

## **Curriculum Toolkit for Teachers and Learners in Wales**

**Addiction and risk-taking behaviours:**

# **Behind the Screen: Understanding Gaming and Gambling Harms**

# Introduction

**This toolkit has been co-constructed with teachers for use with both primary and secondary learners. It should be used flexibly to meet the identified needs of your learners within the context of your school**

This toolkit explores gaming and gambling harms as a health topic, supporting learning across the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience. It forms part of a wider suite of curriculum resources focused on addiction and behaviours that can affect health and wellbeing

Teaching and learning about addiction provides valuable opportunities to address key concepts across the Health and Well-being Area and, where possible, to link to all to the *Statements of What Matters*. It explores the ways learners process and respond to experiences that can affect mental health and emotional well-being, and how decision-making influences the quality of their lives and the lives of others

Through this learning, learners develop an understanding of what gaming and gambling are, how they can affect people emotionally and socially, and why awareness matters

By building skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and reflection, children and young people learn to recognise the factors that influence their decisions and to consider the possible consequences of gaming and gambling behaviours, supporting informed and healthier choices.

## You should consider...

- Whether the content of these resources are developmentally appropriate for your learners
- The appropriateness of the content of the resources and its relevance to *your* learners in *your* context
- How this resource may support prior learning for gaming and gambling harms

# How this Toolkit is organised

**Teacher guidance** is designed to support classroom teachers plan and prepare lessons on the topic of gaming and gambling harms

It includes:

- Curriculum for Wales links
- Why this learning is needed
- Important key messages
- Overviews of the knowledge banks and classroom activities
- Sources of further information to support teaching and learning.

Teachers should make themselves familiar with this guidance prior to planning for delivery

**Teacher Knowledge Banks** are a professional learning tool which provide teachers with the key background knowledge and understanding about the topic of gaming and gambling harms linking with the big questions to inform their curriculum design.

**Classroom activities** are suggestions to support teaching and learning in relation to the health topic. They provide a hook to engage learners in critical thinking, discussion and deepening understanding. They should be used flexibly and can be adapted to meet the needs of learners

# Why This Learning Is needed

Gaming and gambling environments are changing rapidly, exposing children and young people to gambling-like features earlier and more often. While most do not take part in traditional gambling, many experience gambling-style mechanics, such as loot boxes and in-game purchases, without recognising the potential harm

## Research shows that:

### **Young people can find it hard to tell gaming and gambling apart**

Chance-based rewards, loot boxes and in-game purchases can closely resemble gambling, making the difference unclear

### **Some game features are linked to gambling-related harm**

Loot boxes and similar mechanics are associated with higher levels of gambling participation in young people

### **Young people may not understand digital spending**

Many aged 5–17 struggle to recognise real-world value, track spending or understand the financial impact of in-game purchases

### **Game design encourages repeated play and spending**

Bright graphics, social pressure, limited-time offers and 'near-miss' experiences can reinforce behaviours and spending like gambling

Young people growing up in this digital environment need support to:

- Recognise persuasive design and gambling-like mechanics
- Understand the financial, emotional and behavioural risks associated with online gaming and gambling
- Develop critical thinking skills and digital resilience
- Navigate blurred boundaries confidently and make informed choices

Early education matters. Gambling-related harm can develop over time, with early exposure increasing the chance of harm later.

Age-appropriate learning in schools supports wellbeing and safer digital experiences

Resources are organised in teacher knowledge banks linked to each 'Big Question'.  
These questions should be posed to learners as a vehicle for curriculum delivery

Big questions	Knowledge bank	Links to statements of what matters
<p><b>Why do young people engage in gaming and gambling?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun and excitement</li> <li>• Social interaction</li> <li>• To try to win something</li> <li>• A sense of achievement</li> <li>• A way to escape stress or boredom</li> <li>• Peer and social pressure</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> </ul>	<p><b>Understanding gaming and gambling</b></p>	<p><b>Health and Well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits</b> – health promoting and health harming behaviours</li> <li>➤ <b>How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being</b> - connections between experiences and emotions</li> <li>➤ <b>Our decision-making impacts</b> on the quality of our lives and the lives of others – decision-making and assessing risk</li> <li>➤ <b>How we engage with social influences shapes who we are</b> and affects our health and well-being - Recognise how different groups can influence</li> <li>➤ <b>Healthy relationships are fundamental to our well-being</b> – healthy relationships</li> </ul>
<p><b>What are the potential harms of gaming and gambling on young people?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical health</li> <li>• Financial implications</li> <li>• Physiological and emotional effects</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Work and school</li> </ul>	<p><b>The risks and harms of gaming and gambling</b></p>	<p><b>Humanities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges</b> and opportunities that face humanity, and can take considered and ethical action - inequality, choices and decision-making</li> </ul> <p><b>Mathematics and Numeracy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>The number system is used to represent and compare relationships between numbers and quantities</b> - financial literacy, risk, personal debt, and its consequences</li> </ul>
<p><b>What are the wider impacts of gaming and gambling for communities and the wider society?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased contact with justice system</li> <li>• Economic and financial impact</li> <li>• Mental health effects</li> <li>• Housing instability</li> <li>• On going intergenerational affects</li> <li>• Education and workforce</li> </ul>	<p><b>The risks and harms of gaming and gambling</b></p> <p><b>Supporting young people and families with gambling problems</b></p>	

# Key messages for gaming and gambling

In the UK, under-18s cannot legally gamble for money, but low-prize arcade games may still expose them to gambling-like behaviours and harms

Gaming is not gambling but features like loot boxes and microtransactions use chance-based rewards. Understanding this helps make safer choices

Celebrities, influencers, adverts and peers can make gambling seem normal or harmless. Encouraging young people to question this supports safer decisions

Many young people in Wales play gambling-style games, which can increase the risk of gambling-related harm later. Early prevention and home conversations matter

Some young people are more vulnerable to gambling-harms due to family history, mental health challenges, difficult experiences, or early-access to money, but anyone can be affected

Gambling can affect mood, behaviour, relationships, and school, with wider harms over time. Spotting changes early helps reduce harm

Developing brains make young people more vulnerable to gambling harms, particularly when games use gambling-like features and 'near wins' that drive dopamine and continued play

Teaching young people about odds, money management and how in-game spending is designed to keep them playing helps them think critically and make informed choices

Parents and carers play a key role in prevention. Teachers can help by encouraging open conversations about digital spending and pointing out gambling-like features in games

Everyone can access specialist organisations for reliable information on gambling-related harm. These services offer clear guidance on education, prevention and where to get help

# Knowledge Banks

Knowledge Bank	Title
1	<b>Understanding gaming and gambling</b> An introduction to gaming and gambling, and how they can overlap
2	<b>The risks and harms of gaming and gambling</b> Why young people are more vulnerable to gambling harms and its impact
3	<b>Supporting young people and families affected by gambling-related harms</b> Key warning signs, protective measures and the support available

# Classroom activities

Classroom activity	Title
1	<p><b>Agony Aunt scenarios</b></p> <p>Discussion scenarios about gaming and gambling designed to help learners think through decisions and understand when and how to seek support.</p>
2	<p><b>How we are influenced</b></p> <p>Helps learners understand how advertisers use techniques like product placement and celebrity endorsements to promote products and services.</p>
3	<p><b>News reports and articles</b></p> <p>News reports and articles with accompanying questions to guide class discussion and debate.</p>
4	<p><b>The big debate</b></p> <p>Provides thought-provoking statements to spark critical thinking and discussion about gaming, gambling and the risks young people may face.</p>
5	<p><b>Observe, Wonder, Infer</b></p> <p>Images to provoke critical thinking and questioning.</p>

# Supporting learners toward realisation of the four purposes

Ambitious, capable learners who:	Enterprising, creative contributors who:	Ethical, informed citizens who:	Healthy, confident individuals who:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts</li> <li>are questioning and enjoy solving problems</li> <li>can use number effectively in different contexts</li> <li>understand how to interpret data and apply mathematical concepts</li> </ul> <p><b>and are ready to learn throughout their lives</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>think creatively to reframe and solve problems</li> <li>take measured risks</li> </ul> <p><b>and are ready to play a full part in life and work</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values</li> <li>understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting</li> </ul> <p><b>and are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy</li> <li>know how to find the information and support to keep safe and well</li> <li>take measured decisions about lifestyle and manage risk</li> <li>face and overcome challenge</li> <li>have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can</li> </ul> <p><b>and are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.</b></p>

## Teacher Resources: Sources of further information to support teaching and learning

- **All Wales Gambling Treatment Service and 24/7 Helpline 0808 281 9265**  
Referrals are welcome from any individual or professionals to the Treatment Service.  
Email: [GamblingService@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:GamblingService@wales.nhs.uk)
- **GambleAware**  
[www.gambleaware.org](http://www.gambleaware.org)
- **NHS National Centre for Gaming Disorders (London)**  
Specialist treatment for gaming disorder for those aged 13 and over. Online access from Wales.  
[www.cnwl.nhs.uk/national-centre-gaming-disorders](http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/national-centre-gaming-disorders)

\*Please note that the support services listed may be subject to change as commissioning arrangements are updated.

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**Ysgol Cynefin**

**Llanishen High School**