

Odds are that youth gambling is an increasing problem

A preoccupation with gambling causes an increasing number of teens to risk more than money – their health, education and future. In the past 10 years, the number of youth reporting serious gambling problems has increased by 50 percent nationally, according to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

“We know teens tend to live in the moment and look for excitement, and gambling fits this profile by providing an emotional ‘pop’ and immediate feedback.

Gambling at a young age can lead to loss of control over behaviors that lead to problem gambling or addiction,” said Scot Adams, director of the Division of Behavioral Health in DHHS. “Today’s kids can readily navigate the internet and find pretty easy access to things like online poker sites. Young people may also have poor control over impulsive behaviors that lead to problem gambling or addiction.”

Teen rates for problem gambling are higher than for adults, he said.

Approximately four to six percent of children between 12 and 17 meet criteria for a gambling problem, and another 10 to 15 percent are at risk of developing a problem. Approximately three percent of adults in Nebraska experience gambling problems each year.

When you know the warning signs, you can take personal action or help a friend or relative who’s affected by problem gambling, according to Adams.

Signs of problem gambling in teens include:

- Bragging about wins or lying about losses
- Increasing time and money spent gambling
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Excessive phone use, texting and/or internet activities
- Increased interest in the outcome of sports or games
- Personal or home items going missing

The major types of teen betting are sports betting, the lottery, card games like poker, and games of skill, according to the Gambling Assistance Program (GAP) in the Division of Behavioral Health.

GAP funds local prevention programs that provide education and outreach about problem gambling in local communities. “The Odds Are ...” in the Lancaster County Human Services Office is one of those programs.

“About two in three, or 64 percent, of youth say they gamble at home,” said Lisa Olivares, “The Odds Are ...” program coordinator. “The next most popular place was at a friend or relative’s house (48 percent). That means that some parents and other adults are condoning gambling, especially card games like poker.”

If you suspect a teen has a gambling problem, call the compulsive gambling hotline at 1-800-522-4700 for confidential help. To find a list of local prevention programs, go to <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/beh/Treatment.htm>.