

KICKstart

PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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youth from Brantford, Ontario, travel to Halifax, Nova Scotia

DEAL OR NO DEAL

A workshop for a youth retreat on gambling by Kathy Douglas

FINDING WAYS TO LEARN EXPERIENTIALLY IS key in youth ministry. In our area we have found that monthly or weekly meetings are becoming rare. Everyone is busy and making a commitment to meet regularly is difficult, especially for youth. A good model for us is holding one or two overnight retreats a year, where youth engage in a game or activity. This seems to offer youth a sense of community and an opportunity to consider spiritual and social justice issues.

This year, a group of four youth and three adults organized a presbytery-wide youth retreat that included the Casino Game (page 24). The retreat began on Friday evening, with high-school-aged youth playing the Casino Game and then spending the rest of the time together unpacking issues around the topic of gambling. We considered topics of addiction, government-sanctioned gambling, the United Church's policy on gambling and accepting funding from gaming dollars, and what constitutes healthy entertainment.

The youth were put into "families" and as part of the game each family was asked to consider how they would determine where and how they would like to spend their weekly pay cheque. Shelter costs,

transportation, and food were some of the expenses they determined. Those decisions also included how much they would spend at the casino as they took a Vegas holiday. Once into the casino there were a variety of gambling opportunities and snacks to purchase. The "casino staff" (the planning team) were very intense in their attempts to help separate the families from their money as quickly as possible. We hammed it up for the game; actual casino staff do not entice players.

Following the game, and with the help of a guest speaker from the local addictions agency, we debriefed, talking about who really wins at the casino and when entertainment becomes problem gambling. (See "Some Hard Facts about Gambling," page 25.) Later in the retreat, we watched a video brought by our guest from the addictions centre that addressed teenage gambling and learned about the challenges many of us face in a culture that seems to endorse gambling with alarming ease.

We concluded our evening with a dance. The following day we played the "big screen" version of the game Deal or No Deal. This game simulates the TV game show and can be purchased.

The Casino Game

The total time for the game is about two hours.



YOU WILL NEED:

- play money and poker chips
- casino games (see below)
- snack bar items (we sold smoothies and nachos)
- copies of the “Vegas Families” sheets #1 and #2. Find these online at www.united-church.ca/sales/magazines/mandate. Find the link for the November issue, then under “Selections” click “Deal or No Deal” to find and print the worksheets.
- items to create a Vegas-style atmosphere (e.g., decorative lights, disco balls, tablecloths, balloons, music, costumes for dealers and casino staff)

PREPARATION

For the families:

- Count out play money into envelopes so that there is one week’s pay plus \$300 recreation money for each family. Make sure there are a variety of income levels throughout your groups. Below are suggestions of various income levels.
- Gather silly purses to hold the family’s money, to be carried by a designated family member. (This person often had a unique experience at the casino.)

For the casino:

- Organize a variety of games and people to run them. Suggestions: Texas hold’em, blackjack, roulette, horse races, slot machine, Wii games (big screen)
- Identify someone at a table, or wandering with an apron, to sell chips as people run out and need more. (We gave this job to our guest speaker. She gave an extra chip to any youth who attempted to answer a multiple-choice question about gambling realities.)

CASINO FEES

- each chip costs \$1
- \$5 entry fee per person
- \$5 for snacks
- \$3 chips minimum for betting or fee to play each game (e.g, three chips to play Texas hold’em, horse races, and Wii games. They get one chip back if they win Wii.)

HOW TO PLAY

1. Play a variety of ice-breaker games that eventually organize the youth into “family” groups of four or five. (15–25 minutes)
2. Give each family “Vegas Families (Sheet #1).” Using the sheets, they choose what kind of living expenses they would like to incur.
3. When they are done, give them a copy of “Vegas Families (Sheet #2).” Print a salary at the top of each sheet. Each family should be given a different amount. Some suggestions:
 - \$20,000/year (\$385/week)
 - \$40,000/year (\$770/week)
 - \$77,000/year (\$1,483/week)

Families may need to re-evaluate their lifestyle choices to match their income. (Note: This game includes families, but children are not allowed in most casino-type venues.)

4. Explain that all the families are going on a trip to the casino. They will each receive one week’s pay plus some extra casino money in an envelope. Before moving to the casino they should establish who will keep the family’s money (in the purse) to distribute during the casino.

Enter the casino and have fun! We let participants play the casino for about 1 1/2 hours. This time included snacks at the smoothie/nacho bar. (That cost, too, came out of the family’s money.)

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

- Let each family talk about their choices before and after realizing their actual salaries.
- Could they pay their essential expenses (added up from the second sheet) after the casino? Had they set aside the money they needed?
- How did they feel about gambling? Did they have fun?
- Did the family spend only recreation money at the casino or did they dip into household living money? How did they make decisions about spending money? What was it like to be the “holder of the purse”?
- Is gambling an acceptable entertainment activity?

Kathy Douglas enjoys the fulfilling work in the newly developed Presbytery Youth Ministry position for Huron-Perth Presbytery in London Conference.

SOME HARD FACTS ABOUT GAMBLING

EVENTS SUCH AS THE “DEAL OR NO DEAL” EVENT

provide an opportunity to tell the other side of the story about gambling. Gambling—any activity in which someone risks something of value on the outcome of an event that is decided mostly by chance—can be fun and harmless, but it can also exact a high cost and it is not risk free.

Several of the young people at the Huron-Perth Presbytery event were aware of other teens who had developed a problem with gambling. This is not surprising, given studies showing a rate of gambling problems among youth and young adults that is twice as high as that of adults. In 2006, 3.4% of adults and 6.9% of 18- to 24-year-olds reported a gambling problem, according to the Responsible Gambling Council.

Researchers Rina Gupta and Jeffrey Derevensky have reported that elementary and secondary students participate in gambling more frequently than any other addictive behaviour (*Journal of Gambling Issues*, Issue 2, August 2000). Types of gambling youth prefer include instant win games; lottery and scratch tickets; card, dice, and board games; betting on a dare or challenge; and sports betting with friends. There is a minimum legal age—typically 18 or 19—to enter a racetrack, casino, or bingo hall or to purchase a lottery ticket.

We shouldn't be surprised that young people are gambling. They are growing up with more exposure to gambling than their parents and a steady diet of media advertising promoting gambling as fun. Billboards for slot venues tout messages such as “Your next vacation starts here.” Every corner store countertop is littered with colourful tickets (while cigarettes are hidden). Service clubs and charities advertise the chance to win big, and television poker games promote the notion that poker is cool and a way to earn easy money. Internet gambling is also becoming more popular and the number of internet gambling sites has grown significantly.

In Canada, net revenues from government-run lotteries, video lottery terminals, and casinos rose from \$3.2 billion in 1993 to \$11.8 billion in 2003. That's a significant increase from the \$2.7 billion spent in 1992, when governments relied much less on gambling revenues (Source: “History of Gambling” on www.problemgambling.ca). According to Statistics Canada, the average amount spent on gambling per person over the age of 18 was \$524 in 2007. Problem gamblers spend a significantly higher proportion of their income on gambling than those who do not have problems.

Culturally, we have come to accept gambling as a legitimate source of revenue for both non-profit organizations and government and as a source of harmless entertainment.

In this context, it is easy to forget that some people develop problems in their lives as a result of gambling activities. Gambling can destroy finances, relationships, and a sense of security and well-being. It can generate stress-related emotional and physical health problems. Young people are not immune to these consequences and need to be informed.

HOW TO GET HELP

To find what resources are available to help in your area, call a provincial gambling helpline. To find a list of helplines by province, search the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse website at www.ccsa.ca. The website www.problemgambling.ca, while focused on Ontario, has some general resources about problem gambling. The website www.Friends4Friends.ca is aimed at young adults in Ontario and Nova Scotia.

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