

# CONCERNED ABOUT A LOVED ONE'S GAMBLING?

Thousands of Missourians have a loved one who is struggling with a gambling problem. Problem gambling is gambling to the extent that it causes emotional, family, social, occupational, legal, or financial difficulties for the gambler, as well as, significant others.

People naturally want to help the ones they love overcome such a devastating life problem. Attempting to help someone you love overcome their (gambling) addiction is a difficult and challenging task. Educate yourself about your loved one's addiction. Addiction responds best to early recognition, intervention, and treatment.

### Understanding problem and compulsive gambling

The term "problem gambling" refers to all gambling behavior patterns that lead to adverse consequences.

- Problems with gambling range from single incidents (such as over-spending) to compulsive (pathological) gambling.
- Compulsive gambling is a progressive behavior disorder in which an individual is preoccupied with gambling, feels the urge to bet, has emotional dependence on gambling, and loss of control.
- The compulsive gambler experiences the same effect from gambling as an addict experiences from using their drug of choice (alcohol, cocaine, amphetamines).
- Problem gambling can have a significant impact on the individual's financial situation. Unfortunately, this is frequently compounded by the problem gambler's irrational belief that gambling is the solution to the financial problems he/she has encountered
- Neither the amount of time spent gambling nor the amount of money lost or won determines when gambling becomes a problem. Rather, gambling becomes a problem when it negatively impacts any area of the gambler's life.

### Get involved

A compulsive gambler may not acknowledge the problems incurred by gambling. Typically family, spouse, employer and friends recognize the problem before the gambler. Therefore they need someone to get involved, to talk about the problem honestly and openly, and to give them feedback.

- Be clear, don't judge, and speak only for yourself.
- Provide information, not advice.
- Feedback needs to be direct, specific, and behavioral. For example, "Last night you said you would be back from gambling by 9. You didn't get home until after midnight and I was worried."
- Educate yourself about problem gambling, its effect on the gambler and their loved ones, guidelines for recovery, and the resources available in your area.
- Realize that you cannot force the gambler to stop gambling.
- Be prepared for denial or a hostile reaction.
- Protect your financial security. For information on how to protect yourself financially, request or download a copy of *"Personal Financial Strategies for the Loved Ones of*

*Problem Gamblers*” within the Problem Gambling Toolkit available from the SAMHSA’s National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, <http://ncadistore.samhsa.gov/catalog/productDetails.aspx?ProductID=17692>

- Accept that you have the right to protect yourself physically and emotionally.
- If your loved one’s addiction is impacting their children, you may need to take steps to ensure the children are safe from harm and neglect.
- Perhaps most importantly, seek help for yourself. Don’t try to do it alone, isolation can encourage hopelessness and fear.

### **Don’t take their pain away**

A problem or compulsive gambler will usually not develop motivation to change without experiencing pain. The natural consequences of addiction cause pain. It’s hard to stand back and let someone you love suffer. Just keep in mind that if you take away their pain, you also take away their motivation to change. Do not cover up, pay their financial obligations, make excuses or in any way shield them from the natural consequences of their behavior. Do not take personal responsibility, or feel guilty for the loved one’s behavior.

### **Get help yourself**

Discuss the problem with someone you trust who has specific training or experience with problem or compulsive gambling. Develop a support system for yourself. Gam-Anon is a 12-step support group specifically for anyone who feels they have been affected by another’s gambling problem. Gam-Anon is more about helping you than helping the person with the addiction.

Missouri offers free compulsive gambling treatment services for the gambler and his or her loved ones. Family members can access the free treatment regardless of whether or not the problem gambler seeks treatment. If you have questions or need guidance, please contact the problem gambling help line, a certified compulsive gambling counselor, or other mental health provider.

### **Get more information**

Problem gambling help line: 888-BETS OFF or (888) 238-7633  
[gamblingcounselor@lifecrisis.org](mailto:gamblingcounselor@lifecrisis.org) (available 24 hours a day)

Missouri Division of Alcohol & Drug Abuse: (800) 575-7480 or  
[www.dmh.mo.gov/ada/adaindex.htm](http://www.dmh.mo.gov/ada/adaindex.htm)

Missouri Gaming Commission: (573) 526-4080 or  
[www.mgc.dps.mo.gov/nav\\_prob\\_gamb\\_main.htm](http://www.mgc.dps.mo.gov/nav_prob_gamb_main.htm)

Missouri Alliance to Curb Problem Gambling: <http://www.888betsoff.org>

Gamblers Anonymous: <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org>

Gam-Anon: <http://www.gam-anon.org>

National Council on Problem Gambling: <http://www.ncpgambling.org>

Women Helping Women Recovery Newsletters: <http://www.femalegamblers.org>

### **Sources**

National Council on Problem Gambling  
Nevada Council on Problem Gambling  
*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4<sup>th</sup> ed, 1994), American Psychiatric Association  
National Gambling Impact Study Commission Final Report (1999)



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