

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH GAMBLING: FOCUS GROUP & SURVEY FINDINGS FROM PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF YOUTH



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Oregon Health Authority Problem Gambling Services and the Oregon Council on Problem Gambling are committed to understanding gambling behaviors and attitudes within, particularly underrepresented groups of interest, including youth. This is one in a series of focus group initiatives to better understand Oregonian's awareness regarding gambling and gambling-related harms, including their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors to support programming across the continuum of services.



Collaboration with OHA Problem Gambling Services, county Problem Gambling Prevention Specialists, and funding from the Oregon Council on Problem Gambling made this project possible.

Prepared by Problem Gambling Solutions, Inc.



INTRODUCTION & METHOD

PROJECT PURPOSE

Youth gambling in Oregon needs to be elevated to a public health priority due to its accessibility and youth vulnerability to gambling-related problems. Parents and caregivers play a key role as a critical source of information for youth, making their perspective crucial in youth gambling prevention programming. To complement large-scale survey health research in the state and gain a deeper understanding of parents' and caregivers' awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of youth gambling, this project employed a mixed-methods approach, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. Findings will carry implications for initiatives and policies aimed at preventing gambling harm in youths.

RECRUITMENT

Participating county prevention teams recruited participants within their local communities by leveraging existing relationships, distributing flyers, offering incentives, and utilizing word of mouth. Inclusion criteria initially included being a parent or caregiver of middle- or high-school youth in Oregon; however, groups expanded to include parents of elementary-school- and college-aged youth.

DATA COLLECTION

Focus groups were conducted with parents and caregivers of middle-school and high-school-aged youth. Focus groups are a form of qualitative research using moderated discussions among a small group of people to explore perceptions about a specific topic, which provides an opportunity to gather rich, in-depth data from multiple perspectives as group members build upon one another. Community-level Problem Gambling Prevention Specialists organized and led five focus groups, representing Benton, Lane, Multnomah, and Polk Counties; two of the focus groups were held in Multnomah County. Two focus groups were conducted in Spanish, and three in English. For additional insights, focus group participants were also asked to complete a survey. The survey response rate was low and represents a subsample of the focus group participants.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed, with insights drawn from a thematic analysis of the transcripts. Initial findings were presented to the focus group moderators and discussed in the context of their observations from the groups, which are integrated into the results reported.



SURVEY FINDINGS

Focus group participants were invited to complete a survey after their focus group discussion. The survey sample included 17 of the focus group participants.

Experience & Perceptions of Gambling

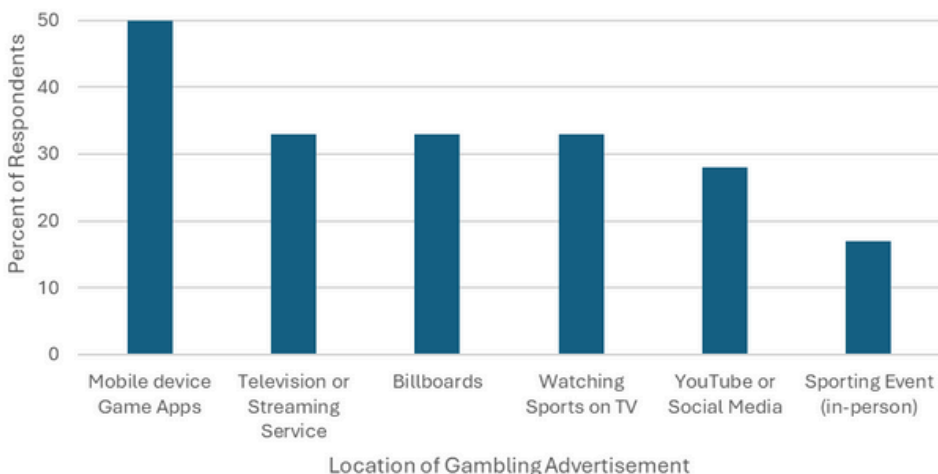
76% of respondents reported that they knew at least a little bit about gambling, and 71% about the signs of problem gambling. Half reported that their children had gambled before, and one-quarter were unsure. 31% also reported that their children and/or their peers gamble regularly.

Sample Demographics (n)

Gender	
Female	16
Male	1
School Level of at Least One Child*	
Pre-K	3
Elementary school	8
Middle school	6
High school	8
College	2
Race	
White	8
Hispanic or Latino	7
Black	1
White & Native American	1

**Respondents with multiple children may report multiple categories*

Figure 1. Locations where respondents report their children view gambling advertisements



Respondents endorsed several ways that their children are exposed to gambling. Exposure occurs primarily through family members, peers, and social media, followed by advertisements, movies and television, and school. Parents reported that advertisements are viewed by youth in a variety of ways (Figure 1).

Screen Restrictions

81% of respondents reported having screen restrictions for their children. The type of restrictions included limiting the types of content their children are allowed to watch, time spent on devices, parental controls on applications and streaming services, and supervision while using devices.



Increasing Access to Knowledge

About one-third of participants felt youth should start learning about the risks associated with gambling in middle school, while over two-thirds thought it should begin even earlier, and 40% believe that gambling is a problem for youth who are their children's age. In general, those who reported that gambling is a problem among youth their children's age had a middle- or high-school-aged youth in the home. Two-thirds of participants reported having discussed the risks of gambling with their children at some point, which was not related to whether they believed gambling was a problem. Discussions include:

- Possible consequences of gambling, both negative and positive
- Being responsible with money, including having a budget
- Discussing gambling as an activity that can begin as fun, with the potential to turn into a problem
- Highlighting the risk of losing control

Most respondents (86%) reported feeling at least somewhat confident that they could find help if their child were experiencing problems with gambling, noting that support groups, open conversations, and counseling were likely to help. All parents were interested in learning more about youth gambling, with particular interest in learning more about how to have conversations, how to identify gambling problems, and general education on gambling and youth.

Fewer than half (44%) of respondents had tried to find information about addictive behaviors in youth, including substance use, problem gambling, or problem video gaming. Of those who did, most looked on the internet, and few utilized resources from social media, asked a medical professional, or asked a friend or family member.



FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Five focus groups took place, two in Spanish (n = 5, n = 12) and three in English (n = 6, n = 6, n = 11). Participants included parents of children preschool- through college-aged.

Awareness of Youth Gambling

By and large, participants were unaware of youth gambling. The majority of participants entered the groups without prior concern about youth gambling, evidenced by explicit statements saying so, long pauses of silence when asked for examples, responding with a series of clarifying questions, or reflecting on their exposure to gambling as children.

Some participants discussed examples of gambling they have observed among youth:

- **Within family or community contexts:** Participants had observed relatives involve youth in Keno, gift scratch-it tickets around the holidays, youth play barajas (card game) and lotería with family, gambling as a common activity at cultural community events, and youth imitating family members' sports gambling.
- **Among peers:** Shooting dice, playing marbles, wagering on Beyblades (spinning tops), and sports betting, both with and without app use, including fantasy sports, March Madness, and live sports betting. Participants were also familiar with youth betting money on video games, friendly sports matches amongst themselves, or social media challenges that carry potential risk.

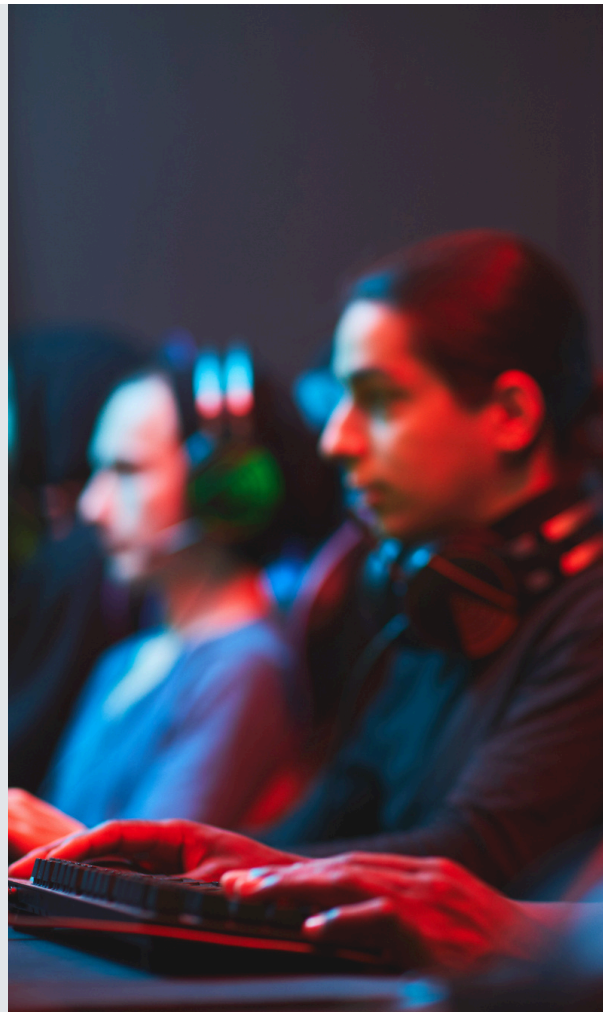
While the gender of all participants' children is unknown, youth gambling was largely discussed as a male issue. Gambling-related consequences that were mentioned included peer conflict about owed money and having activities banned from local community centers because of the associated gambling.

As participants did not have much prior information about youth gambling, groups tended to explore areas of concern as they related to the topic of gambling. **Excessive screen use**, in particular, was well-discussed and noted to potentially encourage gambling behaviors. Other specific concerns included wagering on social media challenges or hearing about nonspecific gambling apps being promoted at school. Importantly, there was mention that youth do not always know at what age regulated gambling is legal or what constitutes gambling.

The **gambling-like qualities in popular video games and activities** were concerning to participants, including raffles, trading Pokémon cards, and in-game purchases within video games. Trading Pokémon cards was well-discussed across groups, noting that this occurs among both younger and older youth. Youth reportedly barter with their cards at school, on the playground, and in after-school programs. Bartering was explored as a gambling-like activity because of the “high” experienced when obtaining a “good” card, and observing youth focus on the monetary value associated with each card. Loot boxes in Fortnite and microtransactions (in-game purchases) in video games like Roblox were noted as having gambling-like qualities because of the chance to win an in-game prize, using actual money to purchase the chance. Participants likened this to surprise boxes that are available for purchase in stores, in which there is a cost to purchase a surprise item; in general, games that use fake money or have elements of chance felt like they could be gambling to participants. Notably, these discussions were general, and gambling in video games did not appear to be well-understood.

GAMBLING & GAMING: SOCIAL MATTERS

- Participants discussed the influence of peers in youth gambling. While on one hand, social inclusion associated with gambling and gambling-like activities draws youth in, gambling consequences include peer conflict. Participating in gambling and gaming has taken over social interactions, and is perceived as preferred to in-person play.
- Social games, like Roblox and Pokémon, were concerning to parents for their gambling-like qualities and social implications, such as Pokémon cards carrying social status. These games attract youth of older and younger ages, creating an environment in which younger youth may learn from and imitate older youth, and older youth may take advantage of younger youth's naivety.



Youth Exposure to Gambling

Participants reported several ways youth are exposed to gambling:

- The most discussed manner in which participants perceived youth being exposed to gambling was through **advertisements**. A range of media advertisements was mentioned. Advertisements for social casinos were noted to pop up while using non-gambling apps and are perceived to have increased in volume recently. Advertisements for sports wagering were discussed as common during sports events, even feeling like it is becoming a central part of viewing sports. Additionally, parents noted that their children have been exposed to gambling-related content through advertisements heard on the radio and sponsored podcasts. Billboards for casinos were mentioned several times, particularly prevalent around coastal towns. Elements of gambling advertisements that may be particularly alluring to young people were mentioned, such as brightly colored signs for lottery products at local grocery stores, memorable jingles for online advertisements, and the central focus tends to be on big wins, with a minor disclosure to gamble responsibly. Notably, one participant mentioned that their children had noticed a sign for the gambling hotline when they were younger, which had prompted a conversation about gambling problems.
- In addition to advertisements, participants noted that gambling content seems to be present in **popular forms of media** among youth, including social media and television or streaming services. YouTube, in particular, was mentioned as a way that youth seem to be viewing content promoting gambling, both passively as a portrayed activity or actively encouraged by influencers.
- Less identified were the influences of **family and peers**. There was minimal discussion of participants having exposed their children to gambling in some way. Some noted that peers have a powerful influence on young people, and that peer pressure was likely to have implications for gambling exposure, but this was proposed as hypothetical rather than specific examples.
- During discussions, gambling exposure was mentioned in a variety of other ways that were not necessarily duplicated in other groups (e.g., walking past lottery machines in restaurants, family bingo nights, raffles), exemplifying the wide range of contexts in which gambling is present.

Notably, participants expressed concern about the normalization and accessibility of gambling to youth. Even if youth are participating in gambling activities without using money, they are developing habits and familiarity that set them up to start gambling with actual money once they are older and have an income. Participants are concerned about their children's financial literacy, worried about their financial habits in adulthood. Additionally, participants expressed concern about problem gaming behaviors, noting that youth may not realize the addictive nature of gaming devices and become overly absorbed when playing, even ignoring body cues like hunger or needing to use the restroom.



Efforts to Limit Gambling Exposure at Home

Of note, the low level of awareness for youth gambling that group discussions began with impacted the strategies participants had for limiting their children's gambling exposure. Nonetheless, concern for technology use dominated the group time. As such, participants shared a range of **rules for their technology use** that they enforce at home. Screen time is limited, and app access is both limited and monitored. Participants expressed that being aware of the games and shows their children are exposed to feels helpful, and monitoring chat or messaging functions on video game systems or social media allows them to supervise. One participant noted that monitoring chats allowed them to intervene as their child and friends placed wagers on fights between unsuspecting peers, something other group members had heard of as well. Some participants' children do not have a credit card attached to their phone's app store, while others do and require parental verification before purchases are authorized, and others monitor the electronic purchases that their children make. In general, when technology rules are not followed, devices are temporarily taken away.

To more directly address underage youth gambling prevention, participants expressed the **importance of having conversations** with their children. These conversations can be challenging to navigate, but attempting to hide or shield youth from gambling and its consequences feels more ineffective and potentially harmful when they are inevitably exposed to gambling elsewhere. Talking to children about gambling was discussed as difficult, and participants expressed seeking support in navigating these conversations, which may serve multiple purposes. While on one hand, conversations may be aimed more at preventing youth from gambling in the first place, they also may be focused on emphasizing financial responsibility, media literacy, and the impact of technology and gambling on the brain. Conversations may also focus on transparency in parent gambling behavior, sometimes highlighting strategies to reduce harm, such as by setting limits on time and money spent.

“Yo creo que a veces lo difícil. Lo primero es como iniciar la conversación como padres.”

(“I think that sometimes it’s difficult. First, is how to start the conversation as parents.”)

At the same time, despite a general lack of awareness of youth gambling prior to discussions, participants expressed **concern and hopelessness** in their ability to realistically limit youth exposure to gambling. Participants noted that while they can control what happens in their home, gambling happens in schools, internet access is overwhelmingly available, and sometimes there is disagreement between caregivers about limits that should be set for their children, making their efforts at home feel less effective.

School Efforts to Protect Youth from Gambling Exposure

In general, participants were **not aware of school efforts** focused on underage youth gambling prevention. Notably, some participants disclosed being closely involved with or employed by schools, agreeing that gambling is not on their radar. One participant emphasized that schools have a lot of urgent health-related topics to cover with students, thus the need for parents to be involved in gambling prevention education. Participants agreed that policies preventing gambling and education would be beneficial in schools, and some groups **identified opportunities** to integrate gambling content into the curriculum. For example, health curricula begin early, providing opportunities for age-appropriate content from a young age. Schools also provide resources to students and

parents on numerous other health risk topics, but participants were unaware of gambling ever being a focus. In one group, participants brainstormed ideas and produced a short list, including flashy, visual flyers with prevention content that could hang in school hallways or at local grocery stores, a guide to help facilitate conversations with youth of different ages, and financial literacy curriculum in schools.

"I think we've got a lot of opportunities as an organization to talk to kids about it developmentally, appropriately, over multiple years. And if we're going to have a lesson about it... We should have corresponding information for families about why we're talking about it."

Similarities Between Gambling and other Risky Behaviors

There was a general agreement that gambling was linked with substance use, largely because of the **neurobiological similarities**. Participants noted that people participate in these behaviors seeking the same feeling, which is produced by dopamine. The intentional design of casino and mobile gambling games to produce this response was mentioned. As such, these behaviors are **similarly addictive** and increase the risk for co-occurrence or addiction replacement. Substance use might impair decision-making and increase gambling-related harm. Both gambling and substances are used as maladaptive coping strategies, and some people might be more vulnerable to developing an addiction than others. In addition to substance use, problematic gaming and phone use were mentioned as comparable harmful behaviors.



Participants explored the **importance of talking to youth about these risks** and the critical value in getting ahead of problems. Participants urged for education to occur in school, with a natural fit to existing health curriculum, as well as having conversations and supervision at home.



RECOMMENDATIONS

INCREASE FINANCIAL LITERACY

- Oregon Senate Bill 3 (2023) set a requirement for financial education to be included in high school curriculum. As courses are developed and piloted over the next several years, preventionists can support educators by developing gambling prevention content to complement their lessons. Consult with educators to discuss how to best support their new curriculum, producing relevant, brief, and powerful content that will bolster financial literacy.
- Create materials that can be distributed to parents during these lessons so parents can understand the relevance of gambling in financial literacy and prepare parents to support their children.

PARENT TOOLKIT: EQUIP PARENTS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS

- Parents can have conversations and engage their children in activities that can help reduce gambling risks at any age. Developing a toolkit to guide parents through having developmentally appropriate and relevant conversations may reduce the overwhelming nature of this topic and provide parents with key talking points.
- Parents are concerned about a number of topics in addition to gambling, such as media literacy, financial health, and the wellness of their children. Alerting parents of another area of concern may be overwhelming and feel burdensome. Creating digestible information that even busy parents can find time to utilize will be critical to setting them up for success.
- A toolkit may include topics like what constitutes gambling, reviewing the neurobiology of addiction, sharing prevalence data on youth gambling, addressing common gambling myths, explaining the risks of gambling-like features embedded in video games, helpful technological tools to limit access to gambling or increase education on preventing gambling harms, and recommendations for supporting youth exhibiting concerning gambling or gaming behaviors.
- To support a variety of learning styles and available time to invest, including resources like audio content (e.g., recording or selecting existing podcast episodes), short videos, and reading materials of various lengths. Toolkit materials should be available in multiple languages with content tailored for cultural relevance and appropriateness.

TAILOR PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL CONTEXTS

- Effective prevention programming needs to account for perceptions of gambling across cultural, religious, and generational contexts. Whether viewed as harmful, accepted, or woven into tradition, gambling prevention can be accurate and responsive. Help parents distinguish between harmful gambling behaviors and traditional family practices.
- Familiarity with gambling varies. Assess communities for level of knowledge and create appropriate materials to support parents where they are.

PEER- AND YOUTH-LED EFFORTS

- Work with parents to help disseminate youth gambling prevention information to other parents. Harness youth perspectives to legitimize the problem and provide examples of youth gambling from their communities, such as data captured in youth focus groups.



APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP OUTLINE

1. Can you share any stories or experiences you've heard about youth gambling in your community or at schools?
 - Follow-up: How do you think it's affecting them?
2. In what ways do you think youth are being exposed to gambling, whether it's through media, friends, or other influences?
 - Follow-up: What do you think are the biggest concerns for parents about this exposure?
3. What steps do you take in your own home to limit exposure to gambling?
 - Follow-up: Are there certain rules or conversations you have with your children to address this issue?
4. What strategies have you seen or heard about that parents or schools are using to help protect youth from exposure to gambling?
 - Follow-up: What do you think works best?
5. How do you think gambling might be linked to other risky behaviors in young people, such as substance use or harmful behavior?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we didn't talk about today?



APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How old is/are the children in your care?
2. What grade are they in?
3. What is/are their gender(s)?
4. What county do you live in? (if you aren't sure, write the name of the city you live in)
5. What is your race?
6. What is your gender?
7. How much do you know about gambling?
 - None I know a lot about it
 - I know a little about it
 - I don't know much about it
 - I don't know anything about it
8. How well do you feel like you know the signs of problem gambling?
 - Very well
 - I know a little
 - Not very well
 - I don't know what problem gambling is
9. *Gambling is risking money, or anything of value, on an event with an uncertain outcome, with the intent of winning something of value. Some examples of gambling include spending money on scratch tickets, casino games, betting on sports, betting on card games, playing bingo or loteria with money, among others.*

To your knowledge, has/have your child(ren) ever gambled?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

10. To your knowledge, do your child(ren) or their friends gamble regularly?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

To your knowledge, through what ways has/have your child(ren) been exposed to gambling? (select all that apply)

- Family member
- Peer
- Advertisements
- Sporting events
- Learned about it in school
- Social media
- Movies or television shows
- Somewhere else (please indicate)
- I do not believe my child(ren) has/have been exposed to gambling

11. To your knowledge, has/have your child(ren) ever seen advertisements for gambling, like gambling apps, casinos, or the Oregon Lottery, in the following locations? (select all that apply)

- Television or streaming service
- Mobile device game apps (e.g., Roblox, etc.)
- YouTube or social media (e.g., Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)

12.

- Billboards
- At a sporting event (in person)
- Watching sports on TV
- Somewhere else (please write in where)
- I do not believe my child(ren) has/have seen an advertisement for gambling

13. At what age do you think people should start learning about the risks associated with gambling?

- Before middle-school
- Middle-school aged
- High-school aged
- As an adult
- I don't think this is a priority to learn about

-
15. Do you think gambling is a problem for people your child(ren)'s age?
- Yes
 - No
 - I'm not sure
16. Have you ever talked to your child(ren) about risks associated with gambling?
- Yes
 - No
 - I'd rather not say
17. If you said yes, what have you talked about?
18. Do you have screen restrictions for your child(ren) (e.g., time limits, parental controls, supervision, app restrictions, etc)?
- Yes
 - No
 - I'd rather not say
19. If you said yes, what restrictions do you have?
20. If your child(ren) was/were having problems with gambling, how confident do you feel you could find help for them?
- Not at all confident
 - Somewhat confident
 - Very confident
21. What do you think could help someone having problems with gambling?
22. How interested are you in learning more about gambling and how it affects people your child(ren)'s age?
- Not at all interested
 - Somewhat interested
 - Very interested
23. What do you wish you knew more about?
-

24. Have you ever tried to find information about addiction or potentially addictive behaviors, like drug use, problem gambling, or problem video gaming in youth?

- Yes
- No
- I'd rather not say

25. If you said yes, where did you go to find that information?

26. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Contact paige@problemgamblingsolutions.com for additional research materials and Spanish translations.
