Know the Stakes: Frequently Asked Questions

**What is gambling?**

Gambling involves playing a game of chance for money in the hope of winning a prize or a reward. It can take many forms, including betting, lotteries, and casino-style games such as blackjack. Much of gambling used to take place in betting shops but a growing number of people (18 per cent of adults in the last four weeks) now gamble online.

New and sometimes unregulated forms of gambling have emerged online over the last few years. Some of these, such as skin gambling, are related to online gaming.

**What is the law on gambling and young people?**

In the UK, most forms of gambling – for example, on horse racing or roulette – are limited to over-18s. Children and young people can take part in some forms of gambling: for example, anyone can legally play what the Gambling Act 2005 refers to as Category D gaming machines (like crane grab machines or coin pushers) if the maximum stake is £1. At 16, you can legally participate in National Lottery gambling.

**Why might young people get into financial difficulties with gambling?**

People who gamble heavily when they’re young are more likely to suffer from addiction in the future – which means that the earlier that problems with gambling are noticed, the better. An awareness of the signs that a young person might be at risk of developing gambling disorder is useful.

If you notice that someone close to you is more withdrawn than they used to be, or that they make up excuses to get out of social situations, there may of course be a host of explanations – but it’s worth keeping gambling in mind as a possible cause. People who have problems with gambling might lie about their spending, or be over-sensitive about what’s happened to their money.

**What is skin gambling?**

Many online games popular with children include skins – costumes and camouflages that players can use to customise their in-game avatar and weapons. Many players collect these. Some are more common than others, which means that there is a rarity value attached to the most desirable items.
The value of skins has given rise to casino-style websites that allow players to export their collection of skins to use as currency. Players can then cash out their skins for real money on third-party websites.

The Gambling Commission – the UK’s gambling regulator – says that skin gambling sites must be licensed and have proper age-verification processes to prevent children from gambling. But in reality few skin gambling sites are licensed: they emerge and disappear overnight.

**Why is there talk of banning loot boxes?**

Loot boxes are virtual treasure chests in online video games. Players don’t usually know what will be in a loot box before they open it. As a result, there’s concern that loot boxes are a kind of lottery and introduce gambling-like behaviours to children.

Some countries have already classified loot boxes as gambling, or made moves to restrict their use. Loot boxes are not officially considered to be gambling in the UK. The Gambling Commission sees loot boxes as more like football cards: they point out that the items players receive cannot be exchanged for real money and that players always receive something in return.

**What are Esports?**

Esports, or electronic sports, are competitive video games played at a professional level. And, like traditional sports, Esports feature tournaments. Outstanding players compete in games like Fortnite or Apex Legends and these contests are streamed online. Children and young people often tune in to watch their favourite teams.

A flourishing gambling market has emerged around Esports. Much of the betting takes place on regulated online gambling sites that children cannot access. But many unregulated skin gambling sites allow skins as currency to bet on Esports matches.

**What kind of gambling is most popular with children and young people?**

Offline gambling remains the most popular type of gambling among children and young people. Among the 36 per cent of children and young people in the UK who have spent their own money on gambling in the last year, the most popular forms of gambling were slot machines and private bets with friends according to the Gambling Commission’s Young People and Gambling Survey 2019.
What proportion of gambling is online?

Online gambling is much less popular with children than offline gambling, but the number has increased significantly in the last year. In 2018, only one per cent of 11 to 16-year-olds in the UK had gambled online in the last seven days; by 2019, that number had **tripled**.

What proportion of young gamblers develop gambling disorders?

In the UK, around **55,000 children and young people** (or 1.7 per cent of the youth population) struggle with gambling-related problems. If you know someone who you suspect might have developed a harmful relationship to gambling, you can find out more about how to help them in our Top Tips.

Where can you go for support?

If you have questions about your own or someone else’s gambling, The National Gambling Helpline provides free support 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is completely anonymous. Get in touch on 0808 8020 133 or through the free, anonymous live chat service.

The **National Gambling Treatment Service** – accessible through the National Gambling Helpline – provides safe, effective treatment for gambling problems through counselling, intervention and psychotherapy.

You can also visit **BeGambleAware.org** to learn more about safer gambling and the resources and tools that are available.

The **CNWL NHS Foundation Trust**, which runs the Young Persons’ Problem Gambling Clinic and the Gaming Disorder Service, now treats young people between the ages of 13 and 25 who are struggling with gambling or gaming. You can find out more and make a referral on their **website**.

Want to speak to someone about gambling?

If you are looking for help, advice or support in relation to your or someone else’s gambling, please go to **BeGambleAware.org** or call the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133.