

Addressing Gambling Harm

Ethical Youth Work Practice in Aotearoa

June 2026

Context

As the peak body for youth development, Ara Taiohi, alongside Korowai Tupu, the professional association for youth work in Aotearoa has responsibility for the setting ethical standards for youth work. Following a number of queries from practitioners and members of the public seeking clarification on the ethics of gambling, this Practice Note has been developed to contribute to sector conversations and support youth workers to navigate these complex issues with greater clarity and confidence.

Purpose

To support youth workers and youth organisations in Aotearoa to navigate ethical questions associated with gambling, including the promotion of gambling online and the use of gambling-derived funding within youth work settings.

This guidance should be read alongside:

- The values of youth work
- *The Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa New Zealand*
- Mana Taiohi, the national youth development principles
- Relevant organisational policies and procedures
- Relevant legislation relating to gambling and advertising in Aotearoa.

Youth workers hold positions of trust and influence in the lives of young people. Ethical practice requires critical consideration of how gambling is normalised, promoted, and financially embedded within communities and youth-serving organisations.

This practice note is not intended to shame or judge youth workers, organisations, or communities navigating complex funding and social realities. Rather, it aims to support thoughtful ethical reflection and decision-making grounded in the wellbeing and mana of young people.

Distinction of different types of gambling

Not all forms of gambling operate in the same way, carry the same level of risk, or are regulated equally within Aotearoa.

1. Lotto and State-Regulated Lottery Systems

Lottery products such as Lotto NZ are state-regulated forms of gambling. Funding generated through these products supports a range of community and charitable initiatives across Aotearoa.

While these products are still a form of gambling, they are generally associated with lower levels of harm than more intensive forms of gambling. They are less associated with rapid, repetitive play patterns that may contribute to addiction cycles. However, they still carry risks, particularly in the way they can normalise gambling and influence attitudes towards it.

However, youth workers should still carefully consider:

- Whether promotion may normalise gambling participation for young people
- How gambling is discussed within youth work settings
- Whether young people are directly exposed to gambling-related promotional messaging Youth workers should avoid encouraging underage gambling behaviour, including framing participation as harmless or low risk.

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2. Class 4 Gaming Machines (Pokies)

Class 4 gaming machines, commonly referred to as pokies, are identified in New Zealand research and regulatory assessments as among the highest-harm forms of gambling. Class 4 gaming machines are a state-regulated form of gambling, although privately operated under a state licensing framework. Funding generated through these products supports a range of community and charitable initiatives across Aotearoa. These machines are structured around rapid reward cycles, high-frequency play, and reinforcement mechanisms that can increase the risk of harm. Research consistently demonstrates that the harms disproportionately affect Māori, Pasifika, and lower-income communities due to factors including accessibility, socio-economic pressures, and the concentration of venues in certain communities.

Many community grants accessed by sports clubs, charities, and youth organisations originate from Class 4 gaming proceeds. This can create an ethical tension where community benefit is derived from activities associated with community harm.

Youth workers and organisations should:

- Openly examine ethical implications of accepting such funding
- Consider its alignment with organisational values and kaupapa
- Ensure transparency with communities and stakeholders
- Critically reflect on whether funding source may contribute to inequitable harm elsewhere.

3. Online Gambling and Sports Betting

Online gambling environments differ significantly from traditional gambling systems. Examples include online casinos, cryptocurrency gambling, influencer gambling sponsorships, and gambling-style gaming mechanics. Online gambling environments are also identified in New Zealand research and regulatory assessments as among the highest-harm forms of gambling.

Online gambling platforms are extremely difficult to regulate as they are often highly immersive, available 24/7, algorithmically targeted and heavily marketed through social media environments frequented by young people.

Partnerships, sponsorships, or funding relationships with online gambling companies require particularly careful ethical scrutiny. Online gambling systems are associated with significant addiction risks, often aggressively marketed, difficult to regulate and highly accessible to young people.

Youth organisations should exercise extreme caution before accepting sponsorships, displaying branding, promoting platforms, participating in affiliate or influencer arrangements. Such relationships may undermine trust, create conflicts of interest, or contribute to the normalisation of gambling harm among young people.

Note: Legal Age requirements

Lotto	No minimum age to purchase or play. However, a parent or legal guardian must be present when claiming prizes over \$1,000
Instant Kiwi	18 years of age
Pokies (pubs)	18 years of age
Casino and Casino Poker Machines	20 years of age
Online Casinos	Legally, the age is generally set at 18+, governed by the offshore licensing jurisdiction of the specific online casino.

Practice Framework:

1. Youth Work Values

Aronga-Taiohi | Youth-Centric

Youth Work begins with the realities, experiences, and aspirations of young people. A youth-centric approach does not assume young people are passive recipients of influence. Rather, it supports young people to develop critical thinking, make informed choices, and understand the social and economic systems shaping their lives.

Youth Workers seek to strengthen young people's abilities and contributions by creating opportunities for reflection, learning, and informed decision and are cautious not to promote behaviours that may expose them to harm and risk.

Aro ki ngā Hononga | Relationship-Focused

Youth Work recognises that relationships are the primary vehicle through which growth, learning, and development occur. Young people place significant trust in Youth Workers, and that trust can be influenced by what Youth Workers model both online and offline. We need to understand the power imbalance that we have as youth workers, and factor in many contributing systems that impact on where the power sits in the relationship with young people.

Strong relationships also create opportunities to have open conversations with young people about gambling, risk, financial wellbeing, online influence, and healthy decision-making.

Ahurea me te Horopaki | Culture and Context

Youth Work recognises that young people exist within wider cultural, social, political, and economic contexts. Gambling harm cannot be understood separately from the impacts of colonisation, inequity, poverty, racism, ableism, and other structural factors that disproportionately affect some communities. Ethical decision-making requires awareness of these broader contexts and a commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice.



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Te Koha a te Iwi | Community Contributors

Youth work supports young people as active participants in their communities and as contributors to positive social change. This includes supporting young people to critically analyse advertising, online influence, consumer culture, and gambling-related messaging.

Rather than positioning young people solely as individuals needing protection, youth workers can support young people to become informed navigators of systems and contributors to conversations about wellbeing, equity, and community responsibility.

2. Key Ethical Principles

The Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa sets the ethical standards for youth workers and organisations. The nuance and complexity of ethical practice lie in applying the clauses to the situations encountered by youth workers. Promotion of gambling by a youth worker or youth organisation requires careful ethical consideration. Situations range from buying an Instant Kiwi for a young person as a gift, running a poker night, through to promoting online gambling as a legitimate way to earn money.

The following table identifies the most relevant clauses and outlines ethical implications for reflection.

<p>Clause 2: Whanonga Matatika Behaviour Covered by the Code</p> <p>Youth workers are positive role models. This Code covers any behaviour, whether connected to their work or personal time, in person and online, when it relates to or affects a youth worker's practice.</p>	<p>This clause is highly relevant to gambling promotion, particularly in online contexts. Participation in betting culture outside of work hours may take a number of forms including sports betting posts, gambling memes, livestream gambling, online casino engagement, or reposting betting wins. Even where these activities occur privately or outside work hours, ethical obligations remain when they <u>relate to or affects a youth worker's practice</u>, for example where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people may view the content • Content influences professional relationships • Gambling behaviour is normalised • Young people interpret behaviour as endorsement <p>This clause is particularly important because digital environments blur personal and professional boundaries. Screenshots, resharing, algorithms and social media overlap mean "private" content may still affect youth work relationships.</p> <p>Youth workers are not expected to cease having personal lives or sharing opinions online. However, ethical tensions arise where publicly visible behaviour may influence young people, undermine professional trust, or normalise harmful behaviours within communities where youth workers hold positions of authority and relational influence.</p>
<p>Clause 4: Ngākau Pono Integrity</p> <p>Youth workers act with integrity, honesty, and impartiality.</p> <p>Youth workers will not engage in activities that would bring young people, colleagues, their organisation, or Youth Work into disrepute.</p>	<p>This clause raises important questions regarding public gambling promotion, online betting culture, gambling sponsorship and acceptance of gambling-derived funding.</p> <p>Integrity requires youth workers and organisations to critically consider whether public association with gambling aligns with the values of ethical youth work. Thoughtful reflection is required around different forms of gambling, rather than treating all forms of gambling as identical.</p>
<p>Clause 11: Ā-Ipurangi Youth Work Online</p> <p>The Code explicitly recognises that Youth Work occurs within online environments.</p>	<p>Young people are increasingly exposed to gambling through platforms such as TikTok, Twitch, Discord, YouTube, livestream gambling, esports betting, loot boxes, and influencer culture. Many young people may not identify these experiences as gambling.</p> <p>Digital environments create unique ethical concerns because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algorithms repeatedly expose young people to content • Livestream culture normalises betting • Gambling is often presented as entertainment • Influencer marketing blurs advertising boundaries • Parasocial relationships increase influence. <p>Youth workers may unintentionally normalise gambling through reposting betting content, engaging in sports betting discussions, or participating in gambling-related trends, humour, and memes.</p> <p>This clause requires Youth workers to critically reflect on their online visibility, influence, and relational responsibility.</p>



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<p>Clause 12: Mana Taurite Equity Youth workers must consider inequity, inclusion, and structural harm.</p>	<p>Research in Aotearoa demonstrates that gambling harm disproportionately impacts Māori, Pasifika and lower-income communities.</p> <p>This creates an ethical tension where youth organisations supporting vulnerable communities may simultaneously rely on gambling-derived funding ultimately generated from those same communities.</p> <p>This clause encourages critical reflection on structural inequity, colonisation, financial exploitation, social harm, and systemic disadvantage.</p>
<p>Clause 14: Kia Awatea Transparency Youth workers and organisations should practise openness and transparency in ethical decision-making.</p>	<p>Organisations receiving gambling-derived funding should consider transparency with communities and alignment with organisational kaupapa.</p> <p>This is particularly important where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations receive Class 4 gaming machine funding or online gambling derived funding • Sponsorship arrangements exist • Gambling branding appears alongside youth activities. <p>Transparency does not necessarily remove ethical tension, but it supports accountability and informed community discussion.</p>
<p>Clause 16: Ngā Tauārai Boundaries Youth workers maintain clear and ethical professional boundaries.</p>	<p>Online spaces blur traditional professional boundaries.</p> <p>Young people may follow youth workers online, view gambling-related content, interpret gambling behaviour as endorsement, or engage with youth workers in gaming or betting spaces.</p> <p>This clause requires careful reflection on social media visibility.</p> <p>Boundary management is particularly important where youth workers hold influence within youth digital culture.</p>
<p>Clause 19: Āu Ake Whāinga Personal Agendas Youth workers do not abuse their position for personal, professional, religious, political or financial gain.</p>	<p>When read in conjunction with clause 18, Kia Aroā/Self -Awareness, this places a high level of responsibility onto youth workers to reflect on why they might be promoting gambling, whether online or 'in real life'. If the result of the promotion is any form of gain, then this will impact the youth work relationship.</p> <p><i>The Code of Ethics quotes a 17-year-old young person: "it clouds every interaction if young people think you are trying to get something. It sours the relationship and takes away the genuineness".</i></p>
<p>Clause 20: Haumarū Safety Youth workers prioritise the holistic safety and wellbeing of young people.</p>	<p>International evidence identifies gambling harm as linked to financial distress, anxiety, depression, family violence, addiction, and suicide risk.</p> <p>Young people may also experience online financial exploitation, gambling-related shame, peer pressure, normalisation of risk-taking, and algorithmic targeting.</p> <p>This clause requires youth workers to consider the interconnected nature of safety holistically, including emotional, psychological, cultural, relational, and digital safety.</p> <p>The issue is not only one of physical protection, but wider wellbeing and long-term developmental impact.</p>



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Any issues or concerns around gambling and its link to youth work should be considered in the context of supervision (Clause 22 of the Code of Ethics). When a youth worker becomes aware that a young person has been affected directly or indirectly, the Code gives further guidance, and Clause 21 (whakamana/empowerment) will also be particularly relevant.

3. Mana Taiohi application

The national youth development principles, Mana Taiohi looks to honour the mana of young people and ensure youth work practice can whakamana young people. Interconnected with our values and the clauses of the Code of Ethics the Mana Taiohi principles often sit in the relational connect between the youth worker and a young person. It is important to reflect how our practice in this area affects the mana of young people.

4. Good practice recommendations

- Maintain clear professional boundaries online
- Avoid public endorsement of gambling platforms
- Critically assess sponsorship and funding relationships
- Develop organisational policies around online conduct
- Discuss gambling literacy with young people where appropriate
- Support young people to critically analyse online influence and advertising
- Engage in reflective supervision regarding ethical dilemmas
- Ensure transparency around funding sources.

5. Practice examples for reflection and discussion

▶ Example 1

A youth worker shares sports betting wins on their public Instagram story. Several rangatahi they work with follow the account.

Questions:

- Does this create implicit endorsement?
- How might this influence young people?
- What professional boundaries apply?

▶ Example 2

A youth organisation receives significant funding from a gaming trust connected to Class 4 gaming machines.

Questions:

- How does the organisation balance community benefit with community harm?
- What accountability exists to affected communities?
- How transparent should funding relationships be?

▶ Example 3

A youth worker participates in a private Discord server where gambling memes and betting discussions occur. Young people later gain access to screenshots.

Questions:

- Are 'private' spaces ever fully private?
- What professional obligations continue in digital environments?
- How does professional identity extend online?

Conclusion

Youth workers in Aotearoa work within increasingly complex digital and economic environments. Gambling promotion, online influence, and funding relationships require thoughtful ethical reflection grounded in the wellbeing and mana of young people.

Youth work values, Mana Taiohi and the Code of Ethics encourage youth workers to act with integrity, critical awareness, and accountability while recognising the broader systems influencing the lives of young people and their communities.

Ethical youth work practice requires ongoing reflection about how our actions, partnerships, funding choices, and online presence may influence the young people we serve.