



GUEST COLUMN: Early exposure to wagering on games of chance can have devastating effects

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BY PATTIE SCHAEGLER

Gambling has been called the hidden addiction because it is not physically visible until the very late stages (depression/suicide/illegal activity) and participation is often not viewed as a problem by parents, teachers and society in general.

However, as the first generation of young people to be inundated with gambling opportunities and messages moves into adulthood, we are learning that early exposure to wagering on games of chance or skill can have devastating effects.

The Oregon Student Wellness Survey, conducted biannually in all counties with sixth-, eighth- and 11th-graders, tells us that about 1 in 4 youth gamble and about 1 in 25 have a gambling problem.

The definition of gambling is “risking money or something of value on the outcome of a game of chance or skill for which the outcome is uncertain.”

In increasing numbers children are betting online, betting on sports teams and betting that they can do something faster or better than someone else.

According to the National Council on Problem Gambling, problem gambling is defined as “gambling behavior which causes disruptions in any major area of life: psychological, physical, social or vocational.”

Most of our youth do not gamble and of those that do, most do not have a problem with gambling. However, research also tells us that children who gamble are twice as likely to participate in risky behaviors such as skipping school, smoking, as well as using alcohol and other drugs. So gambling is not a safe alternative to alcohol or drug use.

We know that the excitement of winning a bet and the anticipation or possibility of winning can activate the same pleasure center of the brain that is activated when alcohol and other drugs are used. Gambling can become addicting.

We are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of talking to our children about the risks of gambling just as we do about other risky behaviors.

To learn more about youth gambling and how to talk to our youth, go to www.problemgamblingprevention.org. To seek help for a possible gambling problem, or just to ask questions, call the Oregon Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-877-mylimit or visit the website at 1-877mylimit.org (help and information is available via chat, instant message or email).

Locally contact ADAPT Problem Gambling Services at 541-672-2691. It's free, confidential and it works.

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