

Gambling not for teenagers

By Amanda Eisele of Mexico Senior High School

It wasn't a problem 70 years ago. It was even considered immoral and illegal. But today, gambling is a big business in the United States--and can become a big problem for underage citizens who generally begin gambling in "innocent ways."

As a society, Americans love to gamble, in fact, the American gaming industry brings in 50.9 billion dollars annually. (www.counselormagazine.com/gambling) Every state but Hawaii, Utah and Tennessee has legalized gambling.

In 1748 Benjamin Franklin organized the first lottery in Pennsylvania. From 1774 to 1789 the Continental Congress sent out orders to stop all types of gaming, which continued late into the 1800s. In 1963, no state had a lottery and only Nevada was allowed to have casinos.

Today, the gaming industry is a booming business. Just between Missouri, Illinois and Iowa there are more than 40 riverboat casinos.

The downside to gambling is the problem of addiction, and it's not just for adults either. It is easier for teens to get addicted to gambling than any drug and the addiction has equally severe health risks. (www.counselormagazine.com/gambling) The same survey reported approximately 49 percent of the 15 year olds gamble, 63 percent of 16 year olds gamble, and 71 percent of all 17 year olds gamble. Teens who gamble have a 20 percent higher risk of suicide than normal teens. 47 percent of pathological gamblers abuse alcohol, and 46 percent become depressed.

The question some parents have is "How did my child get involved?"

Most teens are first exposed to the gaming industry through their parents and television and internet ads. Some of a student's day is actually supported by the Missouri Lottery. The Missouri Lottery has given nearly 2.5 billion dollars to public education; 2.3 cents of every dollar spent on the lottery goes to public education.

"I actually don't think of gambling as a bad thing, you just have to know when to stop," senior Blake Oliver said.

This is where some students, though run into problems. They don't know when to stop. They don't know that the legal gambling age is 21. Teens don't know that online gambling for money is illegal, and some parents aren't aware that this is going on.

There are programs in place to fight underage drinking, illegal drug use, and bullying. Programs like DARE teach kids at an early age not to get involved with drugs and alcohol. In order for kids to understand that gambling is illegal too, they need knowledge about the subject when they are young, before the problem starts.

For information about gambling problems, visit www.888BETSOFF.com or call 1-888-BETSOFF. For facts and statistics about underage gambling visit www.counselormagazine.com/gambling or www.americangaming.org.