

LGBTQ+ University Students Gambling Harm Guidance



Universities are vibrant, diverse communities where students explore identity, independence, relationships, and belonging. For LGBTQ+ students, higher education can be a transformative period, a time of affirmation, self-discovery, and connection. Yet it can also be a time marked by stress, financial pressure, discrimination, and social isolation. These factors create conditions in which gambling can become a coping mechanism, a distraction, or a perceived solution to deeper challenges.

Gambling harm is not simply about losing money. It encompasses emotional distress, academic disruption, relationship strain, and mental health challenges. LGBTQ+ students face a disproportionately high risk of experiencing these harms due to a combination of social, psychological, cultural, and economic factors. This report provides universities with a detailed understanding of these risks and offers guidance on how to create safer, more supportive environments for LGBTQ+ students.



Understanding Gambling Harm in Higher Education

Gambling harm is best understood as a spectrum. It can begin subtly: a student feeling distracted, anxious, or preoccupied, and escalate into significant emotional, financial, and academic consequences. In a university context, gambling harm may manifest as:

- Difficulty concentrating in lectures
- Withdrawal from friends or societies
- Heightened anxiety or irritability
- Missed deadlines or declining academic performance
- Secrecy around finances or phone use
- Increased alcohol or substance use
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or overwhelm

These experiences often develop gradually, and students may not recognise them as signs of harm. Many will not identify as “experiencing gambling harms”; instead, they may describe themselves as stressed, unlucky, or “just trying to get back on track”.

Universities therefore play a crucial role in early identification, stigma reduction, and providing safe pathways to support.





Why LGBTQ+ Students Face Higher Risk

The elevated risk for LGBTQ+ students is not inherent to LGBTQ+ identity. It arises from the social conditions and pressures LGBTQ+ people disproportionately experience. These include minority stress, discrimination, financial instability, and targeted marketing, all of which can increase vulnerability to gambling harm.

Minority Stress and Emotional Load

LGBTQ+ students often navigate environments where they may experience microaggressions, misgendering, homophobia, transphobia, or the pressure of repeatedly coming out. Even in inclusive institutions, the emotional labour of managing identity can be significant.

Minority stress theory explains that chronic exposure to stigma and discrimination creates psychological strain. Students may experience anxiety, hypervigilance, loneliness, or dysphoria. Gambling can become a way to escape these feelings, offering temporary relief or distraction.

Targeted Advertising and Digital Exposure

LGBTQ+ communities are increasingly targeted by gambling companies. Advertising appears on queer dating apps, LGBTQ+ social media spaces, and platforms where queer culture is celebrated. Students who rely on digital spaces for community and connection may be exposed to gambling promotions more frequently than their peers.

This targeted marketing often frames gambling as fun, glamorous, or community-oriented, making it harder for students to recognise risk.

Financial Precarity

LGBTQ+ students are statistically more likely to experience financial instability. Some may have limited or no family support, particularly if their identity is not accepted at home. Others may face additional costs related to transition, travel to safe spaces, or mental health support.

In this context, gambling can appear to offer hope, a way to “fix” money problems quickly or regain a sense of control. Students may feel pressure to keep up with peers socially or academically, and gambling can seem like a shortcut to financial stability.

Community, Belonging, and Social Pressure

For many LGBTQ+ students, university is the first place they can explore identity openly. Social spaces, nightlife, societies, group chats can become essential sources of belonging. However, some of these spaces normalise gambling, whether through sports betting, online games, or casual “fun bets”.

Students may gamble not because they want to, but because it feels like part of fitting in.

Co-Occurring Mental Health Challenges

LGBTQ+ students are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, trauma, or loneliness due to societal stigma and discrimination. Gambling can provide temporary emotional relief, numbing difficult feelings or offering a sense of excitement and escape.

This emotional function can make gambling particularly compelling, and particularly risky.



Why LGBTQ+ Students May Turn to Gambling

Gambling is rarely about money alone. It is often about emotion, identity, and coping. LGBTQ+ students may turn to gambling for several interconnected reasons.

Gambling as Escape

For students dealing with loneliness, dysphoria, or stress, gambling can offer a momentary escape. The focus on odds, outcomes, and anticipation can temporarily quiet intrusive thoughts or emotional pain.

Gambling as Control

Students who feel powerless in other areas of life, whether due to discrimination, academic pressure, or identity-related stress — may find gambling appealing because it creates an illusion of control. The rules are clear, the stakes feel manageable, and the moment of placing a bet can feel empowering.

Gambling as Community

In some LGBTQ+ social spaces, gambling is woven into group activities. Students may participate to feel included, even if they are uncomfortable or unsure.

Gambling as Hope

Financial strain can make gambling feel like a solution. Students may believe they can “win back” what they’ve lost or solve money problems quickly. This belief can be especially strong for those facing transition-related costs or limited family support.





How Gambling Harm Shows Up in Campus Life

Gambling harm often appears subtly at first. A student may seem distracted, anxious, or withdrawn. They may skip lectures, avoid social plans, or become preoccupied with their phone. Over time, these behaviours can escalate into:

- Academic decline
- Strained relationships
- Financial crisis
- Mental health deterioration
- Increased substance use
- Social isolation

These signs do not indicate moral failure or irresponsibility. They indicate that a student is struggling and may need support.





Supporting Students Who Feel Pressured to Gamble

Students may feel pressured to gamble by friends, group chats, social events, or online communities. Universities can empower students by normalising boundary-setting. Simple phrases such as “I’m taking a break from gambling” or “I’d rather enjoy the night without money involved” can help students assert their needs without conflict.

Digital protection tools, such as gambling blocks, app limits, or self-exclusion, can create breathing space for students who feel overwhelmed or tempted.

Encouraging students to reach out early is essential. Talking to a friend, partner, flatmate, RA, tutor, or wellbeing adviser can interrupt the isolation that often fuels harm.

Creating Safer, Supportive Campuses

Universities have a responsibility to create environments where LGBTQ+ students feel safe, affirmed, and supported. This includes:

- Visible messaging that gambling is optional
- Gambling-free social events and alternatives
- Training for staff and student leaders
- Clear pathways to support
- Inclusive, non-judgemental language
- Quiet spaces for students who feel overwhelmed
- Collaboration between wellbeing teams, SUs, and LGBTQ+ societies

Staff do not need to be experts. A simple, compassionate statement, such as “Lots of students choose not to gamble, you’re welcome to enjoy the night however works for you”, can reduce pressure immediately.

Support should always be offered gently, without assumptions. Gambling harm affects whole networks, not just the person placing bets.





How to Access Support from Recover With Pride

Recover With Pride is a confidential, LGBTQ+-affirming service for anyone affected by gambling, whether you gamble yourself or are impacted by someone else's gambling.

The service offers:

- Identity-affirming, trauma-informed support
- Space to explore your relationship with gambling safely
- Support for friends, partners, family, and chosen family
- No judgement, no pressure, no assumptions

If student life feels overwhelming, stressful, or pressured this year, reaching out is a strong and positive step. You're not alone, and support is available.

Refer yourself for support and find tools and resources here:
<https://www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/>

Recover with Pride
LGBTQ+ GAMBLING HARM SUPPORT

Gambling harms are often hidden in LGBTQ+ communities, where stigma, isolation, and lack of tailored support can make recovery harder to access.

Recover With Pride is a national initiative designed to change that.

WHAT WE DO

We provide confidential, trauma-informed support for LGBTQ+ people experiencing harm due to gambling, either their own or anyone affected by someone else's gambling.

- Confidential Support**
Talk to someone who understands.
- For People Who Gamble**
Support with understanding your gambling, making changes and moving forward.
- For Affected Others**
Support for partners, family, friends and anyone impacted by someone else's gambling.
- LGBTQ+ Affirming**
A safe space that respects your identity and your experiences.
- Evidence-Informed**
Research-led and continuously evaluated

You are not alone.
Support is here.
When you're ready.

Whether you're looking for support for yourself or someone you care about, we're here to help.

GET SUPPORT
Scan the QR code to visit our website and find out more about our support and how to get help.

JOIN THE TEAM
Scan the QR code to apply for our Recovery Coach role and join our amazing team.

switchboard

