



## The influence of parents on youth gambling

In Oregon as elsewhere, most parents and kids still don't see gambling as a behavior that can lead to serious problems, even addiction. A 2008 statewide study of Oregon youth and their parents notes that “high proportions of parents (regardless of whether or not they gamble) believe that gambling is a harmless activity, that youth who gamble are unlikely to have problems in school, and that youth gambling is not associated with alcohol or drug use”.

([http://problemgamblingprevention.org/data/OR-Adolescent-Report%20final\\_2008.pdf](http://problemgamblingprevention.org/data/OR-Adolescent-Report%20final_2008.pdf))

An Oregon focus group study of parent/child beliefs about gambling revealed that all of the youth had participated in some kind of gambling activities, while all of the parents believed their children had not done any gambling (Farrell, 2006).

Typical remarks from parents when asked about their child's gambling:

*They haven't really been around it that I know of and don't partake in it.*

*That's something that I personally probably wouldn't be talking to my middle schoolers about—because they wouldn't be exposed to it anywhere.*

*I know my son does like a football pool thing but I don't think it's for money—not yet.*

*My daughters have gone to little poker games and stuff like that they have with their friends but it's all really mild—they are pretty bright kids—they are not going to get themselves in too much. We're talking nickels, dimes and dollar bills—nothing bigger than that.*

*We're talking about \$20 if they're lucky. Losing or winning \$20 would be big. At that point my daughter would say I'm out of that. I've got too much respect for my money to lose it on something like that.*

One exception was a parent whose son had lost \$500 betting with a bookie:

*He likes to gamble on football games and baseball games and he's pretty much learned that you gamble—you lose—it costs you lots of money and lots of privileges. The way it worked is—he went \$500 in debt in one weekend and he had to work it off.*

The report notes that “this father’s story was compelling to the rest of the group; for many parents in the group, it was the first time they had considered that teens can get into trouble gambling.”

When asked about talking to their kids about risky behaviors, “parents ‘absolutely’ set rules about behavior with their children. Most common rules are about parties, curfew, drinking, drugs, sex, internet use, cell phone use. **No one had set any rules around gambling; it simply did not occur to them.**”

When youth were asked whether they gambled with their families at home, typical responses included:

*I play with my family—like poker mostly—just college stuff like that—never for very much money—just enough to make it worth doing because my parents don't really like to gamble if it's for nothing.*

*With my extended family we had a big poker tournament—it was like \$20 bucks to buy in and the winner walked away with like \$300.*

*At a friend of mine's house the parents—the adults have a thing and the little kids have their own little thing and the teenagers have their own little thing.*

*Yeah like me and my family go to this like Super Bowl party every year and my mom and dad buy some squares and then they buy me and my sister some squares just to share—we never win—my parents do but me and my sister never do*

Here are some comments made by youth in the focus groups as to why gambling is generally not a high priority issue:

*I think it's looked at less seriously because with drugs they generally have some sort of addictive substance in them but with the gambling problem it's really just coming from you.*

*Like it's not even really a chemical dependency or anything so people don't really see it as so bad—not like, oh they're addicted to nicotine or something like that.*

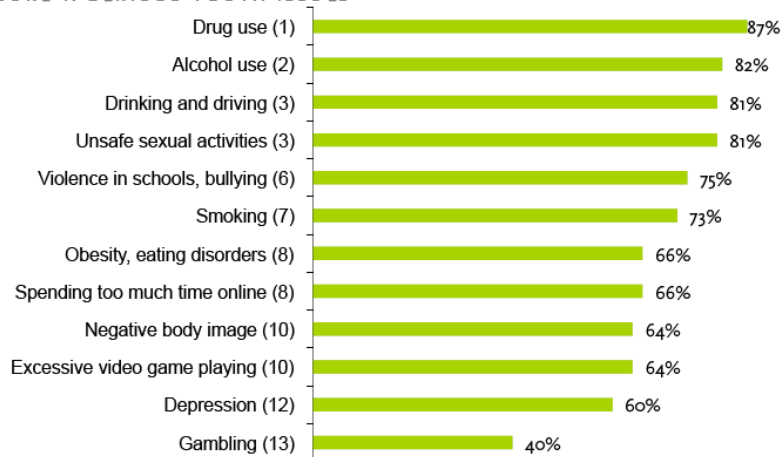
Finally, there were a few examples of parents who had addressed gambling with their kids, such as this focus group participant:

*We've had that conversation with both my middle schooler and his younger brother and treat it in the same vane as any other potential addictive behavior so it goes in the same category as alcohol and drugs and cigarettes. But it also comes into play I think legitimately in terms of how to maintain ones finances—to teach them as they get older the pros and cons of spending their money versus saving their money—the things they spend it on and the things they are saving for and having goals. I think it is somewhat akin to the same conversation as gambling as the same conversation about a credit card offer that you get in the mail when you go off to college. What are you going to do when you start receiving these—and debit cards or phone cards or cell phones or computers that they take to college—I think it's all part of teaching them appropriate behavior with regard to a large financial picture and the responsibility.*

A new study from the International Center on Youth Gambling Problems and High Risk Behaviors ([http://www.youthgambling.com/Parents\\_as\\_Partners.pdf](http://www.youthgambling.com/Parents_as_Partners.pdf)) corroborates this phenomenon and points to the need to educate parents. **The majority (66%) of parents report they “rarely” or “never” have conversations with their child about gambling; further:**

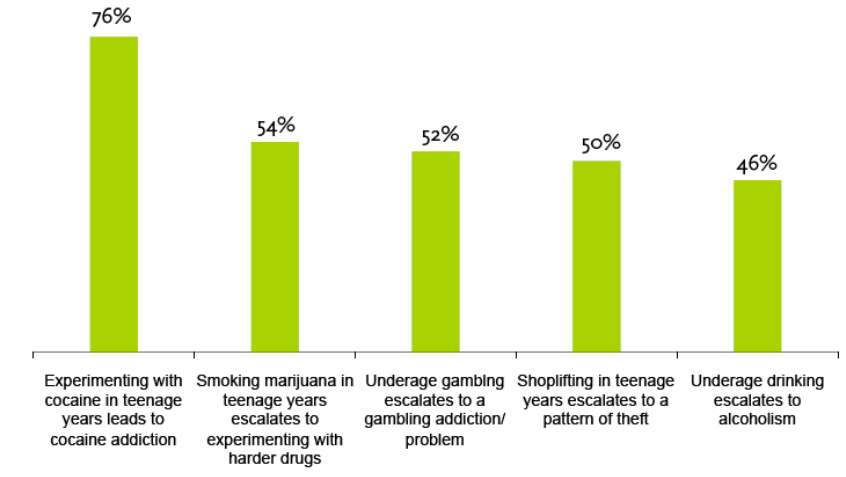
### **Gambling isn't high on the list of concerns parents have for their kids**

FIGURE 1: SERIOUS YOUTH ISSUES



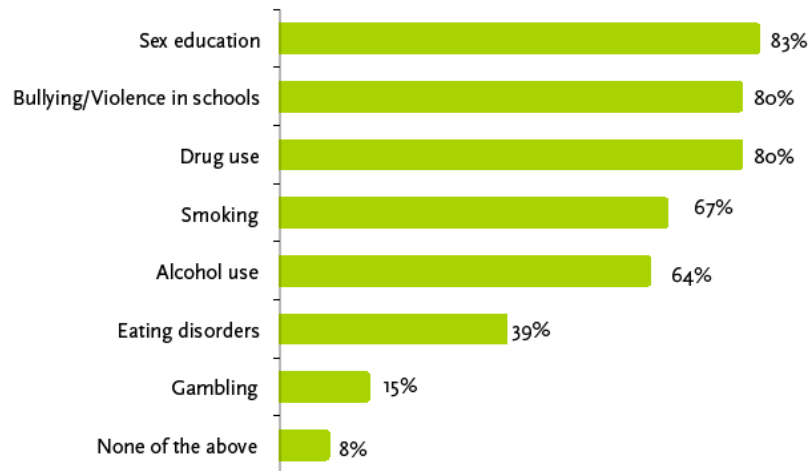
## Parents act inconsistently: they believe youth gambling can be harmful, yet don't talk to their kids about it:

FIGURE 15: PARENTS BELIEVE EXPERIMENTATION IN TEENAGE YEARS LEADS TO SERIOUS PROBLEMS



## Few/no materials coming from schools re: youth gambling

FIGURE 25: TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS CHILDREN HAVE BROUGHT HOME FROM SCHOOL



As the authors of this study state, “This research highlights the paradoxes of parental attitudes toward youth gambling. While parents express strong opinions against underage gambling, their actions contradict this stance. The majority believe that, in addition to being highly addictive, gambling can also adversely affect work performance and friendships. Over half of parents believe underage

gambling can escalate to a gambling addiction/problem, and approximately two-thirds of parents do not condone teenage gambling. Despite this, most parents report they rarely or never have conversations with their child about gambling and/or gambling-related issues. This may explain why other DECODE research shows that among underage youth reporting gambling activity in the last 12 months, a majority believe their parents were “indifferent” to their participation in these activities. Without clear anti-gambling messaging from parents, it is unclear where teens will get them.”

“When parents learn more about the potential risks of youth gambling, they do a better job of helping their kids make different choices about using their leisure time,” says Paul D. Potter, Manager of Oregon Problem Gambling Services. “When we hear parents say, ‘What’s the harm in kids playing poker? At least I know where they are. They could be doing much worse things.’, it tells us that they haven’t seen the real data,” said Potter. “If they did, they’d think twice.”

Sources:

DECODE & Derevensky, J. et al (July 1, 2009) *Parents as Partners Qualitative National Findings* International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High Risk Behaviors, Montreal, Quebec.

Farrell, P. (2006) *Oregon Teens and Parents Perceptions of Teenage Gambling*. Oregon Partnership, Portland, OR

Oregon Department of Human Services (May 29, 2008) *Overall youth gambling down, but Internet’s lure draws concern, DHS reports* news release, Salem, OR. retrieved from <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/news/2008news/2008-0529.shtml>