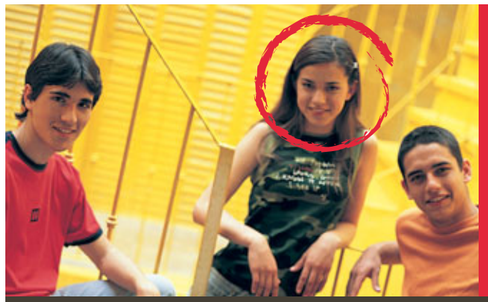


Anyone can have a gambling problem.

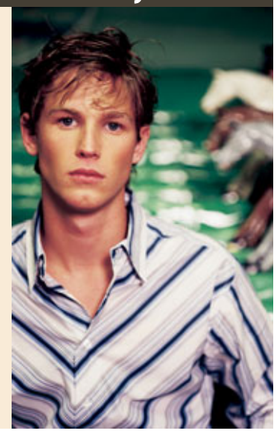
24 HOUR HELPLINE

1-888-ADMIT-IT

FLORIDA COUNCIL ON COMPULSIVE GAMBLING, INC.

Warning Signs of Youth Problem Gambling

- Time away from home unaccounted for
- Weekly or daily card games
- Intense interest in watching or listening to sporting events
- Preoccupation with Internet gambling
- Frequent conversations involving gambling
- Boasting about winnings
- Unexplained need for money
- Missing money or valuables
- New items in their possession unaccounted for
- Skipping school or classes to gamble or because of gambling



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888-236-4848

Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc.

FOCUS

Concerning People with Gambling Problems — *Fall 2003*

Up Close & Personal

Gambling Problems? Yours? A friend's? A family member's?

Call the FCCG 24-hour **HelpLine**
1-888-ADMIT-IT
(1-888-236-4848)

Hooked at a Young Age

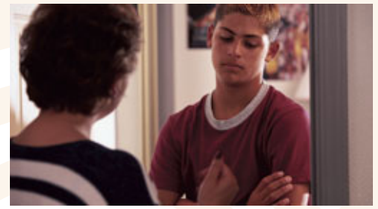
The anonymous e-mail was short and to the point: "Your son is gambling heavily and he is going to lose everything." For several moments, Joyce, a fictitious name to protect anonymity, sat there staring at the computer screen in utter disbelief.

This had to be a prank, she finally concluded. Her nineteen-year-old son, Carl, not his real name, was away from home attending one of Florida's state universities and there was no way he would have the time, the money or the inclination to get into that kind of trouble. Or was there? An ill-defined something in the back of Joyce's mind nagged at her.

Although the sender's e-mail address was unfamiliar, she fired off an indignant response challenging the message's contents and demanding to know who would be writing such trash about her son. Minutes later, the answers flooded back over the Internet in overwhelming and undeniable detail.

"I was floored," Joyce said, "when I realized that the person I was in touch with was Carl's best friend in college. He sent me a copy of an e-mail from my son that showed he was so deeply in debt from Internet sports gambling that he was writing bad checks, had stolen a girl's credit card and had even accumulated twenty-five credit cards, all charged to the hilt. It was so unbelievable! But then again it wasn't, really. When he was seventeen, Carl had stolen $5,000 from his father and me in order to pay off gambling debts. We found out that he had somehow been getting into the dog track and was betting heavily in high school."

Immediately Joyce called her son who predictably denied everything. Being the woman of action that she is, the distraught mother then contacted her husband and found a trained gambling counselor associated with the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. Within a short time, an intervention forced Carl into admitting that he had a real problem and agreeing to go to Gambler's Anonymous as well as to professional counseling.



"My husband and I always thought we were being such good parents by sending our son money whenever he needed it," Joyce continued. "But that came to a screeching halt when we attended Gam-Anon meetings and listened to our counselor. Suddenly we realized that money is like a drug to Carl and just bailing him out would do nothing but keep the cycle going. So, without mom and dad to take care of things, he got a job and finally graduated from high school. Now he's even working on his master's degree but it will take him years to pay off those thousands of dollars in debts."

"Your son is gambling heavily and he is going to lose everything."

When asked if she could trace Carl's gambling urges back any further than his high school years, Joyce said, "Sure, now I can. Hindsight is such a great teacher, isn't it? You know, even as a small child Carl loved it when I would give him lottery scratch off tickets as rewards. If I had only known how early a young person can get hooked, maybe I would have done things differently."

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(Contributions are tax deductible)
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Address_____
Home phone_____
Bus. Phone_____

Membership Categories

Full	$35
Sponsor	$75
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Patron	$500
Institution / Corporate	$1,000
Silver Corporate	$5,000
Special Gold Corporate	$10,000
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If so, select your area(s) of interest:
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___Public Info. ___Fundraising ___Research
___Legal ___Community Services
___Rehabilitation ___Labor / Management
___Communications

Signature_____
Date_____

Make check payable to the **Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling.**

From Our President

by Paul Ashe

Photo by Greg Dillon

Baseball, Motherhood, and Apple Pie – Fading American Traditions

Although most Americans still enjoy apple pie, other classic American traditions are being replaced by technological advancements. Gambling, an activity expecting to exceed $900 billion in legalized forms with an additional estimated 20% in illegal activity, has dwarfed the prior national pastime of baseball. Today it is almost unpatriotic not to purchase a lottery ticket under the assumption that doing so is helping fund our education system. Odds and point spreads are commonplace in all major city newspapers and illegal betting is freely advertised not only in the mail but on sports radio stations as well. How promotion for such blatantly illegal activities can flow through the United States Postal Service and be broadcast on our public airways gives one pause to wonder. In addition, the technological advancements of the Internet have placed gambling access in every home and college campus dormitory. Players no longer have to make a concerted effort to visit a gambling establishment. They can now gamble directly from their bedroom wearing their pajamas even though that type of activity is completely illegal.

This gambling explosion has brought on a new concern for motherhood. Parents have little control over their minor children being exposed to gambling activities via the Internet with easy credit card access. Gambling sites on the Internet now number in the thousands and are completely unregulated. Although legislation like Senator Kyle's bill has attempted to control these gambling activities, enforcement has always been a problem.

Adolescents are easily misled by pie-in-the-sky get rich quick activities. The glamorization of gambling with its million dollar prizes and media events, such as the recently televised World Poker Tournaments, can be an irresistible lure to young, impressionable minds.

The solution to these changes in our traditions can only be found in education, awareness, and prevention of adverse consequences. Our children have to be made aware of the fact that gambling, although popular and attractive, is not always a risk-free activity.

Sources of Internet gambling activities should place warning signs and cross references to help line phone numbers for problem gambling assistance. Our TV stations, newspapers, and other conveyors of gambling events should also be required to publicize the availability of help line numbers and warning signs similar to those required on cigarette advertising. Their choice is, be proactive now or reactive later. If that proactive stance is not taken, in my opinion, it is just a matter of time until the gambling industry will suffer the same multi-billion dollar damages that the tobacco industry incurred.

Although our traditions are changing, our sense of fairness and doing the right and moral thing should not be discarded at the expense of those adversely affected by technological advances.

"Our children have to be made aware of the fact that gambling, although popular and attractive, is not always a risk-free activity."

Executive Director's Update

by Pat Fowler

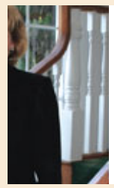

Photo by Greg Dillon

When "Child's Play" Turns Mean

Getting high on gambling. That's what thousands of Florida teenagers do every day and the negative impact is alarming. For years the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. (FCCG) has heard about this problem from young people, parents, school counselors and police officers. Now, finally, we have the data that proves what we already knew and it very clearly points out what must be done.

On page 4 of this newsletter you will find a brief synopsis of the Youth Prevalence Study recently completed by researchers at the University of Florida. In that report to the FCCG is irrefutable proof that gambling rivals other risky teen behaviors such as alcohol and drug use. With that information in hand, we can no longer afford to allow our young people to get hooked and just call it "child's play." But in a society that increasingly accepts gambling as a part of everyday life, there is a glaring denial that sports betting, rolling dice, flipping coins and playing cards for money can be harmful to a sizeable part of our youth population, especially young men.

In truth, I'm not certain that even the crystal clear evidence contained in the University of Florida report will penetrate the misconceptions that exist about teen gambling. Maybe this issue is like the highway intersection that only gets the traffic light after so many deadly accidents make people stand up and take notice. If that is the case, how many gambling related shootings in school stairways, as happened in south Florida, do we have to endure before the message gets through?

Somehow, those of us who see this problem for what it is need to spread the word more effectively and take specific steps to bring a halt to what is going on in our homes, in our schools and on the street. If only I could record and broadcast the conversations I have had with devastated parents whose children are thousands of dollars in debt and have been threatened with violence. That's why the cover article for this newsletter contains such a story, in hopes that it will illustrate what I am trying to convey through the eyes of one distraught mother.

At the very least, I ask that if you are a parent, educator, coach, school resource officer, or other professional working with Florida youth, please read the Youth Warning Signs on the back of this newsletter. Listed also is our 24-hour HelpLine phone number in case you or someone you know needs our assistance.

"If only I could record and broadcast the conversations I have with devastated parents whose children are thousands of dollars in debt and are being threatened with violence."

Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc.

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Phone: (407) 865-6200 • Fax: (407) 865-6103
HelpLine: 1-888-ADMIT-IT (1-888-236-4848)
www.gamblinghelp.org

Our Mission:

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. (FCCG), established in 1988, is a not-for-profit 501 c (3) educational and advocacy corporation under contract with the Government of the State of Florida. FCCG's primary mission is to help persons adversely affected by difficulties due to problem and compulsive gambling. The FCCG maintains a neutral stance on the issue of legalized gambling while seeking to assist citizens in need of support. Governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, the FCCG is an affiliate of the National Council on Problem Gambling.

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Special Focus

Over 117,000 Florida Young People At-Risk

The figures are in and the threat is clear. In addition to being at-risk for illegal use of alcohol and drugs, Florida's adolescents (ages 13-17) are endangered by illegal gambling as well.

"If some type of intervention and/or awareness effort is not realized in the state of Florida in a realistic timeframe, the existing large numbers of at-risk and current problem gamblers will continue into adulthood and develop into pathological gamblers."

A quick look at a recent report conducted by researchers at the University of Florida for the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG) spells out the issue of underage gambling:

- 70% of adolescents have already participated in gambling
- 40% gambled within the last year
- 11.5% are weekly gamblers
- Top forms of gambling are
  - Sports betting
  - Cards
  - Dice
  - Dominoes
- Adolescents are 4 times more likely than adults to become problem or pathological gamblers
  - Mean age for gambling initiation – 12.5 years old
  - Males are more likely than females to gamble weekly
  - African Americans are the most likely to be pathological gamblers
  - Alcohol, tobacco and other drug use among problem or pathological gamblers is much higher than among other youth
  - Problem and pathological gamblers report getting into more trouble at school or at work due to gambling
- 117,963 (12.1%) Florida adolescents (ages 13-17) in jeopardy
  - 80,608 (8.3%) are at-risk gamblers
  - 37,355 (3.8%) are problem or pathological gamblers (Higher than the national figures that range from 1.5% - 3%)
  - 28,303 (5.9%) are male problem or pathological gamblers

Considering the prevalence of illegal gambling among adolescents and the danger this poses, the report concluded by saying:

- ". . . many adults do not realize the options available to children to gamble and more importantly do not recognize the problems many underage persons experience with (gambling)."
- "Action must now be taken to ensure that Florida adolescents and their families are getting the message about gambling risks, prevention and treatment and that state government will institute measures to establish the funding necessary to broaden existing efforts and establish new provisions, including treatment for suffering persons."
- "If some type of intervention and/or awareness effort is not realized in the state of Florida in a realistic timeframe, the existing large numbers of at-risk and current problem gamblers will continue into adulthood and develop into pathological gamblers."
- "Educational efforts by the Florida Department of Education to raise awareness must be encouraged and prevention curriculum, such as developed by the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, [must be implemented] as an extension to the existing dialogue presented to students on alcohol and substance abuse prevention, education and treatment."

Special Focus

Spreading the Word in Our Schools

How do you effectively inform young people about the dangers of gambling? The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. (FCCG) concluded that you follow the example of good drug and alcohol prevention by integrating it into the regular course content within the public schools. If classroom teachers and counselors are already delivering substance abuse information to adolescents, the FCCG reasoned, then adding a gambling awareness component would be a very workable solution.

Following up on that logic, the FCCG set about having a prevention program developed that could be easily presented by middle and high school teachers. In the words of Pat Fowler, FCCG Executive Director, "The purpose of this information will be to bridge the gap in awareness and education of problem gambling among youth to provide knowledge of the risks associated with the activity of gambling."

Keyed to the Florida Department of Education Sunshine State Standards, all the material supports state goals and objectives established for the following subject areas: Health Education; Language Arts; Social Studies; Science; Economics; and Mathematics. As stated in each of the two teacher's manuals, this awareness effort is to provide age-appropriate information for youth regarding:

- Risks and consequences associated with gambling
- Impacts of gambling on individuals, families and society
- Odds of winning at gambling
- Effects of gambling on credit and debt
- Strategies for identifying or assisting someone with a gambling problem
- Approaches to accessing help for a gambling problem

While it would be best for students to receive the entirety of this program in a consecutive manner, teachers can utilize individual sections as they see fit after evaluating the needs and circumstances within each classroom and school. The FCCG recognizes that flexibility of use is vital and will assist educators in the implementation of its material.

As a final component in this educational endeavor, an informational guide was also developed so that school counselors could do preliminary assessments of student gambling problems and be able to make effective treatment referrals.

With such strong evidence now in hand from the Youth Prevalence Study that gambling is a very real danger to Florida youth, it is time to implement this program statewide. The FCCG stands ready to join hands with parents, teachers, administrators and school boards in this venture to protect our young people.

The FCCG stands ready to join hands with parents, teachers, administrators and school boards in this venture to protect our young people.

Photo by Greg Dillon

What's New

45% of the gamblers started gambling at age 25 or younger.

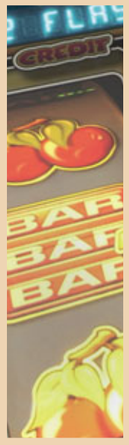
HelpLine Statistics Tell the Story

6,623 calls. That's how many times people accessed the FCCG toll-free HelpLine from July 1, 2002 until June 30, 2003. In its eleventh year of providing assistance to people within, and even outside of the state of Florida, the volume of contact is burgeoning.

While many of the calls are requests for information, pleas for help with specific problem or compulsive gambling situations abound. From the gambler who is in deep trouble to the gambler's spouse who is at wits end, the stories told to the HelpLine responders are full of pain and desperation. A sampling of information recorded during those calls does, in addition to the two charts included in this article, paint a picture that is well worth viewing:

Age Range / Started Gambling / Gambling Became a Problem

Age Range	Started Gambling (%)	Became Problem (%)
Under 18	13.0	3.0
18-20	20.0	5.0
21-25	12.0	10.0
26-30	13.0	11.0
31-39	15.0	22.0
40-49	17.0	28.0
50-54	4.0	8.0
55-60	3.0	7.0
61-64	1.0	2.0
65+	2.0	3.0
Total	100.0 (402)	100.0 (495)



- The majority of calls came from Dade, Broward and Orange counties
- 64% of calls came from gamblers themselves, the rest mostly from spouses
- Major reasons for calls:
  - Overextended debt
  - Relationship difficulties
  - Suffered substantial loss
  - A concerned person calling about someone else
- 50% of the gamblers owed between $5,000 - $14,999 in gambling-related debt
- Types of gambling causing the most problems:
  - Slot machines
  - Lottery games
  - Cards
  - Sports betting (mostly males)
- Snapshot of gamblers based upon HelpLine calls:
  - 70% male, 30% female
  - Largest age grouping: 40-49
  - 65% White
  - 20% African-American
  - 11% Latino-Hispanic
- 12% of callers confirmed that the gambler had problems related to alcohol and drug use
- A growing number of callers, 49%, reported no religious involvement – double from last year's figures
- 45% of the gamblers started gambling at age 25 or younger

Problems Caused by Gambling

(The gambler's view vs. the non-gambling caller seeking help for someone else.)

Difficulties Experienced	Gambler (Yes %)	Non-Gambler (Yes %)
Anxiety	56.0	32.0
Depression	56.0	33.0
Problem at work / school	22.0	17.0
Suicidal thoughts	10.0	5.0
Suicide Attempts	1.0	0.0
Family or spouse conflict	33.0	36.0
Family violence	5.0	4.0
Family neglect	17.0	22.0
Credit card debt	44.0	26.0
Borrowing from friends or family	42.0	31.0
Borrowing from other sources	33.0	25.0
Difficulty paying household bills	40.0	30.0
Using equity or savings	34.0	23.0

Note: Percentages are in excess of 100% since callers are allowed multiple responses.

In the Limelight

Louis Lieberman, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus of Sociology

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, C.U.N.Y.

Mary Cuadrado, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Criminology

University of South Florida at Sarasota

Some Observations on Youthful Wagering

By Louis Lieberman, Ph.D. and Mary Cuadrado, Ph.D.

Youthful (for the sake of brevity of argument, used to mean childhood through the late teens) gambling presents a unique problem when compared with the study of youthful drinking or youthful drug use. The uniqueness lays in the fact that virtually all adults born in the United States, when queried, cheerily admit, often with nostalgic fondness, their youthful gambling. Most of these people regard their childhood experiences of playing board games involving dice or spinners, shooting marbles, pitching pennies or playing cards as "play" even when small amounts of money had been involved.

Parents usually do not frown upon childhood gambling games when "funny money" is involved and may say something like, "It's only fantasy, just like playing cops and robbers and pretending to shoot someone. They know the difference between fantasy and reality." The flaw in their argument is that the behavior of violence in those games in which a child may use a toy gun to shoot someone is not sanctioned in the "real world" and thus is unlikely to become a model for adult behavior (although some psychologists have argued that it may for a few). However, it does become precisely that when a child learns to bet, experiences the thrill of winning, attempts to beat the system, and plans ways to beat the other kid at cards next time. Adult drinking and adult drugging have no such culturally legitimate childhood paradigms.

Few studies have explored the world of youthful gambling. Of particular interest are the gambling behaviors of those youths who seemed inclined to be risk takers (as defined by their adjudication and placement at a residential facility of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice). In this study of 569 youths in thirteen residential centers, we found that 91% had wagered money (or food or favors) in their youthful lives. Of these 518 youth, nearly a third (31.1%) cited betting on ten or more types of gambling activities.

Of particular interest to us were responses of ninety-seven youths who cited "other" and then wrote in additional activities upon which they bet. These activities were categorized as: fights (street and unspecified); animal fights (dog and cock); racing (foot, bicycle, auto); sex (touching, kissing); and "all others" (board games, hitting targets, etc.). Gambling activities such as these are rarely taken into consideration in studies of youthful gambling.

"Parents usually do not frown upon childhood gambling..."

Clearly, this population liked to gamble before entering the Juvenile Justice System. Was their gambling a factor in their entering the System? Nearly 17% of them said that it was. Did this population experience any other negative consequences (defined by the South Oaks Gambling Screen for Adolescents as modified by the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. [FCCG]) due to gambling in the year before entering the System? Nearly 84% said "Yes" to at least one.

Can we extrapolate from this study of juvenile offenders to the general population of youth in Florida? Obviously not. While other studies such as the recent FCCG prevalence study can tell us much about the extent of gamblers and problems among the general population of young Floridians, much would be learned from a new psychosocial in-depth study of youthful wagering that focuses on the relationship between youthful "games" (the types of gambling that do not appear in the preconceived, adult-derived measures of extent) and the unique youthful consequences (e.g., pressuring other kids to gamble, getting angry at friends who don't want to wager during games).