

# Underage Gambling: An Unsafe Bet

By Mercedes Baldwin of Mexico Senior High School

*He calls his mom to ask for some cash. Betting on the game made him short for the week. In the background he can hear his dad rushing his mom off the phone. He's impatient; he always goes to the casino on Thursday nights.*

*Sure, he'll use the cash to buy some food, but he's also been invited to go to the casino Saturday night with a group of guys.*

The higher risk for developing a gambling problem in college comes hand-in-hand with increased freedom. The college years are full of at-risk behaviors, including underage gambling.

However, the root of underage gambling begins as young as age 10. Most children are introduced to gambling by a parent or close adult. This risky endeavor becomes even more popular in high school. In a single study, more than 30 percent of high school students admitted to gambling periodically. Some didn't even know it's illegal. ([www.888betsoff.com](http://www.888betsoff.com))

While high school students are mastering the art of betting on sports and playing poker, they look forward to "hanging with the guys" and playing in even bigger groups in college.

Some colleges are even promoting underage gambling. Poker tournaments are major events held on some campuses. Prizes such as flat-screen TV's,

stereo systems and other expensive electronics are given to the winner.

Underage gambling is viewed as "the norm" on many college campuses. While playing cards with friends and betting on sports games isn't uncommon, studies over the past decade show that playing the lottery, gambling at the casino, and internet gambling are the more popular forms of underage gambling.

Nearly 1,400 students completed a survey done within two major Minnesota universities. Of these, 84 percent of students admitted to gambling within the last year. The most popular forms of gambling were slot machines (68 percent); the lottery, including scratch-off tickets and daily numbers, (64 percent); playing cards with friends (41 percent); playing cards at a casino (40 percent); and betting on, sports (37 percent).

(<http://www.miph.org/gambling/gmb-collegestud.html>)

In Missouri, there is an organization which strives to increase awareness about the problems of underage gambling. The Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling presents facts and warning signs to help educate teachers, parents and teenagers at the website [www.mgc.dps.mo.gov](http://www.mgc.dps.mo.gov).

Students can legally purchase lottery tickets at the age of 18 but gambling on the casino floors is forbidden until age 21. Casinos have rigid security to crack down on underage gamblers.

Some college students participate in gambling to give themselves something to do. While it may be fun to attend the poker tournaments, or even play in them, most college students don't know they could become addicted or may be already.

*Just before he hangs up the phone, his mother confides in him that she wishes she could do something else with her Thursday nights besides watch his father waste away money at the casino. His mom makes him promise that he'll never let gambling be a part of his everyday life.*

*He'll get the money just in time for Saturday night out with the guys. Enclosed inside the envelope will be a letter from his mom saying she's sent a little extra and to go out and have fun with it. But instead of going to the casino, he'll keep his promise. You can bet on it.*

*Mercedes Baldwin, formerly of Mexico Senior High School, won a \$1,000 scholarship to Truman State University for her essay entry that appeared in her high school newspaper The Bulldog's Growl.*