

Online Gambling: Intervention & Treatment

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

This document allows service providers to understand and tailor effective interventions for children and youth experiencing difficulties managing gambling. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on evidence-informed therapeutic modalities or best practice approaches for youth with problem gambling. As a result, youth are less likely to be identified and referred for appropriate treatment. In addition, most treatment approaches for youth have been modeled after problem gambling treatment programs for adults [1, 2]. This is concerning because adult-focused services may not address the unique developmental, social, and psychological factors affecting young people. Programs designed specifically for youth are more likely to yield positive outcomes [3]. Despite these challenges, interventions that focus on treating underlying conditions, addiction counseling, and personalized recovery programs can help youth understand their gambling behaviors, develop healthier coping strategies, and work towards long-term well-being.

Psychological Treatments & Therapeutic Approaches

The psychological treatments preferred by clinicians who serve children, youth, and families with problem gambling include modalities such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), mindfulness, motivational interviewing, psychoeducation, and solution-focused therapy [3]. Other effective therapies include dialectical behavioural therapy, psychodynamic therapy, trauma-informed care, family therapy, and the recovery model of treatment.

Harm Reduction as a Preventative & Treatment Strategy

An alternative to traditional abstinence-based treatment is harm reduction, which focuses on minimizing the negative consequences associated with gambling rather than requiring immediate cessation. There continues to be stigma around gambling, and those receiving treatment for gambling problems may experience shame. A harm reduction approach fights against harm, discrimination, and oppression; it favors positive change, as defined by the client. It is important to offer a person-centred treatment that focuses on the gambling disorder as the source of harm; responsible gambling messages are commonly used as a tool to enable informed choice and promote appropriate gambling behavior [4].

Integrating Support Services & Mutual Help Groups

Service providers may incorporate a multidisciplinary approach by referring to housing services, inpatient or residential treatments, and social assistance services; they may also try to collaborate with other professionals involved in the case (e.g., school counselors, social workers, and mental health specialists) to ensure comprehensive care. Additionally, they may

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offer treatment that involves mutual help as tools to control gambling behaviours, such as attending online virtual mutual help meetings at Gambling Anonymous (GA) or Gamblers Anonymous (GAM-ANON), pre-commitment cards, self-exclusion programs and financial limits to help control gambling behaviors. These programs allow people to ban themselves from specific gambling venues or websites for a period. Combining mutual help group participation with psychotherapy has been reported to be beneficial in long-term recovery [5].

By utilizing evidence-informed strategies, fostering a harm reduction mindset, and incorporating a network of support services, providers can better assist youth struggling with gambling-related challenges.

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