

Understanding gambling harm



Gambling is a normal activity for some people. It might be a bit of fun with friends, a weekly lottery ticket, or a day at the races.

But for some people gambling can become an issue. Recognising when gambling is causing harm can be challenging and confronting.

4 reasons why some people like gambling

1. It's fun to take risks

It's human nature to feel excited and positive when taking a risk. The anticipation alone can create a natural high. It's what we look for in fun and entertainment.

2. It's a bit of escapism

People like to switch off from the everyday. Whether down at the club, by the track, at the casino or betting online, you can be surrounded by different people, sounds and emotions.

3. They want to make money

Gambling is a game of chance. Sometimes you get lucky, but most of the time you lose. Even when you have a win it may all be gone with the next bet.

4. You've been brought up with it

Card games, scratchies, a bet on the Melbourne Cup – they're all part of growing up, and these days, gambling advertising is everywhere, especially in sport.

Where gambling issues can start

All sorts of people can develop issues with gambling. It isn't possible to identify a single trigger. It's more likely to be due to a combination of experiences and social cues.

Motivation may be a factor. Someone playing the pokies in their local club may see it as an escape from problems or worries; someone who bets on horse racing or plays casino table games may be chasing a thrill.

Some life experiences kickstart excessive gambling

- a big win early on, which creates a powerful positive association between gambling and winning
- anxiety and stress at home or work
- debt
- a close personal loss.

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People may also be affected by other risk factors

- a family history of addiction
- mental health issues such as depression and anxiety
- not understanding that gambling outcomes are random
- a tendency to avoid problems and emotional stress rather than seek support
- personal issues with alcohol or drugs.

Some people are less likely to develop issues

It seems like common sense, but people who are less vulnerable generally have:

- financial security
- supportive friends
- hopes and dreams for the future
- stability at work
- the ability to use support rather than escape to cope with problems
- knowledge of the randomness of winning
- the capacity to set limits on gambling.

Signs of gambling harm

It can be hard to know if someone is struggling with gambling. Your loved one may have done everything possible to hide it from you, and no one wants to jump to conclusions. Your hunch might be right, but it's worth knowing how to put your finger on what's wrong.

The clues

- they won't talk about where they're spending their time
- they're reluctant to talk about their finances

- they collect the mail and find ways to stop you from seeing bills
- you've noticed money going missing – from shared accounts or elsewhere
- they ask to borrow money but won't give a good reason why
- they've started selling things without explaining why
- sometimes they have cash to throw around, but other times they're broke
- they get upset or angry more easily
- they're abusing alcohol or drugs
- they've lost interest in usual activities like spending time with friends or family
- they neglect work, school, family, personal needs or household responsibilities
- they seem anxious, worried, guilty, depressed or irritable
- they argue with family or friends about money and gambling
- they're always thinking or talking about gambling.

What those clues might mean

- they're spending more money and time on gambling than they can afford
- they find it hard to manage or stop gambling
- they're lying about gambling and trying to hide it from people
- they're chasing their losses or using gambling to get out of financial trouble
- they're gambling until all their money's gone
- they're gambling with bigger amounts of money, more often or for longer times.

Help is close at hand

No matter how you're affected by gambling – your own or someone else's – GambleAware can help. For free, confidential advice and support, and to find services near you, go to gambleaware.nsw.gov.au or call us on **1800 858 858** 24/7.