

## **It is increasingly common to find underage and very young people seeking help to deal with online gaming and gambling or with possible addiction issues**

In September, the course "**Online gaming, gambling, social media... Addictions or legend?**" will be delivered. The instructor in charge of delivering the course will be Estibaliz Ansotegi, a psychologist and coordinator of addiction prevention programmes at the company Ortzadar, S.L.

### **When did you start working on the subject of sports betting, online gambling at Ortzadar?**

We have been organising workshops to raise awareness and reduce the risks associated with substance use for many years, but the first time a school asked us to work on this issue specifically was in 2010. Therefore, we have been working on issues related to online gambling, sports betting, etc. for about 10 years.

### **What have these years been like? What developments have you seen?**

At first, we were not very really sure what to expect; whether it was going to be an extremely widespread issue among students, whether we were going to come across people who were abusing these games or some other problem linked to them.

For the first 2 to 3 years, very few people in the groups involved in the workshops were betting or gambling. It was even quite an unknown issue for most of them. Indeed, over the years, things have changed, and it is increasingly common to come across at least one person (mostly boys) in each group that is betting or gambling.

The proliferation of bookmakers, the increase of the number of machines in bars, the easy access, the continuous bombardment from the media through advertising, has acclimatised the population, and particularly young people, making it part of their leisure activities.

### **Although it is forbidden under the age of 18, what is the real situation you are finding?**

Although it is illegal for people under 18 to gamble, the truth is completely different. Many underage people are finding it very easy to bet. They use their mobile phones, tablets or computers and, on many occasions, they even bet and gamble in betting shops and they say they know which premises they can get into without too much trouble.

Due to this ease of access, it is increasingly common to find underage and very young people seeking help to deal with online gaming and gambling or with possible addiction issues.

Other aspects that we would like to highlight are the differences we find in this type of gambling in terms of gender, i.e. there are many more boys than girls involved in gaming, gambling, etc. Girls often tell us that they accompany their partners but they do not bet. Girls say that they are more active in social media than in these activities.

### **Why are these games still so successful?**

Although there is increasing pressure against bookmakers or against famous people who advertise these brands at a social level, these games are still easily accessible and you can bet small amounts of money, obtain welcome bonuses, or win instant prizes. The features of the games also make them attractive and the general belief is that "it won't happen to me; I've got everything under control".

### **What would you recommend to work on this issue with young people?**

- The importance of analysing and reflecting on the real risks that can be involved in sports betting, online gambling, social networks, etc. Talk about the issue and educate them on it.
- Monitor how they use social networks (what is published and what is shared) and whether they bet and gamble, especially among the underage population.
- Make society aware of the real threat of these games and applications; we are all part of this problem and we have to do our bit.
- Strengthen self-limiting behaviours, use limits and rules.
- Encourage self-analysis and criticism of these companies.