

Anglicare's **Gamblers Help**

Our service
is **voluntary,**
confidential
and **free**

Family
Resource
Booklet

1800 243 232
anglicare-tas.org.au



AnglicareTAS
Choice, support and hope

Contents

- 3 Prevalence of gambling harm in Tasmania
- 4 Understand that gambling is an addiction
- 6 Impacts of gambling
- 7 How you can support someone experiencing gambling harm
- 8 Tips for having healthy conversations
- 10 Stages of change
- 11 Avoid rewarding the gambling behaviour
- 11 Gambling harm affects the whole community
- 12 Taking care of yourself
- 13 Practical things that can be done
- 14 Speak to someone
- 15 Helpful websites
- 16 Services and supports in your local area

Prevalence of gambling harm in Tasmania

Electronic gambling machines (EGMs or Pokies) are the biggest cause of gambling harm in Tasmania.

Persons contacting the Gamblers Help service were asked which forms of gambling were causing harm for them.

- 75.5 % of people reported having experienced harm arising from using EGMs at hotels or clubs
- 39.5% of people reported experiencing harm from using EGMs at casinos
- 15.5% of people experienced harm from racing and betting on sports
- 7.8% of people experienced harm from playing keno

Few people experiencing gambling harm seek help

The Productivity Commission Inquiry Report on Gambling (2010) findings mirror the Tasmanian Gamblers Help service experience. Those experiencing gambling harm often do not seek professional help until a crisis occurs, such as:

- Financial ruin
- Relationship breakdown
- Court charges
- Attempted suicide, or
- When they hit 'rock bottom'

"Nearly 70% of people that Gamblers Help supports in Tasmania reported gambling had been causing harm for two years or more before they sought help."

The main obstacles to help-seeking are:

- Feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment
- Denial, and
- Believing they can resolve their gambling without professional supports

"The Productivity Commission Report concluded that the help-seeking rate is between 8% and 17% of people experiencing gambling harm."



Understand that gambling is an addiction

Addiction can be described as a chronic health condition which is characterised by the inability to stop consuming a drug or cease an activity, even if it's causing physical or psychological harm to the person or those around them.

Warning signs that someone may be experiencing gambling harm

Financial signs

- Money missing from bank accounts, wallet, purse or money jar
- Household items and valuables missing
- Regularly short of money even though they earn a wage
- Borrowing money regularly
- Having many loans at the one time
- Being secretive about financial records or payslips
- Unpaid bills and/or disconnection notices
- Lack of food in the house

Mood and behavioural signs

- Becoming withdrawn from others including avoiding family events
- Performance at work is negatively affected
- Seeming worried, agitated or upset for no apparent reason
- Reporting feeling hopeless, depressed, frustrated or suicidal
- Changes in personality – sleeping, eating, or sexual relationship patterns
- Controlling and/or manipulative behaviour
- Using threats, lies or charm to manipulate others

Time-related signs

- Spending more and more time gambling
- Being secretive about unexplained absences
- Often being late for commitments
- Taking a lot of sick days or days off
- Taking an unusual amount of time for simple tasks (e.g taking two hours to get the paper from the shops)

Remember gambling behaviour is often hidden

It can be difficult to tell if someone is experiencing gambling harm as many people hide it, don't show their feelings and lie or get angry if questioned about their behaviour.

You may not want to believe that someone you know or love has an issue with gambling. Sometimes people feel that they should have noticed and acted sooner.

Gambling increases the chances of encountering other life issues

- 96.3% of people experiencing gambling harm also met one or more criteria for other mental health issues
- 75% who experience gambling harm also had a co-occurring alcohol use issue
- 40% of those experiencing gambling harm also had a co-occurring drug use issue
- Data suggests more people will seek help for a drug use issue before they will seek treatment for gambling harm

96.3%
of people
experiencing gambling
harm also met one or
more criteria for other
mental health
issues



Impacts of gambling

It's estimated that for every person experiencing gambling harm another seven people are adversely affected. Their behaviour can have serious social, emotional, physical and financial impacts on those who are close to them.

Whether it's your partner, child, parent or friend, the behaviour and consequences that result from gambling harm can have a significant impact.

Research shows that people close to someone experiencing gambling may experience a range of emotional, psychological and financial effects.

These may include:

Emotional

- Physical and/or emotional abuse
- Relationship breakdowns and/or lack of intimacy
- Feelings of worthlessness, shame and embarrassment
- Feelings of helplessness
- Psychological issues

Stress-related illnesses

- Social isolation
- Family arguments
- Depression and anxiety
- Poor sleep

Financial

- Financial issues and hardship
- Loss of property and valued items
- Inability to meet bills and increasing debts
- Decreased work or school performance

Impacts on children

- Loss of trust - as a result of lies, secrets and broken promises
- Depression - a feeling of powerlessness to deal with the problem and blame for causing the problem
- Feeling anxious - worried about losing a parent due to separation or divorce
- Loss of self-esteem
- Social withdrawal, isolation and loneliness - feeling ashamed and different to others
- Feeling angry and hurt

How you can support someone experiencing gambling harm

It can be hard to help someone experiencing gambling harm, especially if they don't think they have an issue or don't want to stop. You may find it difficult to talk to them about it as you do not know what to say and you find it confronting.

Providing support is an important step in recovery. Simple gestures such as listening when the person wants to talk and checking how they are feeling can help them feel safe. This may then lead to them to begin to talk about what's going on for them.

Discussing the issue of gambling too directly can be confronting for both you and the person. It's a potentially sensitive conversation that could escalate and be upsetting for everyone concerned.

Use connecting statements

Connecting statements are truthful statements about something positive between you and the other person that makes you both feel connected and positive about your relationship. They are a useful way of starting a conversation.

For example, *'I care about you and what happens to us. Because of that, I feel that we need to talk about what I've been noticing.'*



Tips for having healthy conversations

Talking about someone's gambling harm can be very hard. The shame and the stigma surrounding gambling harm means communication must be done with care and sensitivity.

Do

- Listen to what they have to say
- Let them know you're asking because you care about them
- Without blaming, tell them how their gambling might be impacting others
- Use non-judgemental communication
- Encourage them to act to help themselves and work on it together
- Encourage them to take up alternative activities they enjoy away from gambling
- Focus on positives and fixes rather than the problems themselves
- Encourage them to talk about what might be good about gambling less
- Use the words they use
- Ask them, "How bad do things have to get?"
- Be patient, this is a process that can take weeks or months
- Ask about potential difficulties with managing money
- Assist with peer connection (if appropriate)
- Provide information on self-help resources including guidance on goal setting and finding the circuit breakers to assist to restrain gambling urges
- Provide information on Gamblers Help support options including:
 - Online forums, online support and live chat
 - 24-hour helplines and professional phone counselling
 - Face-to-face counselling

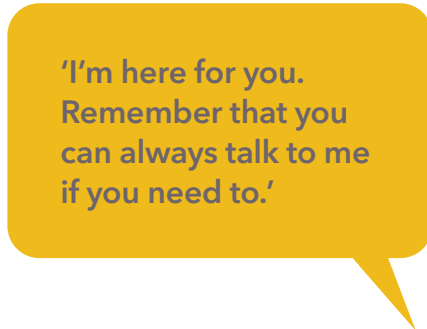
Avoid

- Telling people what to do, instead come to a solution together
- Labelling them a problem
- Lecturing: if you keep chipping away at people they won't hear you
- Telling people what you would do unless you have overcome addiction


Dealing with negative reactions

If the person does not want to talk about it, you can tell them that gambling help is available and you're willing to talk when they're ready. If the conversation becomes unproductive or aggressive, you should end the discussion and try again at another time.

You can say things like



'I'm here for you. Remember that you can always talk to me if you need to.'



'I want to help you. Tell me what I can do to support you.'

Interventions should be a last resort and should be done in a way that helps the person feel supported and cared for rather than punished or shamed.



Stages of change

Understanding what a person is going through can help you with communicating with them more effectively. If someone feels they are understood, they're more likely to talk openly and honestly and allow you to develop a plan together.

Many go through stages of change when attempting to stop or reduce gambling.

- 1 No problem:** The positives of gambling are outweighing the negatives. They are enjoying gambling and don't see it as a problem.
- 2 Thinking about it:** They feel ambivalent about their gambling and are thinking about making a change. They enjoy it, even though they know that it costs time and money.
- 3. Getting ready:** They are ready to control or stop their gambling and have decided to do something about it. They have scheduled a time very soon to start making changes.
- 4 Taking action:** They are working to change their gambling and will say things like "I am doing something to change my behaviour". They should be pulling together a package of strategies they can use to help them change their behaviour.
- 5 Maintaining change:** This is when they have identified all the things they need to do to change their behaviour and started to put them into practice. They just need to practice and turn the new behaviours into habits. This stage can be hard.
- 6 Slips and falls:** People may slip up and start gambling again. It's a common part of the process of change. A lapse or slip up can be a good way of finding out how to adjust the plan to stay on track.

Understanding these stages of change can help decide the best way to respond and the appropriate type of support to provide.

Accepting and working within the stage is crucial to helping someone experiencing gambling harm. Try not to push someone into a stage of change they are not ready for.

Avoid rewarding the gambling behaviour

Providing or loaning money to a person experiencing gambling harm may reinforce or reward the behaviour and contribute to it continuing. Instead, consider setting up a system that rewards positive behaviour and deters the negative.

For example, you might consider not lending money if they continue to gamble. However, if they cut back or stop gambling you could offer to conditionally help to pay off a bill.

Be aware that when the person has paid all their debts, it can be a time when they are vulnerable to relapse. For example, some gamblers may begin convincing themselves that once the debts are paid off a small gamble is acceptable.

Gambling harm affects the whole community

Friends, family and other key supports can play a significant role in supporting someone through the harms caused by gambling.

It's important to remember that if someone close to you or a loved one is experiencing gambling harm, it's not your fault.

The process of overcoming gambling harm is not easy. It's natural for people providing support to experience different feelings, concerns and thoughts.

Common feelings include:

- **Anger:** How could they do this to me/us?
- **Shame:** I will have to keep this a secret
- **Guilt:** I didn't pay attention to the signs
- **Fear:** How can I support? I'm not qualified
- **Avoidance:** If we pretend this isn't happening, it will go away
- **Minimisation:** They are just trying to get attention
- **Cutting off:** This is not my problem - someone else can deal with it



Taking care of yourself

Feeling the strain of supporting someone with a gambling issue is normal. Many find it difficult to understand why someone cannot just stop gambling and may ask 'how can I make them stop?' or 'what can I do, to make them see the problem?'

Ultimately it is the responsibility of the person who gambles to change their behaviour.

It's normal to feel upset or angry about someone else's gambling. It is also natural to want to take responsibility for someone else's gambling. However, when someone chooses to continue to gamble, it can lead to others feeling upset and hurt.

Focusing on caring for yourself and working through your feelings can decrease the impact of someone's gambling on you.

Self-care

It is important to look after yourself. In the long run, feeling tired and run down as a result of trying to help is not helpful to you or the person you are supporting. Taking time out will help you to cope better in difficult circumstances.

You could try to:

- **Relax:** Take some time for yourself, book a massage or just have a bath or shower
- **Eat healthy food:** Eating well will make you feel better overall
- **Get moving:** Go for a walk, run or join a fitness class. Moving even just a little will make you feel better

Seek support

It can be very difficult to cope on your own when a person close to you is experiencing gambling harm.

Talk to someone you trust, such as a close family member, local doctor, friend or counsellor. Find people that you know will not judge you or the person that gambles.

Talking about what you're going through can help alleviate stress. They will have a different perspective on the situation and could provide useful advice.

Planning

Know your limits by thinking about what you are willing to accept and what is unacceptable.

Determine the level of involvement you are prepared to commit to, and then discuss this with the person who gambles.

Discuss and negotiate a plan by determining what each of you is willing to do. It may be helpful to speak to a professional gambling counsellor, another family member or a friend for assistance in making decisions or to develop a plan.

Practical things that can be done

Taking steps to protect you and your family

In most cases, people who are experiencing gambling harm have difficulty dealing with money.

There are measures you can take to protect yourself and those around you, including:

- Take control of finances for the immediate future
- Limit access to cash for the person who gambles - You can seek support from a specialist to help you work out the best strategy for your situation.
- Organise direct debit for bills, mortgages and other regular payments
- Create a realistic budget and keep good records of all financial transactions
- Keep a check on the mail
- Speak to a financial counsellor about how to avoid inheriting someone's debts and removing your name from joint accounts
- Do not sign anything you don't understand or are not prepared to pay for
- Do not lend EFTPOS or credit cards, share pin numbers or leave that information where it can be easily accessed



Speak to someone

If you need to talk to someone at any time of the day or night, we recommend the following services:

Lifeline 13 11 14

0477 13 11 14 (Lifeline Text 6.00pm to midnight)

Gamblers Helpline 1800 858 858

Gamblers Help telephone-based gambling specialist support services include:

- 'Gamblers Helpline Tasmania' seven days a week, 24 hours a day information, therapeutic counselling and referral service
- Referrals to and from appropriate organisations, including other services within the Gamblers Help service suite
- With appropriate consent, follow up services for people (e.g. callbacks, SMS follow-ups)

Gamblers Anonymous 1300 224 636

Gamblers Help is funded by the Tasmanian Government through the Department of Communities. Visit Department of Communities for more information - www.communities.tas.gov.au.

Helpful websites

Gamblers Help Online

www.gamblinghelponline.org.au

A useful website with research and strategies to support someone experiencing gambling harm. 24/7 supports and tools including the gambling calculator.

Online gambling specialist support services include:

- Gambling information and resources
- Self-assessment and self-help tools
- Counselling via email or chat

Know Your odds website

www.knowyourodds.net.au

Facts about gambling, including the house edge and why people can become addicted. The website also contains useful tools to help work out how much money is being spent on gambling and how serious the gambling harm may be.

Gamblers Anonymous

www.Gaaustralia.org.au

A fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other. Their hope is that they may solve their common problem and help others recover from a gambling harm.





AnglicareTAS

Choice, support and hope

1800 243 232

anglicare-tas.org.au