

Eaton County Substance Abuse Advisory Group Examines Youth Gambling

According to the 2008 Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth (MiPHY), one in four (27%) of Eaton County 11th graders made bets or gambled in the past 30 days. Gambling affects boys and girls equally: 21.4% of Eaton County 9th and 11th grade boys and 21.9% of girls made bets or gambled in the past 30 days.

In order to learn more about the types of gambling youth are involved in and whether they perceive gambling as harmful or not, the Eaton County Substance Abuse Advisory Group (ECSAAG) polled 112 youth about gambling behaviors and attitudes while attending the Peer Assistance Leaders (PALs) Basic Training. Held in June 2009 at Eaton ISD, PAL training equips student leaders to provide assistance and support to their peers, in their high schools. The youth polled identified the following:

- The most prevalent teen gambling behaviors identified in order of popularity were: sports betting, card games and online gambling sites.
- Most youth thought that girls and boys participated in the same gambling behaviors.
- Almost all students (87%) viewed gambling as a risk behavior.
- Almost all thought that negative consequences could occur from gambling. Addiction, loss of money, preoccupation with gambling, poor relationships, and academic failure were the consequences most frequently identified.
- Most of the students (86%) think their parents view gambling as a risk behavior.
- The majority (69%) reported that their parents did not gamble.
- Youth who had been exposed to adult gambling identified these behaviors most often among the adults in their lives: playing the lottery, going to the casino, playing card games, and sports betting. Less frequently, they are aware of adults engaging in electronic gaming machines or on-line gambling.
- More than half (61%) thought that their community viewed gambling as a risk behavior.

Students also commented: “People usually associate gambling with other bad things, such as drinking and smoking,” “It has been explained to us that gambling is considered to be a risk behavior,” “Gambling causes more loss than gain,” and “Everyone gambles.”

James Loree, LMSW, the Director of the Center for Addiction and Relationship Recovery, is a local therapist who assists people with problem gambling, shares his views on youth gambling. “Youth are at risk for problem gambling. We need to engage them, so that they won’t put their faith in a risky behavior that probably won’t yield a happy future.” According to Dr. Nancy Bernthal, ECSAAG staff and Eaton Intermediate School District Prevention Specialist, “Gambling opportunities have recently become more accessible for Eaton County residents with the opening of a casino in Battle Creek.”

ECSAAG will continue to review the youth data over time. Parents who are concerned about teen gambling may benefit from these tips:

- Set the example you’d like your teen to follow.

- Talk to your teen about the risks of gambling.
- Set consistent rules and consequences.
- Know your teen's friends and the activities they share.
- Encourage your teen to become involved in constructive activities, like the arts or sports.
- Explore software to block access to internet gambling sites and check cell phone bills, if necessary.

Resources are available in our community for problem gambling or gambling addiction:

- Gamblers Anonymous (GA) helps people who are having problems with gambling and want to stop. Gam-Anon helps friends or family members of gamblers. For GA and Gam-Anon meeting locations in our community, please check online at www.gamblersanonymous.org.
- For help by phone, the State of Michigan offers a helpline number: 800-270-7117 and 211 can also be dialed to locate local problem gambling resources.
- James Loree can be reached at www.jameslore.com or 517-285-4841.
- For information about ECSAAG, please contact Nancy Bernthal at 517-541-8767 or nbernthal@eatonisd.org.