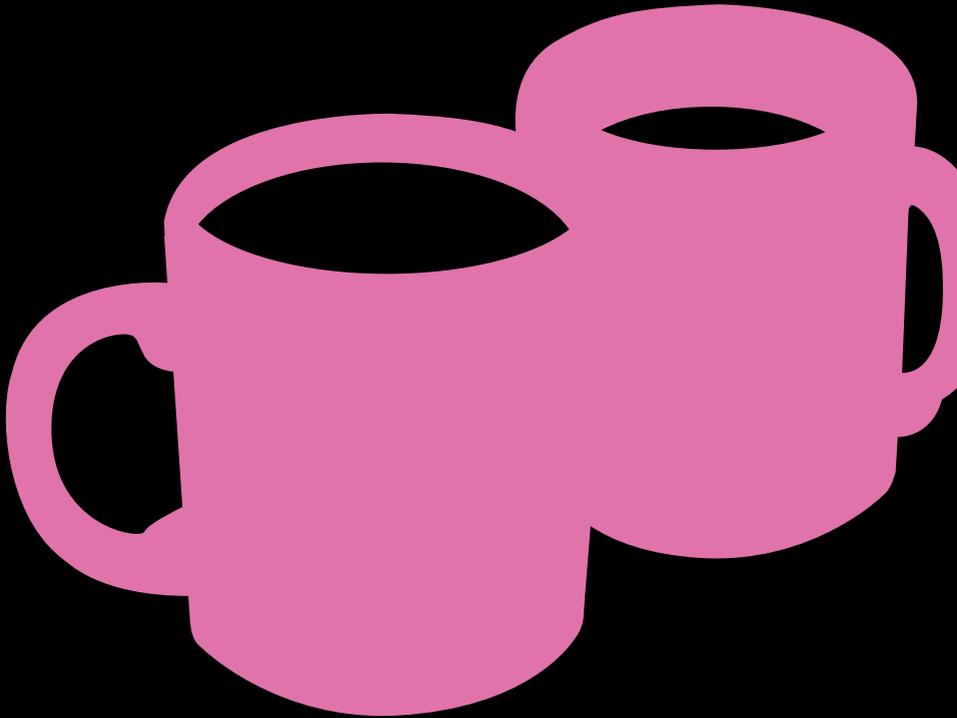

Supporting a problem gambler

A guide for family and friends



0845 6000 133
www.gamcare.org.uk



We all want to help the people we care about when they are in difficulty

Callers to the GamCare Helpline often ask a number of questions. This leaflet is designed to help you to manage your feelings and cope with the issues associated with gambling. It is not designed to replace the support and guidance available from seeing a GamCare counsellor or attending a support group. Contact the GamCare Helpline on **0845 6000 133** or log on to our website **www.gamcare.org.uk** to find out about the counselling and support services available in your area.

What do I say to someone whose gambling is causing a problem?

Problem gambling is not an easy issue to raise. What a problem gambler needs to understand is how their actions are affecting you. It may too be an opportunity for you to demonstrate the support you are able to offer in overcoming the problem. It is best not to make assumptions. Try to discuss only what you have seen.

Encourage the person to see the consequences of their behaviour and its effect on you. Take time to think about what you want to say. It might help to write your feelings down.

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Signs of a problem gambler...

- **Uncontrolled spending.**
- **Significant amounts of time spent gambling.**
- **Concealing or lying about gambling behaviour.**
- **Gambling impacting on relationships with family and friends.**
- **Withdrawal from family activities.**
- **Spending excessive amounts of time on a computer.**
- **No apparent interests or leisure pursuits.**
- **Absence from school, college or work.**

Why do they gamble?

Many people find themselves unable to explain why someone close to them continues to gamble despite the problems it causes them and those around them. The most obvious answer is “for the money”, but is this really true? Money may attract someone to gambling in the first instance. But most problem gamblers use gambling as an opportunity to escape from other problems or pressures in their lives – problems at home or at work, boredom, loneliness or anxiety. Gambling may cause the outside world and its problems to simply ‘fade away’. The need to experience this sense of escape may increase as the stress of gambling in an uncontrolled way increases.

Some problem gamblers say that the thrill or ‘buzz’ becomes addictive and they want to experience that feeling again and again.

Ask the person if gambling and its consequences are getting in the way of living the life they want to live

What can I do to help me to help them?

Look after yourself.

Take time out to get support for you. This might be family or friends, a GamCare counsellor or a support group. Occasionally, someone with a gambling problem will ask someone close to swear to secrecy. Secrecy does not allow you to get support and it can help someone avoid responsibility for his or her actions, allowing the gambling to continue unchallenged. If you feel you can’t talk to people close to you, seek support.

Limit the financial impact that gambling has on you. If you can, separate your bank account and protect your own money.

Pace yourself

We all want to help the people we care about when they are in difficulty. But remember, the motivation and willingness to change behaviour comes at different times. You may be ready now, but the person who you are trying to help may not be ready. It won’t help to rush them or try to push them to change. Wait in the wings until they are ready and then offer to help them in the way they choose.

Ultimatums

Try and steer clear of ultimatums. Ultimatums are rarely effective and they can increase the sense of guilt and shame a person feels about their behaviour. This may encourage greater secrecy and rarely prepares someone for change. Encourage them and work with them to establish firm boundaries.

Think carefully before doing anything that enables the gambler to continue to gamble. Lending money or lying about their gambling helps problem gamblers avoid the consequences of their actions. They should take responsibility for their own behaviour.

Gambling, and the loss of trust it often brings, can put an enormous strain on a relationship

Don't do everything

The first steps to seeking help can be daunting and require a ready state of mind. But they are also often the simplest and easiest. If you step in and take these steps for a gambler, it may be denying the person a chance to express their readiness to act in a way that gives them a sense of achievement. Remember, they need to be motivated to change.

I'm feeling really down about the whole thing, what should I do?

Gambling, and the loss of trust it often brings, can put an enormous strain on a relationship. If you find that you feel overwhelmed or are losing hope, it is important to seek professional help. Share your concerns with your GP, a relationship counsellor, or with a GamCare counsellor. They can help you through this difficult time.

I'm worried about them as they seem depressed – what should I do?

Try to talk to them to ask them how they feel, encourage them to call the GamCare Helpline on **0845 6000 133** or seek help online. If you believe they may be thinking about harming themselves, they should seek professional help as soon as possible. Suggest they discuss their feelings with their GP or a GamCare counsellor.

GamCare provides a confidential Helpline throughout the UK and a range of help online. These services provide emotional support, advice, information and referral for people experiencing problems with their gambling and family and friends affected by gambling.

GamCare counselling provides a safe, confidential way for you to talk about your situation. Contact the GamCare Helpline for details of counselling and other support services available in your area. In addition, GamCare offers a Netline, an internet-based helpline, at www.gamcare.org.uk and an online peer to peer support forum for members.

Our helpline is open 7 days a week, 8am–midnight.

0845 6000 133

www.gamcare.org.uk

Gam-Anon

Support for friends and families affected by gambling.

08700 50 88 80

www.gamanon.org.uk

Gamblers Anonymous

A support fellowship for problem gamblers.

020 7384 3040

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Gordon Moody Association

A residential treatment centre for problem gamblers.

01384 241292

www.gordonhouse.org.uk

Citizens Advice

Free, independent and confidential advice and information.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

National Debtline

Free, independent and confidential advice on money and debt problems.

0808 808 4000

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Parentline Plus

Support and information for parents.

0808 800 2222

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Prisoners' Families Helpline

Free and confidential information and support for friends and families of prisoners.

0808 808 2003

www.prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk

Relate

Relationship counselling and advice to couples and individuals.

08451 30 40 16

www.relate.org.uk

Samaritans

Confidential, emotional support for anyone in a crisis.

08457 90 90 90

www.samaritans.org.uk

Youth Access

Information on local counselling services for children and young people.

020 8772 9900

www.youthaccess.org.uk

