

Living with a Problem Gambler

Watching someone close struggle with a gambling addiction can have devastating effects on their family and friends. Although the problem belongs to the gambler, those closest to them are usually the first to experience the difficulties created by excessive gambling.

Identifying a Problem Gambler

Gambling addictions can take a serious toll on both the individual and the wider network of friends and family. Here are a few of the more common warning signs to watch for:

- Bill collectors constantly calling or mailing.
- The family member is away for long periods of time with no explanation.
- Expressed or implied unrealistic expectations that gambling will bring wealth.
- Frequently borrowing money.
- Personality changes including irritability, secrecy and lying.
- Depression.
- Unexplained absences from work.
- Boasting about earnings but never mentioning losses.
- Drastic mood swings.

The signs that someone close may have a problem with gambling can be subtle and difficult to interpret. Here are a few questions to ask yourself to help discover the whether someone you know has a problem:

- Do you feel they can't be trusted with money or hide their money from them?
- Do they promise to stop gambling by pleading for another chance, but continue to gamble?
- Do they immediately return to gambling to try to recover losses?
- Do you feel the need to search their clothing, go through their wallet or check up on their activities?
- When discussing the issue, do they use guilt or try to shift responsibility for their gambling?
- Do you feel a need to anticipate their moods or try to control their life?
- Has the person's gambling ever brought you to the point of threatening to break up your family?
- How do you feel about the quality of your life together?

Getting Help for the Problem Gambler

Recognizing the problem is the first, critical step. If the person admits the problem exists, it's a huge step in the right direction. Unfortunately, many gamblers have difficulty admitting that there is a problem and are convinced that they will recoup their losses.

Remember that making the gambler feel guilty could worsen the problem. They could become even more secretive and less inclined to discuss the matter further. If the gambler refuses to admit the problem, patience is important. Have a calm and constructive conversation, assuring the gambler that they have your full support. Suggest researching the topic. This may help the gambler reflect upon the situation without feeling pressured.

Until the problem is under control, a gambler's access to money may need to be restrained. Some things to try include:

- Making an agreement with the gambler that they pay their bills by cheque only, or take over the paying of bills for them.
- Have the gambler's pay deposited directly into their bank account.
- Remove any cash and valuables from places the problem gambler could have access to, including safety deposit boxes.

- Request that another trusted person's signature be required to authorize withdrawals and the cashing of cheques.
- Tell other family members and friends of the arrangements and discourage money lending.

Remember that a gambler cannot be forced to seek therapy. Make the gambler aware of appropriate resources and social support and the odds are they will be more open to seeking therapy. The family must be included in any treatment program both to help the problem gambler see the impact of their behaviour and to help heal the damage done. If there is still some uncertainty as to whether the problem exists or its treatment, seek out the advice of a professional.