

GAMBLING AND FAMILIES

For most people, gambling is something they do occasionally as a form of recreation. However, on occasion, certain gambling behaviours can adversely affect a person's physical or psychological health or have an impact on significant areas of their life such as family relationships and financial well-being. The severity of problems can range from minor to life-altering.

Families affected by problem gambling experience difficulties and challenges that are unique to this particular situation. One major barrier to discovery is the invisibility of the problem. While problem gamblers do exhibit some signs (e.g. time away from home, mood swings), these subtle changes could also indicate some other problem. It is common for family members to discover the seriousness of the gambling problem after it has taken firm root and threatened their financial security. When this happens, they may feel anger, resentment, betrayal, and distrust. The lack of trust can often last for an extended period of time, complicating recovery for the partner and other family members and providing the couple with challenges in their relationship.

In addition, children who live in homes affected by problem gambling may be at greater risk of developing emotional or behavioural problems in an attempt to deal with the anger and frustration they are experiencing. Children need to be provided with age appropriate information in order to understand that:

- this situation is not their fault,
- it is not their job to fix the family's problem, and
- they can continue to love their gambling parent even though they hate what he/she is doing.

By connecting them to appropriate resources such as counsellors, clergy, youth workers, friends or family members, children have the opportunity to ask questions, express their feelings and access support to stay healthy.



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Do's And Don'ts With A Gambler

Do:

- Encourage the gambler to access help through the Gambling Helpline (1-800-463-1554 or 944-6382) or a local AFM office. Crisis counselling, information, identification of other resources can be provided.
- Support the gambler if he/she decides to access treatment services.
- Help the gambler become involved in a number of social and recreational activities. There will be a void in his/her life when he/she stops the gambling behaviour.
- Monitor for depression or suicide. Some gamblers become depressed and view suicide as the only solution to their problems. If you have concerns, encourage them to seek professional help.

Don't:

- Expect that if the gambler has stopped gambling it will be easy for them to abstain. Many gamblers find it very stressful to stop gambling.
- Blame, harass, lecture or moralize. The gambler has not intentionally hurt you or your family. It will take time and effort to work through this behaviour.
- Lie or provide false excuses for the gambler's behaviour.
- Expect that if the gambling stops your life will return to normal immediately. In fact, life may seem more stressful. It might take some time for you to sort through the financial issues and even longer for the emotional pain to go away.

Do's And Don'ts For Someone Living With A Gambler

Do:

- Call the Gambling Helpline or a local AFM office for further information and assistance. Educating yourself on the nature of problem gambling and how it has an impact on your family and its members can help you with some of the feelings and questions you have.
- Break the isolation. Set up a support system for yourself and family (i.e. friends, other family members, community support groups).
- Consult with a professional or a friend who understands debt management as your family's financial situation might need to be reviewed.
- Maintain your own balance through friends and social activities. Self-care is important.

Don't:

- Blame yourself for your partner's gambling problems.
- Bail out the gambler from debt. Although this might resolve the immediate crisis, many gamblers use bailouts to go back to gambling.
- Sign any loan applications, promissory notes or other financial documents without consulting with someone who understands your financial situation.
- Go gambling yourself to try to win back money to pay off debts. This could place you at risk for developing a gambling problem.
- Make any hasty decisions about your relationship.