

Problem Gambling

Problem gambling has a negative effect on the life of the gambler or the people close to them, like parents, friends, brothers and sisters, boyfriends or girlfriends, and others in their lives. It might be that someone's gambling is causing them to be unhappy, have less energy, fall behind at school, underperform at work, stress about money, or have arguments with family members and friends. If someone's gambling is causing any of these effects, it is considered to be problem gambling.

Anyone can develop a gambling problem. Two of the things that seem to put young people at risk of developing a problem are a history of gambling in their family and the age they started gambling themselves. The earlier people start, the more likely they are to experience gambling-related problems later on

Signs and Symptoms

People don't start out as problem gamblers. It starts as a fun activity, but somewhere along the way it begins to cause problems. If you think there's a problem, the chances are there is one. That's why you should know and look out for these warning signs:

- a significant interest in gambling and gambling-related activities
- problems in school, such as a loss of interest or unexplained absences
- changes in personality or behaviour
- changes in relationships (new friends and acquaintances whilst ignoring old friends)
- changes in mood
- explosive bouts of anger
- displays of anxiety and stress
- spending more time and/or money gambling than intended
- wanting to stop gambling or betting but thinking it's too hard
- telling lies about winnings
- having arguments with family or friends
- returning to win back money or possessions that you've already lost
- feeling bad about gambling
- regularly missing or being late for school or work
- being criticised for gambling or identified by others as someone with a problem
- borrowing money from people and not being able to pay them back because it's been lost to gambling

Asking For Help

The first step is always the hardest but we're here to help you take it. If you know that your gambling is causing you difficulty but you're not sure how to talk to someone about it, we're here to listen and give advice on how to overcome your problem. When the people in your life know about your gambling – and, more importantly, know that you want to do something about it – it makes it much easier for you to make changes.

It may be that your friends and family already have an idea that you have a gambling problem. They may react with anger, distress, shock, sadness, or they might not seem to quite understand how you feel because it can take a bit of time for the people who care about you to get their heads around what you're up against. Then again, they could also be very understanding right from the start. If people offer you help and support, take them up on it. You don't have to work through things on your own and they want to help you because they care about you. You'd do the same for them, so let them do it for you.

It also helps if you're clear and specific about what you want, or need, from the person you're asking for help:

- "I'd really appreciate it if you could help me keep an eye on my money for a while."
- "I need someone to hang out with so I have something to do when I feel like I want to gamble, would it be OK if I call you when I feel like that?"
- "I'm going to call the GamCare HelpLine and find out about getting help, will you sit with me?"

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Help your friends and family find out more.

The more the people in your life know about gambling, the better they'll understand the situation and what they can do to support you. To help make this go more quickly and smoothly, you can:

- direct them to this website
- encourage them to call the **National Gambling Helpline, on freephone: 0808 8020 133**

Talking To A Problem Gambler

Often the person who's gambling doesn't think that he or she has a problem. Sometimes family and friends will spot the problem first, because the gambler might be convincing him/herself that everything is fine when really it isn't.

It's important to let the gambler know the reason you're concerned is that you care about them. It's also helpful to use positive communication rather than being confrontational or critical. You could try talking about how you're feeling by using 'I' messages to lessen defences and keep lines of communication open. Below are some examples, but it's important to be genuine and talk to the gambler in a natural way.

- "You're my friend and I'm upset because I see you doing things that are really risky."
- "I love you and I don't want you to hurt yourself. Talk to me about what's going on."
- "I can see you're not happy at the moment and it upsets me. I want to help."

Once you've started the conversation, listen carefully to what they have to say in response and be patient. Don't jump in or cut them off mid sentence, as this might drive them back into their shell or make them turn defensive. Being calm and caring is really important, but don't allow them to make excuses for their gambling and certainly don't help them out with money, as this could make the problem much worse.