
Gambling - providing support

Summary

- You cannot force someone to acknowledge that they have an issue with gambling, but you can encourage them to seek professional help.
 - Avoid lending them money.
 - If you're not sure how to approach the situation, a counsellor can point you in the right direction.
 - Expect things may not go to plan. Most gamblers make several attempts to stop gambling before they stop completely.
-

People gamble for many reasons such as excitement, the thrill of winning or to be social. Gambling becomes an issue when it causes harm to the gambler and those close to them. Usually, this means they are spending more money or time on gambling than they can afford. It can be painful if a family member or friend has an issue with gambling.

As a person without a problem, it may be hard to understand why they don't just stop. You cannot force someone to acknowledge that they have an issue with gambling, but you can encourage them to seek professional help. If you're not sure how to approach the situation, a counsellor can point you in the right direction.

Money-related signs of gambling

Financial signs of a gambling problem may include:

- Unexplained debt or borrowing
- Money and/or assets disappearing
- Numerous loans
- Unpaid bills or disconnection notices
- Lack of food in the house
- Losing wallets or money regularly
- Missing financial statements
- Secret bank accounts, loans or credit cards.

Personal signs of gambling

Emotional signs of a gambling problem may include:

- Moodiness, unexplained anger and depression
- Decreased contact with friends
- Family complaints about being emotionally shut out
- Avoidance of social events
- Secretiveness about activities
- Manipulation of others using threats, lies or charm.

Time-related signs of gambling

Other signs of a gambling problem may include:

- Disappearing for amounts of time that they cannot account for
 - Having no time for everyday activities
 - Overusing sick days and days off
-

- Using increasing amounts of time to study gambling
- Taking an unusual amount of time for tasks, for example, taking two hours to get milk from the corner store.

Talk about it

The best way to find out if someone has a gambling problem is to ask. They may be relieved to talk about their gambling, or feel too ashamed and guilty to talk about it. They may get very angry or deny that they have a problem.

You cannot predict how a family member or friend will react, but you can let them know you are asking because you care about them. Try to discuss gambling in an honest and non-confrontational way. Suggestions include:

- Talk about what you have noticed, for example, that they spend a lot of time at the club.
- Express your worries, for example, that you are concerned they have a problem.
- Even if they deny they have a problem, you can provide them with information about where to get help.
- Try to keep the lines of communication open and focused on the problem.
- If you find the discussion aggressive, circular or hurtful, take a break and agree on another time to have the discussion.

Keep the lines of communication open

Tips for a successful approach include:

- Accept that you cannot control or change the gambler's behaviour. They have to be willing to change themselves. Be supportive. Try not to pressure them about their gambling.
- Choose an appropriate time and place to talk. Discuss the matter in a private place away from distractions and judgement. Ensure you will have a suitable amount of time to talk. Talk when you are both feeling well, rather than tired or upset.
- Use statements about how the person's behaviour makes you feel and the reasons for this. For example, 'I'm worried because you seem distant and you are coming home late at night'.
- Be firm, but express your concerns positively. Telling the person what to do or using sentences that include 'you should' is unlikely to be useful.
- Ask them for their perspective and allow them to tell their story.
- Listen in a non-judgemental manner that is free from criticism.
- Encourage them to take responsibility for their behaviour. Help them address their issues in a way that best suits them.

Decisions about money

One of the decisions you may face is whether to give or lend money to a problem gambler. Issues to consider include:

- Lending money on a regular basis can make you resentful and angry, which could harm your relationship.
- In many instances, lending money to someone with a gambling problem allows them to gamble more.
- Lending money can provide some immediate relief to you, but it is likely they will return again and again until you set firm limits or boundaries.
- You can respond to difficult requests for financial bailouts with an answer such as, 'I care about you and I don't want you to suffer' or 'I'm saying 'no' for your own good'.

Quitting may take several attempts

Overcoming a gambling problem will take time. Issues to consider include:

- Expect things may not go to plan. Most gamblers make several attempts to stop gambling before they stop completely.
- Encourage the person to seek professional help. Some will possibly make contact with a problem-gambling service, but not show up or only go once or twice.
- Slip-ups can occur while trying to stop gambling. However, slip-ups can make the person aware of what triggers their gambling and help them to devise new tactics to manage it.

- Your emotional support is important. Congratulate the gambler on their successes and note positive behavioural changes.

Develop an action plan for lapses

Returning to gambling is a common problem for people trying to stop, so it can be useful to have a plan in place that will help keep them headed in the right direction.

Suggestions include:

- If they ask you to a meeting with a counsellor, go along if you can.
- Encourage them to keep talking openly with you.
- Agree to talk about gambling relapses or loss of control, so triggers that lead to the urge to gamble are understood and can be handled in future.
- If they set out a budget and ask for help sticking to it, support them.
- If you are not sure how to help, consult with a gambling service.

Gambler's Help

Gambler's Help is a free service for people who are affected by gambling. There are Gambler's Help services available throughout Victoria that provide:

- Free, professional, confidential counselling for people for whom gambling is an issue
- Counselling for the family and friends of people for whom gambling is an issue
- Financial counselling to help people with gambling-related money problems
- Advice on self-exclusion programs and other support services
- Community education to help communities reduce the negative effects of gambling.

Where to get help

- Your doctor or other health professional
- **Gambler's Help** Tel. **1800 858 858**, TTY 1800 777 706 – 24-hour telephone counselling service
- **Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation**
- **Gambling Help Online** - counselling and information services including a **peer support program**.
- **Gamblers Anonymous** Tel. **(03) 9696 6108** – support group for people with a gambling problem
- **Gamble Aware** – information about the odds of winning, how gambling works, and when to stop
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**
- **SuicideLine** Victoria Tel. **1300 651 251**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2019 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.