





gambling **HELP**

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1800 858 858  
[gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au](http://gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au)

## **PROBLEM GAMBLING:** **A GUIDE FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

### **Who is this book for?**

If you know or suspect that your partner, family member or close friend has a gambling problem, this brochure will give you practical advice on how to manage yourself and help your loved one.

We understand your needs may seem secondary to the person in the family who has a gambling problem. But we also understand that the distress experienced by those who love and care for the problem gambler, can be profound. You also deserve attention and support to help you cope with the situation.

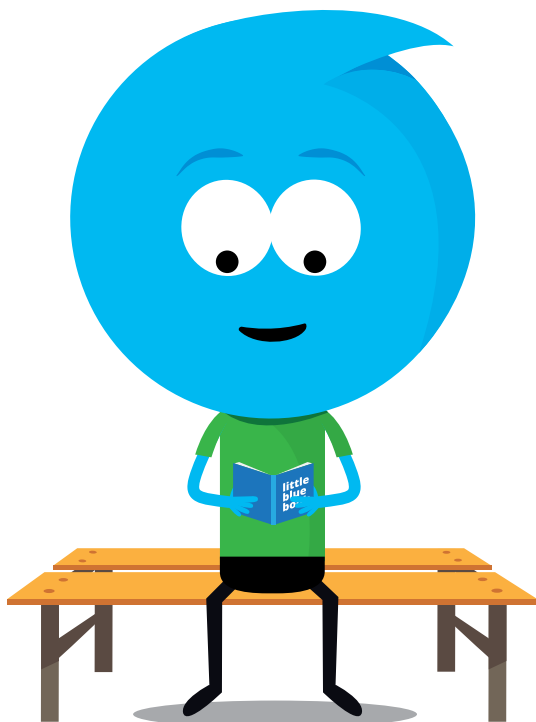
### **What's in this brochure?**

The brochure falls into two parts – helping yourself, and helping the problem gambler in your life.

Helping yourself also means helping other vulnerable people close to you, such as children. It includes practical help on things such as protecting and sorting out your finances and obtaining legal advice. It also shows how you can protect yourself emotionally and provides some ideas for accessing free help services and support. Finally, it helps you answer all those questions that you have about problem gambling and why some people are affected. The second part is about how you can assist the problem gambler to get help and get their life back.

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## **STEP 1: GETTING INFORMED:** **WHAT IS PROBLEM GAMBLING AND** **WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE AFFECTED** **AND OTHERS NOT?**

Gambling problems affect people from all walks of life. In fact, it's estimated that up to 1% of Australians experience severe gambling problems. That's around 200,000 people! Another 3% or so are experiencing harm from heavy gambling and are at risk of becoming problem gamblers. And this doesn't include all of the people who suffer as a result of someone else's gambling.

In general, problem gambling can be described as having difficulties limiting money and/or time spent gambling, which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler or those around them. This includes you as someone who is affected!

It's important to keep in mind, though, that many people who gamble never go on to develop any gambling problems. These individuals are often called "recreational gamblers". So what distinguishes people who develop gambling problems from those who don't?

Well, a variety of motivations play a part.

Recreational gamblers tend to be motivated to gamble for enjoyment, or to socialise, whereas problem gamblers are generally more likely to gamble on their own and/or to chase their losses – try to win back money they have already lost. What's more, gamblers' motivations can also vary by form of gambling. For example, "pokie" players may be more likely to use gambling as an escape from problems or worries, whereas horse racing wagerers and casino table gamers may be more likely to gamble for the "thrill", or for excitement.

Apart from different motivations for gambling, research tells us that there are some other factors that make it more likely that some people will develop gambling problems. These include:

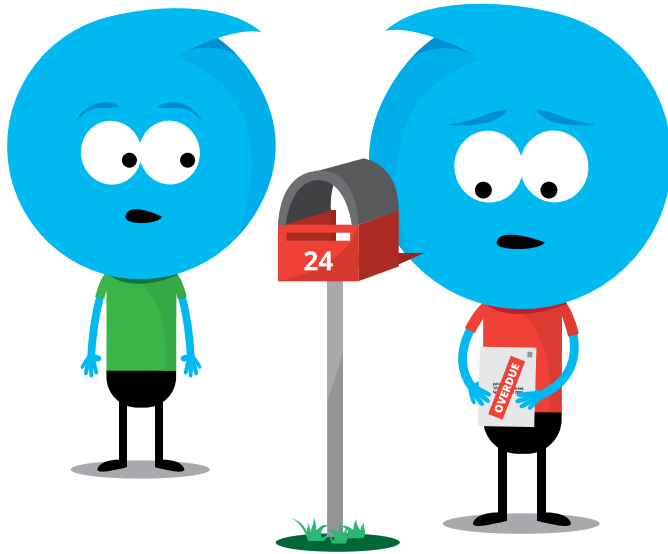
- A big early win
- Not understanding gambling outcomes
- A stressful life with a lack of support and direction
- Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and stress, and
- Substance abuse issues.

On the other hand, there are some things that make it less likely for people to develop gambling problems. These include:

- Financial security
- Supportive friends
- Hopes and dreams for the future
- Doing well at work
- Using support, rather than escape, to cope with problems
- Knowledge of randomness, and
- Setting limits on betting.

### **Take home message**

Problem gamblers tend to chase losses and gamble to manage unpleasant emotions related to past losses or their lives in general.



## STEP 2: FINDING OUT IF YOUR LOVED ONE HAS A GAMBLING PROBLEM

So how do you know if a loved one is gambling too much? While there are no hard and fast rules, here are a few clues to look for:

- Is your loved one secretive about where they have been spending time?
- Are they secretive about their finances?
- Do they always collect the mail and prevent you from seeing bills?
- Have you ever noticed money missing from shared accounts, or elsewhere?
- Do they sometimes ask to borrow money and can't give a good reason as to why?
- Do they sell their valuables for unexplained reasons?
- Do they go through periods of appearing to have large amounts of money, followed by periods when they are low on cash?
- Are they easily agitated?
- Are they abusing substances?
- Do they seem 'distant' or 'avoidant'?

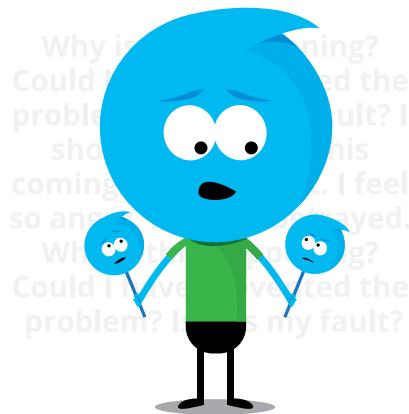
If you answered 'yes' to some of these questions, or if you suspect that your loved one has a gambling problem for other reasons, then it's definitely a good idea that you read on. The following pages may be helpful to you and maybe to them as well.

If your loved one is willing, they might want to take the quiz on the Gambling Help website, to help them determine if they are experiencing a gambling problem. Go to:

[gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au/need-help/do-you-have-gambling-problems-take-the-quiz](http://gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au/need-help/do-you-have-gambling-problems-take-the-quiz)

### Take home message

Be on the lookout for warning signals that could suggest your loved one has a gambling problem.



### **STEP 3: COMING TO GRIPS WITH THE SITUATION: MANAGING YOUR EMOTIONS**

If you know or suspect that your loved one has a gambling problem, it's normal to experience intense feelings such as a loss of trust, anger, confusion, fear, frustration, and hopelessness. Learning to manage these emotions, however, is important, as it will put you in a better position to look after yourself. What's more, you'll also be in a better position to move forward and do something productive about your loved one's gambling.



This step will aim to get you thinking about some of your emotional reactions. But importantly, we know that it is impossible for us to offer specific guidance in helping you deal with your emotional experience in such a brief booklet. Every person is different, after all. So, if you're struggling with your emotions at this time, please consider seeking free and confidential support from a specialist counsellor by contacting Gambling Help on **1800 858 858**, or organisations such as Gam Anon, which is a support group especially for friends and families of problem gamblers.

### Dealing with hopelessness

Did you know that problem gambling is a very treatable psychological condition, with studies showing that 65% to 80% of problem gamblers substantially reduce or stop their gambling after treatment? People can and do get better. There's no need to feel hopeless!

### Dealing with anger

It's perfectly normal to be angry! Your loved one's decision to gamble to excess has caused a lot of stress and heartache for you and others around them.

But on the other hand, there are some things that influence decisions and behaviours, which contributed to the development of their problems.

For example, did you know that many people with gambling problems:

- Experience a significant early win, creating a powerful positive association between gambling and winning, making them want to continue. They incorrectly believe that gambling can be an additional source of income
- Are likely to have been experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety or depression which contributed to the development of their problems
- Have a tendency to avoid or "escape" problems and emotional stresses through gambling rather than seeking social support.

These reasons don't absolve them of responsibility, but they do provide a better understanding of what motivates your loved one to keep gambling and why it has become a problem. They did not choose to have an early win. They didn't choose to be depressed. And they don't realise they have a flawed understanding of how gambling works. Keep this in mind when you find your anger spiralling out of control.

## Managing guilt

At times, you or other family members may blame yourselves or feel guilty for not doing more to prevent the problem. Perhaps you think that you should have seen it coming, or that you should have supported them more? Perhaps your loved one has even blamed you or your behaviour as causing their gambling problem? But this is neither fair to you, nor is it accurate. This is particularly common if they have incurred heavy losses and are having emotional difficulties or arguments with those around them. This is probably happening because they are angry with themselves, not you. It is not your fault they behave in this manner.

## Managing feelings of betrayal

It can be extremely hurtful to discover that a loved one has been gambling in secret, and is using shared finances to gamble. But remind yourself that your loved one did not develop their problems to spite or deliberately hurt you. And in reality, their misguided secrecy is in part motivated by a fear of losing or hurting loved ones. What's more, their continued gambling is often motivated by an unrealistic desire to bail themselves and their families out of financial

difficulties. This is a cruel irony, because gambling is often the very source of their financial difficulties and not the solution. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that they didn't set out to harm you or your family.

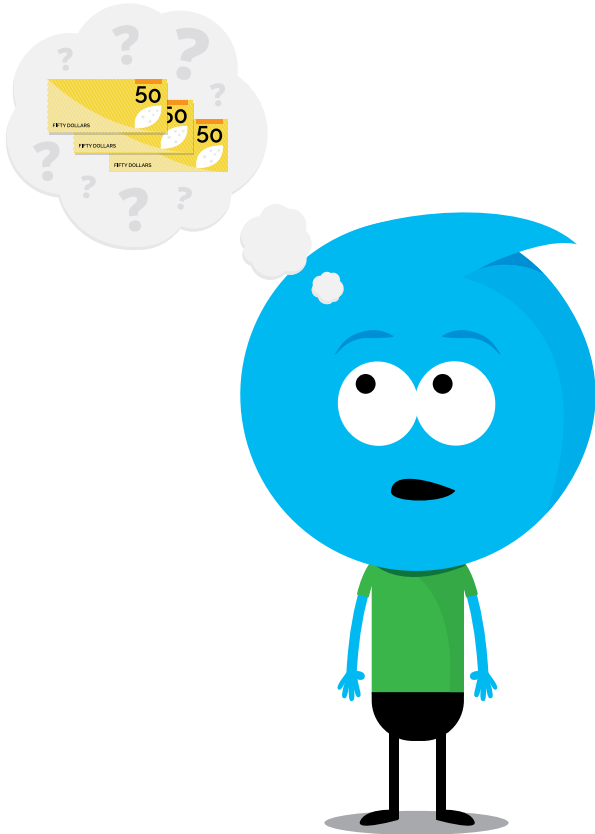
## Take home message

The better you are able to balance your emotions, the better you'll be able to look after yourself.

Managing your emotions and getting informed about problem gambling can help you move onto some more helpful conversations with him or her.

Striking the right balance between encouraging your loved one to take responsibility for their gambling problem without blaming and shaming, is your difficult task. It takes time and practice.

You deserve help and support. Free and confidential support is available for family and friends of people with gambling problems at Gambling Help on **1800 858 858**, and they can also tell you what face to face services are available in your area.



## **STEP 4: PRACTICAL STEPS TO TAKE AS SOON AS YOU KNOW**

In this section we attempt to guide you through some common dilemmas family and friends can face, and talk through some practical strategies you might be considering.

### **7 Common dilemmas**

#### **1. How do I make sure they are being open about their gambling and finances?**

Here are some things you can do to try to encourage full disclosure:

- Sharing credit files – If your loved one agrees, having regular joint discussions and reviews of credit and banking statements can ensure transparency and help rebuild trust. Credit files and ratings can be obtained from [veda.com.au](http://veda.com.au). Credit reports include information about loan enquiries, credit providers, serious debts and credit infringements, commercial credit and public record information including bankruptcy data and default judgments.

- Organise shared access to bank accounts – this allows you to see where income and expenditure is going.

If you don't believe your loved one is being entirely open, don't despair; this can take some time. Changes may occur in small steps. Read on for what you can do in the meantime.

## **2. Should I separate our finances?**

A temporary separation of finances might be considered if you believe that your loved one is still secretly gambling away shared finances. Seek legal advice on how to protect your and your family's finances. Remember to be sensitive in the way you do this (see "last but not least" on page 25). Contact Legal Aid NSW for more information: [legallaid.nsw.gov.au](http://legallaid.nsw.gov.au) or the free legal service funded by Gambling Help at [communitylegal@wesleymission.org.au](mailto:communitylegal@wesleymission.org.au) This service specialises in helping people with gambling issues.

## **3. Should I take over their finances and provide my loved one with a living allowance?**

This is generally only a short-term solution. If you and your loved one opt for this, remember, their weekly

expenditure allowance should be realistic rather than set it at a restrictive level simply to punish them.

## **4. Should I provide a gambling allowance to encourage "controlled" gambling?**

In general, people with gambling problems need a period of abstinence in order to get their gambling under control, so a gambling allowance is generally not recommended, especially if they are unaware they still hold misconceptions about how gambling works. Avoid constantly checking where the allowance has been spent. Remain vigilant but begin the journey of regaining trust.

## **5. Should I bail them out?**

The person with the gambling problem won't experience the consequences of money loss if they are bailed out, and there's a chance they will gamble the 'bail-out' money away, so think twice. If a bail out really is necessary to avoid a crisis, such as a house repossession, try to organise to pay the money directly to a financial institution.

## 6. How do we manage the bills and debt collectors? How do we manage our financial crisis?

Develop a realistic long-term plan to financial recovery. A shared plan can also help repair trust.

This is an important step, as it can replace feeling hopeless and overwhelmed with a clear plan that will lead to a better outcome for everyone.

Coming up with a financial plan is best done with a financial counsellor. Fortunately, free financial counselling can be organised through Gambling Help on **1800 858 858**. You and your loved one are encouraged to seek assistance in this area.

There are many ways financial counsellors can assist you in dealing with debts and repayment schedules. Financial counsellors can:

- Show you which debts should be viewed as priority debts
- Explain how to apply for hardship consideration for a wide variety of debts
- Work with credit and banking agencies to negotiate repayment arrangements
- Show you how to consolidate your debts into one loan, saving the stress of managing multiple loans

- Suggest options for how to restructure debts, which can help save you money on interest
- Help you explore the pros and cons of bankruptcy
- Refer you to legal assistance if necessary, and
- Importantly, help you work out a realistic repayment arrangement for debts.

Remember, a financial plan should be realistic and sustainable. If your weekly expenditure allowance is too tight, you're unlikely to stick to the plan, but if it's too high, you might despair that it will take you too long to pay your debts off. With no finish line in sight, it's harder to stick to a plan!

Finally, it's important that your loved one with the gambling problem continues to be transparent about finances while sticking to the plan, and that you regularly review progress together. Celebrating the small steps to success together can boost morale and helps slowly rebuild trust!

Call Gambling Help on **1800 858 858** for more information on free financial counselling services near you.

## 7. Should I stay in the relationship?

For decisions this big, you might consider seeking advice from a counsellor. An important thing to keep in mind, though, is that more often than not, gambling problems are temporary. Ending a relationship is often permanent. A permanent solution to a temporary problem may not be the way to go. But ultimately, you need to do what's right for you!

### Some other useful things to know

#### Self exclusion

It is possible for people with gambling problems to voluntarily exclude themselves from gambling venues for a given period of time. Once self-excluded, when he or she is identified, he or she will be asked to leave a venue. What's more, with multi-venue self-exclusion options offered by clubs and hotels, your loved one needn't self-exclude themselves from one venue at a time. Rather they can self-exclude from multiple venues with little hassle. You are however, not able to self-exclude on someone else's behalf. For more information on self-exclusion call Gambling Help on **1800 858 858**.

#### Keeping yourself safe

If you have ever felt threatened or unsafe, or if you are concerned about the welfare of children affected by a parent's gambling, it's important that you know that there is support available. Call the domestic violence line on **1800 65 64 63** or Gambling Help on **1800 858 858**. There are many options available to you including counselling, temporary accommodation, and Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs). See [domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au](http://domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au) for more information.

#### Keeping them safe

Unfortunately, people with gambling problems are at a greater risk of self-harm and suicide than the general population. If you think your loved one is at imminent risk of hurting themselves, call emergency on 000, or your local community mental health crisis team.

#### Last but not least... a word on boundaries

A fundamental principle of behaviour change is that we can't control another person's behaviour. Failing to appreciate this leads us to try to exercise control over our loved ones that we simply don't have. This can happen in one of two ways.

Which do you tend to do?

- Bend over backwards to meet their needs, in order to keep them happy, and keep them from gambling, (e.g. lending them money, not asking them questions about gambling, etc.) or
- Try to take over their life, to save them from themselves, and save those around them from the fall-out (e.g. cutting off or taking over their finances without their permission, confiscating their property, etc.)

Unfortunately, as you may have found out, neither of these approaches works.

The alternative is to learn how to put in place firm boundaries that limit the impacts of your loved one's gambling on themselves and others, while encouraging them to change. So keep the following points in mind if you're going to implement any of the control strategies discussed above with your loved one. They are based on the principles of collaborative boundary-setting.

- Any restrictions should be clearly understood, agreed to by both parties, have a set end date, and be reviewed and re-negotiated once the end date is reached.
- The gambler's involvement in the decision-making process will maximise your chances of being successful.
- Consequences of breaking agreements should be decided by both parties before they start. Once they do start, these must be consistently enforced.
- Control strategies are short term solutions, and no substitute for seeking treatment.

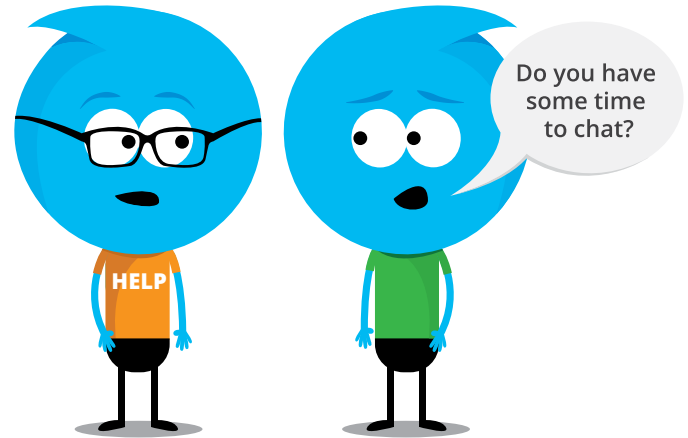
## Take home message

If you're considering separating finances, providing a living/gambling allowance, or bailing a loved one out, it's important that you carefully consider the pros and cons of doing so.

Any restrictions should be agreed to by both parties, have a set end date, and be re-negotiated once the end date is reached. It is helpful if everyone is involved in the decision making process.

Self-exclusion, financial counselling, and support services for victims of domestic violence are available free-of-charge. Call Gambling Help on **1800 858 858** or visit [gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au](http://gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au) for more information.

Ultimately, these strategies are no substitute for seeking additional treatment.



## STEP 5: LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF: SEEKING HELP AND SUPPORT FROM PROFESSIONALS, FAMILY AND FRIENDS

It can be easy to forget to look after yourself at this difficult time. You might become totally pre-occupied by your loved one's gambling problem and forget to consider your own needs. But the



reality of the situation is that your loved one will likely take some time to change. How much time is often outside of your control. So remember to look after yourself in the meantime, while taking practical steps to limit the impacts of your loved one's gambling on you (see step 4 on page 19).

### Ideas for looking after yourself

- Talk to a family or friend about your situation.
- Plan pleasant activities (such as outings with friends, regular walks, visits to the cinema or sporting events) even if you don't feel like it. It might not seem like the 'smart thing' to do during a crisis, but getting your mind off things is important. It will give you strength in the long run.
- Exercise regularly. This can be a powerful means of managing stress.
- Seek free and confidential professional support through Gambling Help.
- Attend a Gam Anon meeting if you'd like to talk to people in the same boat as you.

### **Remember, reaching out is a sign of strength**

Don't fall into the trap of trying to deal with problems on your own. Just like your loved one, you need support to get yourself through this. Often we can trick ourselves into thinking that we're being strong by not telling others about our difficulties. But often, the truth is we're simply too scared or ashamed to reach out for help. The reality is, reaching out is harder in the short term, it takes great courage, but ultimately you'll be better off.

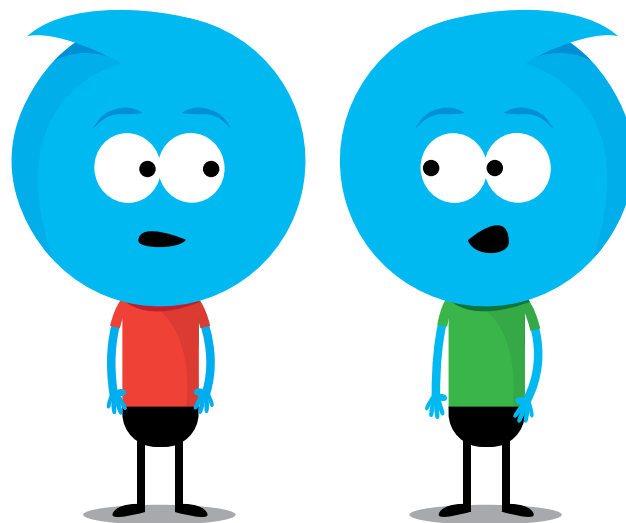
Family and friends are a great place to go for emotional support. They can lend a sympathetic ear, and practical support. But also bear in mind, many family and friends will give you well-intentioned advice, which might not necessarily be appropriate or accurate in your situation.

Professional guidance on the other hand, has some advantages. Some people find that the fact that they don't personally know their counsellor makes it easier for them to be open and honest. Another advantage is that professional counsellors are trained to give you advice based on what research tells us has worked in similar situations, not simply based on their opinions.

So if you feel like you need extra support, then call Gambling Help anytime on **1800 858 858** or, if this is too daunting, you might even like to 'chat' to a counsellor online at [gamblinghelponline.org.au](http://gamblinghelponline.org.au)

### Take home message

Remember to look after yourself! Get professional support if you need it. Call Gambling Help for free and confidential counselling on **1800 858 858**.



## **STEP 6: STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR LOVED ONE**

Getting your loved one talking about their gambling problem is very important. It is one step away from them actually doing something about their problem! This section will cover some useful strategies you can use to get them talking.

## **What if they won't own up to it?**

### **Dealing with denial**

If your loved one is denying that they have a gambling problem, to you, or themselves, beating them over the head with it is unlikely to get them talking.

If we want our loved one to open up to us about their gambling problems, we need to create a safe space, in which our loved one knows that we are there to support them, rather than to blame and/or judge them.

Your conversations about gambling will be more fruitful if you're able to manage your anger, and create a relatively open atmosphere in which to discuss gambling. We know that this is often difficult to do. But the anger itself will not solve the problem. It is justified to feel angry, but making critical comments, belittling him or her, and constantly nagging and blaming him or her for being in a difficult financial position may be counterproductive. Express your emotions by stating that you are disappointed and angry at his or her behaviour but that you want to work together to regain control over the situation.

## **Getting the conversation going**

Here are some practical strategies that can help get a conversation going:

- Leave brochures about gambling and gambling treatment where they can be easily picked up around the house.
- Regularly and patiently let them know that you're willing, able and interested to talk to them about their problems, through asking open questions. For example: "I've noticed that you've been a little down of late. Are you ok?" "What's been going on for you? Is there anything I can do to help?"
- Talk about gambling in a more general sense. For example: "I've been doing some reading about problem gambling lately..."
- Don't nag them about gambling, this is likely to be counter-productive.
- Be patient! This is a process that can take weeks or months. In the meantime, do what you need to do to minimise the damage caused by possible continued gambling (see steps 4 and 5).

- Gambling Help has a number of helpful videos on their website that you might want to view yourself, or refer to your loved one. Of particular relevance is the “You’re Stronger Than You Think” video, all about the importance of seeking help for gambling problems. Go to [gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au](http://gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au)

## Dealing with their anger

### Do

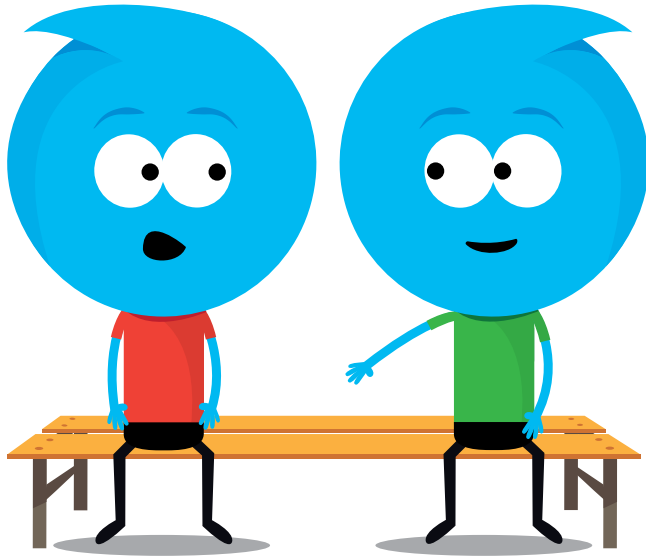
- Validate their anger. For example, “I can see that this is really affecting you.”
- Let them know that getting angry is ok, but getting aggressive isn’t. For example, “and you have every right to feel angry, but I can’t accept your shouting or your threats.”
- Let them know how their aggression affects you. For example, “When you shout at me I feel hurt and disrespected.”
- Encourage them to express their emotions in a more productive manner. For example, “I would really like to continue to discuss this as calmly as possible. I’m interested in why you feel this way and would like you to tell me more about it.”

- Recognise when it’s not possible to have a productive conversation and defer the conversation until later. Remember, this is a process that can take time!

### Take home message

Encouraging your loved one to openly discuss their gambling can be an important part of their journey to recovery. Do not be overly judgemental and critical just to ‘put the boot in’! This requires time and patience.

Call Gambling Help for more ideas and support on **1800 858 858** or visit Gambling Help at [gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au](http://gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au)



## **STEP 7: DEVELOPING THE CONVERSATION**

Now that you've got the conversation started, here are some really useful things to keep in mind.

### **Expressing challenging emotions**

It's important to learn how to express intense and distressing emotions like anger and hurt without pushing your loved one away. Here are some helpful Dos and Don'ts to keep in mind.

#### **Do**

- Express how you feel. "I/we are upset and angry about your gambling but I/we still want to help you as much as possible." Or "Yes, I am angry at what you have done but I do want to help you gain control and overcome your gambling urges."
- Acknowledge and validate the emotions that they express in words. "From what you're saying, it sounds like you've been feeling really down lately. Am I right in saying that?"

- Try to reflect back what they say to you and check your understanding regularly as you go. “If I heard you correctly, you’re saying that you feel like you’ve got things under control. Is that right?”
- Focus on finding solutions rather than the problems themselves.

### Don't

- Have conversations about gambling when you or your loved one is feeling too tired or stressed.
- In discussions over other matters, do not bring up gambling as a weapon to win an argument or to put him or her down and feel bad.
- Label the person with the gambling problem (e.g. “How could you be so selfish?”).

It's going to be a bumpy ride, but remember, getting an open conversation going is the single most important thing you can do to help. Hopefully this will be the first step in encouraging your loved one to enter treatment.

## The 2 Golden Rules of Change

1. When people talk about the benefits of change and know what action to take, they become more likely to change.
2. When people talk about the disadvantages of change, they become less likely to change.

Try asking your loved one about the advantages of reducing or stopping gambling, and the disadvantages of continuing. Talking about the advantages of change and how to achieve these will bring them closer to taking action!

Avoid telling them all the reasons why YOU think they should stop. They will tend to reply with “yes, but...” and go on to list all of the reasons why they aren't quite ready to change. Talking about the disadvantages of change makes them less likely to take action!

Take a moment to prepare some questions that encourage your loved one to think about the reasons why they might want to stop gambling.  
(see over)

For example: "What do you think would happen if you stopped gambling for the next ten years?"

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now take time to wonder:

"What do you think would happen if you continued gambling like this for the next ten years?"

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Take home message

Learning to effectively express intense emotions is an important part of the process.

Learn to ask your loved one questions which encourage them to explore the advantages of reducing or giving up gambling.

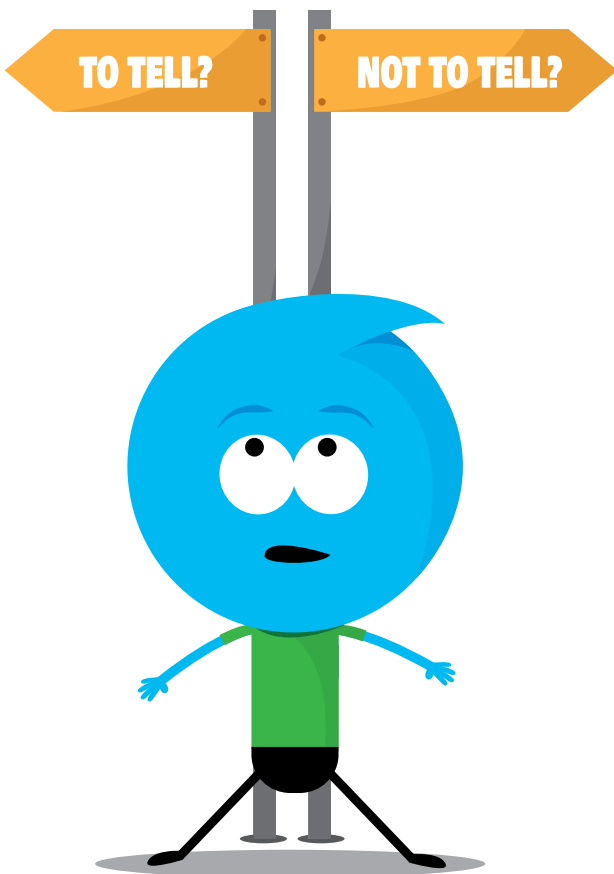
You can call Gambling Help for more ideas and support on **1800 858 858**.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Remember, when practising these techniques, be patient, practise a lot, and don't expect yourself to be able to do them 100% of the time. It's a challenging skill to master, but incredibly powerful.



## **STEP 8: TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL: SHARING YOUR SITUATION WITH OTHERS**

### **Who do we tell about the gambling problem?**

Balancing your desire for being honest and open about what happened, with your loved one's need for privacy may be difficult. It is generally desirable for the person recovering from the gambling problem to continue being totally open about their gambling and finances with family and maybe close friends. But this needn't apply to everyone in their lives. On the other hand, it's probably a good idea for gambling friends to know about what has happened, so that they can assist your loved one in avoiding gambling venues, and understand if your loved one needs some space.

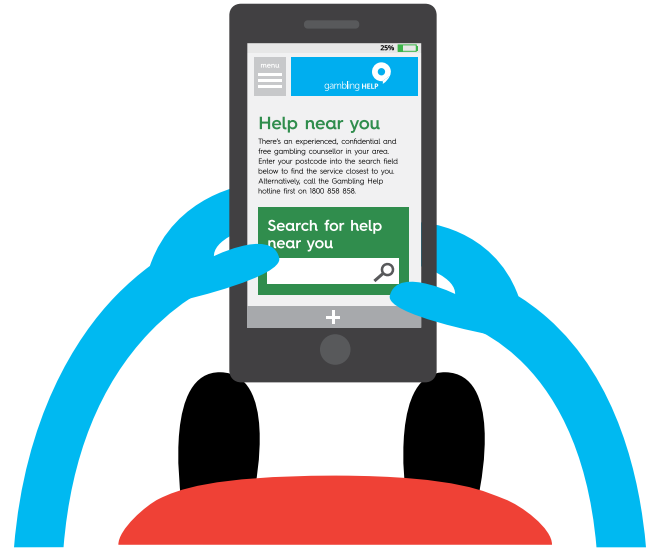


## Who decides who we tell?

Importantly, you might be tempted to tell people about your loved one's gambling problem, on their behalf. In general though, it is desirable for the person with the gambling problem to decide for themselves who they tell about it. This is not always possible though, particularly if they are in denial. If you feel that you need to tell others about your loved one's gambling problems, it's important to consider the benefits of doing so with the potential consequences, which could include damaging trust and communication with your loved one.

### Take home message

Not everyone needs to know about the gambling problems, but transparency in close relationships is recommended.



## STEP 9: GETTING THE PROBLEM GAMBLER TO TAKE ACTION: TREATMENT, PEER SUPPORT OR SELF-HELP?

In order to determine what treatment is right for your loved one, you might like to consider the following questions:

*Are your loved one's problems mild?*

For example, do they have no debts, or are their debts small and manageable debts?

*Have their gambling problems been relatively short lived, say less than 6 months?*

*Is this their first attempt to reduce their gambling?*

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, then self-help and peer-support might be the right option for them. If not, don't despair. Read on!

## **Self-Help & Peer Support**

Self-help doesn't mean giving up without assistance. It doesn't mean figuring things out all on their own. It's extremely difficult for most people to stop, using willpower alone.

Self-help is most likely to be effective when individuals work through self-help books and tools, that include tried and tested strategies. There's no need to reinvent the wheel! A self-help booklet is available through Gambling Help. It contains useful information on identifying triggers, managing cravings and other useful strategies. It's available at

**[gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au/needhelp](http://gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au/needhelp)** There are lots of other resources available at the site as well, including videos.

If the person wants to limit gambling rather than quit entirely, an important practice is setting gambling budgets and measuring gambling expenditure. This can be done the old-fashioned way, with a paper and pen, or alternatively, your loved one can download a useful app, which helps them do just this. Look up "Stay On Track" in your app store.

Peer support can be an important part of the recovery process. Encouraging your loved one to reach out and discuss their gambling problems with trusted friends can be tremendously helpful. Some people find that Gamblers' Anonymous is a good way to find the support they need to stay off gambling. Meetings are available in most communities.

If the above methods prove unsuccessful, or your loved one's problems are more severe, gambling treatment with a specialist counsellor might be more appropriate.

## Getting them into treatment

### 1. Get informed about treatment

Importantly, it helps to know a thing or two about treatment, so that you can dispel any concerns your loved one might have about attending counselling. Here are six important facts to keep in mind about gambling treatment:

- It is effective in approximately 65% to 80% of cases, even for heavy, long-term gamblers.
- It's free.
- It's confidential.
- It's quick and easy. Six to eight weekly, hour-long sessions are helpful for most people.
- It's provided one on one, with a trained counsellor or psychologist who specialises in the treatment of gambling problems.
- It's convenient. Clinics are located throughout New South Wales with many providing counselling outside business hours.

### 2. Get them talking about the advantages of treatment

Remember the golden rule of change from step 7? Get them to talk about their own reasons for coming

into treatment. For example: *“What are some things you might get out of counselling?”* *“What might you miss out on if you don't go?”*

Take a moment to write down some questions that encourage your loved one to talk about the advantages of coming into treatment, and the disadvantages of not coming in.

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### 3. Be ready to address some common barriers to attending treatment

Here are two common ones.

#### 1. Why would talking about gambling help?

It can be hard to believe that simply talking about something like gambling problems would magically make them go away. But there's more to it than that. Gambling treatment has progressed a long way in recent years. It is highly specific, structured and a fascinating experience for most people who attend. Most people are surprised by what they learn about themselves during treatment.

#### 2. I can deal with it myself!

The reality is, for most people, dealing with gambling problems can be nearly impossible without assistance. In the vast majority of cases, willpower alone is not enough to get through it. Think about it – if you had a rotten tooth, would you try to pull it out yourself, or would you call a dentist?

For many people, dealing with it on their own is a sign of 'being strong'. The reality is though, that nothing takes more courage than reaching out for assistance. It's the smart thing to do and it's the right thing to do. Encourage your loved one to see reaching out as a sign of strength.

- Encourage them to watch videos about seeking treatment. A number of videos from recovered gamblers and gambling treatment counsellors might be useful in helping your loved one build up the motivation to seek treatment. These videos might help them view getting help as a sign of strength and help dispel some of their concerns about seeking treatment.
- Find dozens of stories from gamblers and family members at [gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au](http://gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au)
- Or watch "Courage to change" at [psych.usyd.edu.au/gambling\\_treatment\\_clinic](http://psych.usyd.edu.au/gambling_treatment_clinic)

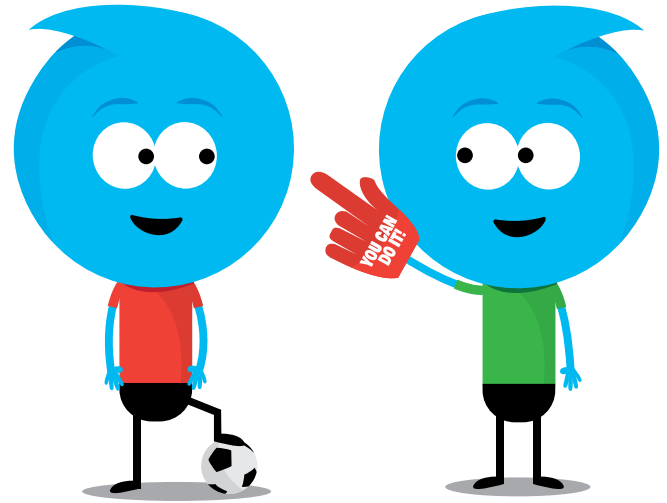
## Take home message

Self-help strategies and peer support are more appropriate for people with less severe gambling problems, but they can work.

For more severe problems, professional gambling treatment is recommended.

You can have an active role in encouraging your loved one to come to gambling treatment by being informed, and asking them the right questions.

Gambling Treatment is available through Gambling Help on **1800 858 858**.



## **STEP 10: BUMPS ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY**

In this last section, we'll address some of the common challenges that people recovering from gambling problems, and their loved ones, might face.

## **How do we rebuild trust?**

It takes time to rebuild trust, but in our experience, it can be done! Here are some helpful tips from previous steps which can help you rebuild trust in each other.

- Come up with a shared financial plan. Apart from the practical benefits, following the plan together can help repair trust and self-esteem over time. (see step 4)
- Maintain transparency about finances by organising joint access to bank accounts and credit files. (see step 4)
- Keeping the conversation going about gambling and emotional difficulties more broadly is a powerful means of rebuilding trust, and ultimately will making your relationship a more fulfilling one.

## **What if they relapse?**

It's important to distinguish between lapse and relapse. A lapse is a one-off gambling episode which does not necessarily suggest that an individual has relapsed. Relapses on the other hand signal a return to problematic patterns of regular gambling. Importantly though, even if an individual relapses, it

does not mean that they need to start the process of giving up all over again. Often it is quicker and easier second time around.

The reality is that lapse and relapse is a common part of the recovery process. Lapses are likely to happen on occasion. So keep things in perspective, and remember that the hard won progress has not been for nothing. Keeping things in perspective makes it more likely that your loved one will continue to be open with you about their gambling.

Finally, if you or your loved one fears that they are in danger of slipping back into bad habits, it might be useful for them to go back into treatment for a 'top-up', or implement any of the other strategies that they have found useful.

## **How do we minimise the risk of relapse?**

In general, some things which tend to keep relapse at bay are staying busy, stable employment, social engagement, and alternative leisure pursuits. Someone who has spent a lot of time gambling in the past may suddenly find themselves with many empty hours to fill when they quit.

Finding something to do that makes them feel good about themselves is important. Re-embracing roles such as 'responsible parent' and 'caring partner' is also helpful to many.

It might also be helpful to come up with a shared list of "dos and don'ts", in a collaborative fashion. For instance, seeing friends who gamble at gambling venues might be a don't, as might be going to the casino. It also might even be a good idea to limit seeing friends who gamble for a time.

### Take home message

Adhering to a shared financial plan is a useful means of rebuilding trust.

Lapses and relapse are normal parts of the recovery process, and don't mean the gambler is back at "square one".

Keeping busy and socially connected can help reduce the risk of relapse. A list of "dos and don'ts" can also help.

If a relapse occurs, top-up treatment sessions or other previously helpful strategies may be useful.

### Find out more

You are not alone in this. Gambling Help is a free service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for families and friends of people with gambling problems. Free and confidential counselling is available both in person, and over the phone, so you can get informed, and put yourself in the best position to support yourself and your loved one.

Help in languages other than English is also available through the Gambling Help website or by calling **1800 856 800**.

### Acknowledgements

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