At The National College, our WakeUpWednesday guides empower and equip parents, carers and educators with the confidence and practical skills to be able to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with children about online safety, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change. Formerly delivered by National Online Safety, these guides now address wider topics and themes. For further guides, hints and tips, please visit nationalcollege.com.

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

SPORTS BETTING ONLINE

Sports betting online involves placing wagers on real-world sporting events through websites, apps, and linked accounts. In the UK, licensed gambling is illegal for under-18s, yet young people may still encounter betting through sports coverage, social media, gaming spaces, friends, or adult accounts. With gambling content increasingly visible online, parents and educators should help children understand the risks, financial impact, pressure, and how to make safer choices.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

EASY ONLINE ACCESS

Online sports betting sites and apps are widely available and can be accessed through phones, tablets, computers, and, indirectly, gaming or social platforms. Some young people may attempt to bypass age checks using false details or someone else's account. Digital wallets, prepaid cards, and saved payment details can also make spending harder to notice, increasing the risk of discreet or impulsive betting.

PEER AND INFLUENCER PRESSURE

Social media influencers, online tipsters, and sports content creators can make betting appear fun, profitable, or part of being a committed fan. Young people may feel pressure to copy this behaviour, especially when friends talk about odds, accumulators, or predictions during matches. Gambling advertising rules aim to protect under-18s, but children can still see persuasive betting content in online spaces.

FREE BET OFFERS

Online betting platforms often use free bets, bonus credits, or 'risk-free' promotions to attract users. These offers can make gambling seem safe or low commitment, but they usually include terms and conditions that young people may not understand. A free incentive can lead to real spending, repeated deposits, or the belief that gambling is easier to control than it is.

NORMALISING GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR

Online sports betting can make gambling feel like a routine part of watching sport. Young people may begin to see odds, predictions, and wagers as harmless entertainment rather than as financial risk. This can also blur boundaries with other gambling-like activities, including loot boxes, skins betting, or casino-style games, making later gambling feel more acceptable or familiar.

ADVERTISING AROUND SPORT

Young people can be exposed to betting brands through sports broadcasts, social media, sponsorship, pitch-side advertising, and content linked to major fixtures. Repeated exposure may make gambling seem normal, glamorous, or expected as part of the sport. Without adult guidance, children may connect betting with excitement, loyalty, and success, rather than understanding that gambling is designed to make money from customers.

CHASING WINS AND LOSSES

A winning bet can create excitement and encourage a young person to try again, while a losing bet may lead them to place another wager to win back the money. This is known as chasing losses. Because online bets can be quick, small, and available at any time, children may not recognise how rapidly repeated decisions can become costly and emotionally harmful.

Advice for Parents & Educators

START EARLY CONVERSATIONS

Talk openly with children about how betting works, including odds, losses, advertising, and the fact that gambling companies are commercial businesses. Use examples they may recognise, such as betting adverts during football matches, influencer predictions, or online tipsters. Keep the tone calm and curious, so that children feel able to ask questions, share concerns, and discuss pressure from friends without fearing punishment.

SET SAFER BOUNDARIES

Use device, app store, and bank settings to limit spending, block gambling transactions where possible, and require adult approval for purchases. Check payment histories for unfamiliar withdrawals, digital wallet use, or repeated small transactions. These safeguards work best alongside clear conversations, helping children understand that online payments are still real money, even when they feel quick, hidden, or invisible.

EXPLORE ONLINE EXPOSURE

Ask which apps, websites, games, sports channels, and social media accounts children use around live sport. Betting content may appear through adverts, sponsorship, livestreams, tipster pages, or discussions between friends. Watching a match together can help you point out gambling messaging in real time and explain how it is designed to influence choices, normalise betting, and encourage spending.

NOTICE AND SEEK SUPPORT

Look out for secrecy around devices, sudden interest in odds, requests for money, unexplained spending, mood changes linked to sports results, or late-night phone use. Respond with support first, then gather information and seek specialist advice where needed. Organisations such as GambleAware, Ygam, GAMSTOP, and the Gambling Commission provide information about gambling harms, education, blocking tools, and support routes.

Meet Our Expert

Bubba Gaeddert is a Senior Lecturer and the Head of Events at the University Campus of Esports. He is also the President and Co-Founder of the Videogames and Esports Foundation, a charity that supports safe and inclusive gaming environments. With over 25 years of experience in esports, education, and media, Bubba is a global leader in promoting positive gaming practices for youth and families.



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