use **relatable examples**:
  - Every felt that rush when you win a game, score big in sports or level up in video games? That rush is dopamine, the brain's reward system. What happens when that system gets hijacked by gambling?
- Add **visuals**:
  - Brain reward system diagram.
  - Dopamine pathways illustration.
  - Short clip, animation, or illustration showing “near-miss” slot machine effects.
- Include a **call to action**:
  - Learn the signs.
  - Talk to someone you trust.
  - Recovery and support are always available.

## Adolescent-Focused Highlights

- **Why teens are at risk**:
  - Reward and impulse-control centers are still developing.
  - Teen brains are more sensitive to dopamine.
  - Early gambling increases risk later in life.
  - Easy access – online games, sports betting, dares, playing games of chance, and much much more increases the risk.
  - Video games can blur the line between play and gambling
- **A Few Warning signs for teens**:
  - Spending more time or money on games or gambling features.
  - Mood swings tied to wins or losses.
  - Hiding gaming or betting behavior.
  - Choosing gambling or gaming over friends, family, or activities
  - Falling behind at school or withdrawing from responsibilities.
- **Positive message**:
  - Most youth are not gambling.
  - If you or a friend are struggling, you're not alone—and help works.

## Conversation Starter: Adults

Starter prompt: Gambling disorder is real, and it doesn't always show obvious signs – but there's science behind what makes it so powerful.

### Key messages

#### 1. Gambling Disorder Is Real

- No physical signs like with substance use.
- Often misunderstood as bad choices rather than a medical condition.

#### 2. How Gambling Hijacks the Brain

- Activates the brain's reward system and releases dopamine — the same chemical involved in other addictions.
- Wins, near-misses, and anticipation create powerful urges to keep playing.
- Over time, tolerance builds, requiring more gambling for the same “high.”

#### 3. The Impact on Daily Life

- Everyday pleasures — family time, hobbies—feel less rewarding.
- Gambling can become a main source of relief, escape, or excitement.
- Financial stress, relationship strain, and emotional distress may develop.

#### 4. Signs of Gambling Disorder

- Increasing time or money spent on gambling.
- Chasing losses or hiding gambling behavior.
- Anxiety, restlessness, or discomfort when trying to stop.
- Choosing gambling or gaming over friends, family or activities.
- Trouble at work or other responsibilities.

#### 5. Not About Weakness

- Gambling disorder is a medical condition, not a lack of willpower.
- Understanding the brain science helps reduce stigma and increases support.

#### 6. Recovery Is Possible

- The brain can heal with time, therapy, and support.
- Evidence-based treatments help manage cravings and rebuild healthy habits.

#### 7. Call to Action

- Learn the signs.
- Seek help early — support works.
- Share resources and encourage open conversations.

## Closing

Conversations about gambling, the brain, and resilience open the door to understanding—not judgment. With adolescents or adults, these discussions help people recognize why gambling can feel so powerful and how recovery is possible.

This guide supports those conversations by offering trauma-informed, strength-focused tools. Honest dialogue helps reduce shame, build understanding, encourage healthy decision making, and encourage steps toward support.

Gambling disorders are treatable. The brain can adapt, recover, and rebuild healthy pathways. With connection, guidance, and accessible resources, people can regain control and strengthen their resilience. Your role in starting these conversations truly matters—and can make a meaningful difference in someone’s path toward wellness and recovery.

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmGWHvwntf0>

This document was developed by human authors and reviewed with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot Chat for clarity and readability.

You can get this document in other languages, larger print, braille or a format you prefer free of charge. Contact Problem Gambling Services at [PGS.Support@oha.oregon.gov](mailto:PGS.Support@oha.oregon.gov).

Problem Gambling Services

[PGS.Support@oha.oregon.gov](mailto:PGS.Support@oha.oregon.gov)

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HSD/Problem-Gambling/Pages/Prevention.aspx>