



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



A family guide to talking about gambling online

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Introduction

There are many different types of gambling – from the National Lottery and instant-win lottery games, through to online gambling websites and apps offering the chance to win money by betting on poker, casinos, bingo, racing, football and other sports. Gambling online is particularly big business in the UK, with 2019 figures from the [Gambling Commission](#) showing it accounts for 37 per cent of all gambling.

This guide explores some of the risks gambling online can pose to children and young people, how to talk to them about it if you do have concerns as a parent or carer, and what you can do to help.

How much do children and young people gamble online?

While most children and young people don't gamble online, there is a small percentage that do. [Research from the Gambling Commission in 2019](#) found that 7 per cent of 11 to 16-year-olds surveyed had ever gambled online and 3 per cent had gambled in the seven days prior to completing the survey. Some 12 per cent said they had ever played an online 'gambling-style' game – namely one that operates like roulette, poker, slots or bingo but is free to play and does not reward players with real money prizes.

Evidence from [Zendle and Cairns](#) (2018) suggests that in-game mechanisms, like loot boxes, which involve an element of chance determining what players may receive, could be considered to promote gambling behaviours. This may be the case even if the mechanism is free to use. For example, some games will prompt players with messages like 'Log in to receive a daily surprise gift.'

Why does gambling online appeal to children and young people?

The high frequency of both online and offline gambling adverts (such as during ad breaks in TV sports broadcasts, and in public places such as billboards and bus shelters) can make gambling seem a 'normal' part of life, as well as fun and exciting.

Gambling online often includes chat and messaging features, and companies make the most of portraying gambling as a social activity to be enjoyed and shared with friends.

Direct inducements also play a role, with some online gambling games enticing players with sign-up bonuses or allowing them to win frequently when they first start playing, for example through 'practice modes' or tutorials. This can give children and young people the false belief that a winning streak will continue, encouraging them to play on.

Online gambling games can also resemble other video games popular with children and young people. Players might then falsely conclude that gambling games involve skill rather than luck.

Are 'loot boxes' gambling?

Players purchase loot boxes (also known as loot crates or loot packs) while they're playing a game using virtual currency they acquire in the game or by using real money. Loot boxes contain in-game items of unknown quantity and value. As the contents are unknown until the box is purchased and opened, there's an element of chance surrounding the value of the items received. For that reason, loot boxes have been likened to gambling.

In recent years, a market for exchanging, buying, selling and betting with in-game items through unauthorised third-party sites has also expanded. Six per cent of young people surveyed by the Gambling Commission said that they had bet with in-game items on websites outside the game or privately with friends or other players. One popular form of this is 'skins betting', which involves trading and betting with items that cosmetically alter the appearance of characters, weapons and other items in a game. This constitutes illegal gambling.

A [report](#) produced by the Gambling Related Harm All-Party Parliamentary Group (June 2020) recommends that loot boxes require greater regulation and should not be sold to children playing games.

Belgium became the first European country [to ban loot boxes in 2018](#).

How can I talk to my child about the risks of gambling online?

While the majority of children and young people don't gamble online, a much higher percentage are aware that gambling online exists. Thirty-nine per cent of those surveyed by the Gambling Commission were aware of the option to pay to open loot boxes in a game. This means that discussing the risks of gambling online around the following topics is important.

- **Age restrictions**

Gambling online is generally for those aged 18 and over (with the exception of the National Lottery which is available from the age of 16). Although signing up for gambling online when under 18 is not illegal for a child, the company providing the service would be breaking the law. Once informed, they would need to delete the account, including all personal data, and remove any winnings. As gambling in this context would be unlawful, the company would not be able to chase any debts incurred by a child.

- **A game with only one clear winner**

Explain to your child how the odds of winning on most sites are incredibly low, even if the site or app may claim otherwise. So, if the odds of winning are higher in the short term, the **long-term** likelihood of winning is extremely low. Remind your child that gambling companies are there to make money and, if they paid out more than they took in, they would quickly go out of business.

- **Cheaters never prosper**

Children and young people may see things online to suggest that you can 'cheat' at online gambling, either by using special software or through special strategies often promoted by online vloggers or websites. Explain that there are no guaranteed winning strategies and that gambling will always be a game of luck, rather than skill. Using any software to increase your chances of winning online not only breaks the rules of a gambling site, but could also break the law.

- **Gambling online is designed to be quick and easy**

Gambling online can be fast-paced, allowing the player to place bets or play games with few or no breaks in-between. This enables them to gamble large amounts of money quickly, even if each bet is for a small amount.

- **Gambling can lead to other online risks**

Using gambling sites and apps might open your child up to risks from other people online. For example, they might attempt to gain access to your child's account through trickery, viruses or spyware that may collect personal information.

- **What are the rules in your home?**

Creating a family agreement about what is OK and not OK to do online can help children understand that gambling online is not permitted. [Childnet's family agreement template](#) is useful for helping you do this.

What can I do if I'm worried that my child is gambling online?

If you're concerned that your child is involved with gambling online, there are a number of positive steps you can take.

- **Look out for the warning signs¹ including:**

- changes in mood, sleep/tiredness and behaviour
- withdrawal from social interactions
- sudden changes/discrepancies in how much money your child has or what they say they're spending it on
- struggling with schoolwork
- preoccupation with sporting odds and gambling activities portrayed online or on TV.

- **Remind them you're always there to support them**

Your child may not wish to reveal they're gambling for fear of being told off or punished. They're also more likely to deny it if their gambling behaviour has become problematic. Remind your child that you're there to offer support and help if they're ever worried about anything online.

¹ From: raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/behaviour/behaviour-questions-issues/gambling

- **Consider filtering and blocking tools**

You can use parental controls provided by your internet service provider to block access to certain types of online content, including gambling sites. You can also install filtering software to block access on devices. Setting age restrictions on app stores can also prevent children and young people from installing gambling apps.

- **Seek help**

If you're worried your child is gambling online and that their well-being is being negatively affected, contact [GamCare](#) for advice and support.

For more resources and information about gambling online visit:

GamCare – www.gamcare.org.uk/

GamCare – Big Deal? (for young people) – www.bigdeal.org.uk/

Gambling Commission – [Gambling safely: guidance for parents](#)

Childnet – [Family agreement](#)

Help and support:

[Meic](#) – A confidential, anonymous, and free bilingual helpline service available to children and young people in Wales up to the age of 25.

[Childline](#) – A free, private and confidential service available to anyone under 19 in the UK. Whatever the worry, they are there to listen.

[NSPCC](#) – A national charity working to protect children and prevent abuse, the NSPCC offers a dedicated helpline with professional counsellors.

[CEOP](#) – The Child Exploitation and Online Protection website is where you can safely and securely report any concerns about online sexual abuse.

[Report Harmful Content](#) – A national reporting centre designed to help everyone report harmful content they see online.

[Action Fraud](#) – The UK's centre for fraud and cybercrime where you can turn if you've been the victim of a scam, fraud or cybercrime in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.