

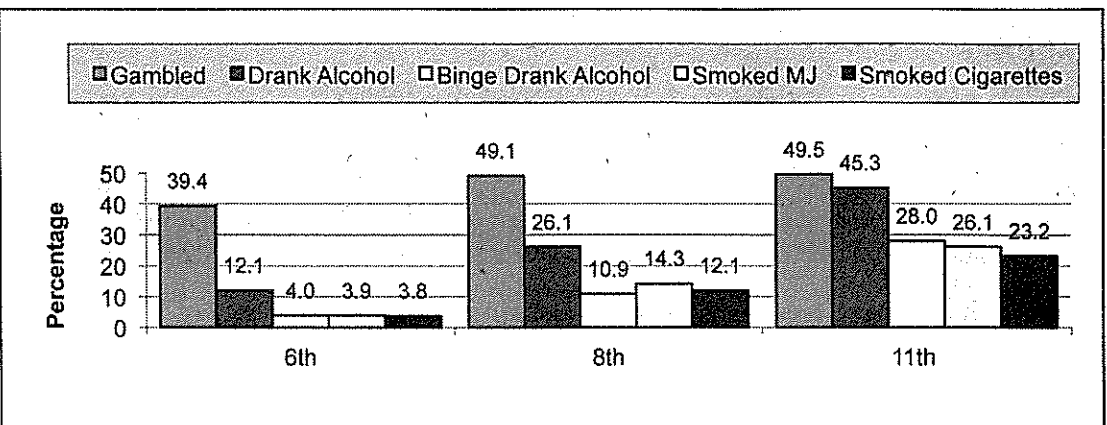
# Thinking about lottery tickets for your kids' holiday stockings? Not a good bet

**BY MARY ANN DEARBORN, LCSW, CPS**  
*Problem Gambling Prevention Coordinator for Tillamook County, Tillamook Family Counseling Center*

Today's is the first generation to grow up in a society where gambling is widely accepted and gambling activities are commonplace. Did you know that research indicates that youth problem gambling rates are 2-4 times higher than those of adults?

Surveys of Oregon teens tell us that drugs, alcohol and gambling often travel together, yet many parents say "they just don't see" their kids gambling, or they see gambling as a relatively safe pastime and encourage it as an alternative activity. The 2010 Tillamook County data tells us a different story: Gambling is the number one youth risk behavior for 6th, 8th and 11th graders in our county. In Tillamook County, nearly 40 percent of 6th graders surveyed and 50 percent of 8th and 11th graders surveyed reported gambling in the past 30 days. Tillamook County youth surveyed who reported gambling also reported higher than adult rates for lying about their betting, spending more time or money gambling than they wanted to, and feeling they can't stop gambling when they want to stop.

Both kids and adults can get caught up in gambling – a behavior that is associated with significant problems. What many people don't realize is that gambling can be as addictive as alcohol or other drugs for some people – and expos-



ing youth to gambling increases the risk of the youth becoming addicted to gambling as an adult. Here's why the adolescent brain and gambling or substance use are a bad combination:

- The brain's frontal lobes (where decisions and judgments are made) is not fully developed until the third decade of life;
- The adolescent brain routes decision making through the amygdala (emotion center of the brain), resulting in fight, flight, freeze or freak out responses;
- The adolescent brain is especially vulnerable to risk taking and impulsivity (seeking fun and easy entertainment);
- The adolescent brain is more sensitive to the effects of dopamine, the "feel good" chemical (neurotransmitter) in the brain that becomes activated by exposure to alcohol or other drugs, gambling, high-intensity media, food and sex.

Gambling is more widely accessible to youth than substances and unlike substances there is no saturation point, so gambling can go on and on in

a wide range of venues through various means (online, mobile phones, throughout the community), often without others being aware of the behavior until serious problems develop. Oregon Health Education content has been revised to require inclusion of content on gambling, yet, based on the findings from Tillamook County students surveyed, parents and teachers talk less to youth about gambling than substance use. We can do better.

The most important thing we can do is to talk to our kids about gambling, as we would any other risky behaviors, using these simple guidelines:

- Notice opportunities to discuss gambling. Help your kids make sense out of what they see on television, in the news and in the community.
- Discuss rules and expectations for behavior with your children and follow through on consequences.
- Be specific and concrete. When you talk about gambling, mention examples: buying a lottery ticket, betting on a sports event, playing bingo, etc.

- Be clear about your own values but avoid sweeping statements (all gambling is bad) or threats (if I ever catch you betting...). Kids feel immortal, so scaring them doesn't work, and threats invite rebellion.

- Emphasize and model balance and choice. If your own gambling, or that of a family member, is getting out of hand or setting a bad example get connected with help. In Oregon, that help is free, confidential – and it works (call 1-877-MY-LIMIT or visit [www.1877.mylimit.org](http://www.1877.mylimit.org)).

As adults, we play the most important role in the prevention of problem gambling behaviors in our kids. Think twice about your own gambling behavior. Make another choice if you are thinking of buying kids any one of the hundreds of advertised gambling products. And skip the Lottery ticket for their stocking. A better gift is helping your kids understand the best bets in life aren't made in card games, on the internet or with a Lottery ticket.