

Understanding Gaming and Gambling



In this slide set, we'll explore:

- The definitions of gaming, gambling and gambling harms
- Different forms of gaming and gambling – and where they overlap
- Why do young people gamble and why does it matter?
- The gambling spectrum
- Regulation of gaming and gambling

* This knowledge bank helps you understand the big question:

"Why do young people engage in gaming and gambling?"

Definitions



Gaming – playing a game of chance for a prize. It includes a game that involves both an element of chance and an element of skill, a game that involves an element of chance that can be eliminated by superlative skills, and a game that is presented as involving an element of chance, but does not include sport (Gambling Commission, 2024).



Gambling - gaming for a prize, betting money and participating in lotteries (Gambling Act, 2005).



Gambling Harms – adverse impacts that gambling can have on the health, finances, relationships and overall wellbeing of individuals, communities and society (Public Health Wales, 2023).

Different types of gambling

- **Sports betting**
Through advertising, apps, family members or informal bets with friends.
- **Fruit machines and slot machines**
Found in arcades, takeaways, pubs and seaside venues.
- **Lottery and bingo**
Exposure through family play, online bingo sites or scratchcards.
- **Online gambling websites or apps**
Including betting, casino-style games or bingo sites.
- **Betting with in-game items:** Using virtual items or “skins” (digital designs that change how characters or weapons look and can be rare or traded) to place bets online, often with little age checking.
- **Informal gambling**
Betting with friends, dares, card games or money-based challenges.



Blurred Lines: Gaming and Gambling

Gaming and gambling share features that can increase the risk of gambling-related harm for children and young people:

- **Shared mechanics:** Both use reward systems that create excitement and encourage repeated play.
- **Uncertain outcomes ("dopamine hit"):** Not knowing the result creates excitement and repeat play.
- **Random rewards:** Loot box style prizes rely on chance, like gambling.
- **Spending nudges:** Players are encouraged to spend real or in-game money.
- **Chance-based results:** Outcomes may feel skill-based but are largely random.
- **Rare gaming items :** Scarce digital items or skins (e.g., character colours, outfits, designs) that increase excitement and repeat play

Gamblification

When games include features that shape engagement and spending, often similar to real-world gambling, this is often called **gamblification**.

Key points about gamblification:

- **Feels like gambling:** Some games use random rewards or spinning wheels.
- **Designed to hook:** Chance and “nearly winning” moments encourage repeated play.
- **Linked to spending:** These features often push children to buy in-game items.
- **Blurs boundaries:** Children and young people may struggle to tell the difference between play and gambling-style behaviour.
- **Tracking in-game spending:** Small in-game purchases can quickly add up and children and young people may not realise the real cost.



Gambling-Like Mechanics in Video Games

Loot boxes

Pay or earn in-game currency to get random items that support game progression

Gacha games

Popular in mobile gaming; players spend currency to get random characters or items

Skins

Using in-game items as currency on third-party gambling sites. Skins change the appearance of weapons or characters but usually have no effect on gameplay

In-game casinos

Games like Roblox or Fortnite host simulated gambling experiences

These are often perceived as “games” rather than gambling, which increases risk for children and young people.

Why do young people gamble?

- Gambling behaviour is shaped by environment, access and design, not just personal choice.
- Young people are exposed to gambling through everyday spaces, including online platforms and advertising.
- These factors make gambling easy, appealing and normalised for young people.

Reasons young people give for gambling

- For fun – 78%
- Chance of winning – 36%
- To win money – 34%
- Easy to access – 31%
- Simple to play – 30%
- Something to do – 29%

Why does it matter?



Gambling Spectrum

Gambling isn't an all-or-nothing activity.

Young people may move towards harm depending on what they're exposed to, the environments they're in and how vulnerable they are.

Recreational or 'lower-harm' gambling

- Gambling-like activity that happens occasionally or for fun, without expecting to win.
- Examples include trying a loot box once, playing free betting games or small, occasional in-game purchases.

'Harmful' gambling

- Gambling starts to cause problems, such as guilt, stress or loss of control.
- Examples include chasing losses, spending more than planned or becoming fixated on rare gaming items.

Gambling Regulation

- Gambling is illegal in the UK for under-18s, but some gambling-like activities (such as toy grabber machines) are not age-restricted.
- Loot boxes are not legally classed as gambling, which means regulation is limited and young people are not well protected.
- Skin-gambling websites often have weak age checks and little regulation, making it easy for children to access gambling-like content and face risks like scams or exploitation.



References

The information provided in this slide set took references from the following:

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[Newcastle University – Loot boxes report](#)
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