



Understanding Gambling Harm

What Is Gambling Harm and Why
Does It Matter?



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What Is Gambling Harm and Why Does It Matter?

When people hear the word "gambling," they often think about betting shops, casinos, online slots, bingo, lotteries, or sports betting.

For many people, gambling may start as a form of entertainment or a social activity. However, gambling can sometimes become harmful, affecting a person's health, wellbeing, finances, relationships, work, and day-to-day life.

Gambling harm is not just about losing money.

It is about the wider impact gambling can have on individuals, families, friends, relationships, and communities.

At Recover with Pride, we believe that understanding gambling harm is an important first step towards recognising when support may be needed, whether for yourself or someone you care about.



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What Counts as Gambling?

Gambling involves staking money, possessions, or anything of value on an activity where the outcome is uncertain, with the hope of winning something in return.

Examples include:

- Online casino games
- Slot machines
- Sports betting
- Horse racing bets
- Bingo
- Poker
- Lottery tickets
- Scratch cards
- Fantasy sports competitions involving money
- Cryptocurrency-related gambling products
- Informal betting between individuals

Many gambling products are now available through mobile phones and can be accessed at any time, making gambling more visible and accessible than ever before.

What Is Gambling Harm?

Gambling harm refers to any negative impact caused by gambling.

This harm can affect:

- The person gambling
- Partners and spouses
- Parents and caregivers
- Children and family members
- Friends and chosen family
- Communities and workplaces

Importantly, gambling harm exists on a spectrum.

Someone does not need to be in significant debt or facing a major crisis to experience gambling harm.

Concerns can begin long before a situation becomes severe.

Gambling Harm Is Not Just Financial

One of the most common misconceptions is that gambling harm is only about money. Whilst financial difficulties can be a significant consequence, gambling harm often affects many areas of a person's life.

Emotional Harm

A person experiencing gambling harm may feel:

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Shame
- Guilt
- Hopelessness
- Frustration
- Low self-esteem

Affected others may experience these feelings too.

Relationship Harm

Gambling can impact trust and communication.

This may lead to:

- Arguments and conflict
- Secrecy
- Dishonesty
- Emotional distance
- Relationship breakdowns
- Strained family relationships

Many affected others tell us that the loss of trust can be one of the most difficult aspects of gambling harm.

Physical Health Impacts

The stress associated with gambling harm can affect physical wellbeing.

Some people report:

- Sleep difficulties
- Headaches
- Changes in appetite
- Fatigue
- Increased stress-related health concerns

Social Impacts

People affected by gambling harm may:

- Withdraw from social activities
- Isolate themselves
- Avoid friends and family
- Stop participating in hobbies and interests
- Feel disconnected from their community

Over time, isolation can make gambling harm even harder to recognise and address.

How Gambling Harm Develops

Gambling harm often develops gradually.

Many people do not set out expecting gambling to become a problem.

It may begin as:

- A way to relax
- A hobby
- Entertainment
- A social activity
- A way to cope with stress or difficult emotions

Initially, gambling may appear manageable.

How Gambling Harm Develops

However, over time, some people find themselves:

- Spending more time gambling
- Spending more money than intended
- Chasing losses
- Hiding gambling from others
- Relying on gambling to improve mood
- Struggling to stop despite negative consequences

Because these changes can happen gradually, they are not always easy for individuals or their loved ones to recognise.

Warning Signs of Gambling Harm

There is no single sign that indicates gambling harm.

However, some common indicators include:

Financial Signs

- Frequently borrowing money
- Missing bill payments
- Unexplained financial difficulties
- Selling possessions
- Increasing debt
- Secretive financial behaviour

Behavioural Signs

- Spending increasing amounts of time gambling
- Appearing distracted or preoccupied
- Becoming defensive when gambling is discussed
- Frequently talking about wins but not losses
- Hiding gambling activity
- Breaking promises to stop or reduce gambling

Emotional Signs

- Increased irritability
- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Mood swings
- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Low confidence

Relationship Signs

- Increased conflict
- Loss of trust
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Avoiding important conversations
- Secrecy about finances or activities

Why Do People Continue Gambling Despite Harm?

This is one of the questions affected others ask most often.

It can be incredibly difficult to understand why someone continues gambling when the consequences appear obvious.

The reality is that gambling harm is rarely about a lack of willpower.

Many factors can contribute, including:

- Hope of winning back losses
- Escaping stress or difficult emotions
- Habit and routine
- Shame about admitting there is a problem
- Fear of disappointing others
- Difficulty imagining life without gambling

Some people genuinely want to stop but struggle to do so without support.

This can be confusing and frustrating for loved ones.

Understanding these factors does not excuse harmful behaviour, but it can help affected others make sense of what they are seeing.

Gambling Harm in LGBTQ+ Communities

LGBTQ+ people can experience unique pressures that may increase vulnerability to gambling-related harm.

This can include:

- Experiences of discrimination
- Minority stress
- Isolation
- Family rejection
- Mental health challenges
- Difficult experiences of stigma and prejudice

For some individuals, gambling may become a way of coping with emotional distress or difficult life experiences.

It is important to remember that gambling harm can affect people from all backgrounds, identities, ages, and communities.

At Recover with Pride, we recognise the importance of understanding these experiences within an LGBTQ+ context.



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Gambling Harm Can Affect Whole Networks

When gambling harm is present, it often impacts more than one person.

Parents may worry about an adult child.

Partners may experience loss of trust.

Friends may feel helpless.

Flatmates may encounter financial pressures.

Chosen family members may carry significant emotional burdens.

Because of this, recovery is not only about supporting the individual who gambles.

It is also about recognising and responding to the needs of everyone affected.

Early Support Matters

Many people wait until gambling harms reach crisis point before seeking support.
However, support can be beneficial at any stage.

You do not need:

- Significant debt
- Relationship breakdown
- A formal diagnosis
- A crisis situation

If gambling is causing concern, support can help.

Early conversations often prevent harms from becoming more severe.

Common Myths About Gambling Harm

Myth: Gambling harm is only about money.

Reality: Gambling can affect emotional wellbeing, relationships, physical health, employment, and quality of life.

Myth: Someone would stop if they really wanted to.

Reality: Many people want to stop but find it difficult without support.

Myth: Only the person gambling is affected.

Reality: Gambling harm can impact partners, parents, friends, chosen family, colleagues, and wider communities.

Myth: If someone is still functioning at work or home, they must be okay.

Reality: Gambling harm is often hidden, and many people continue to appear outwardly successful whilst struggling significantly.

Key Messages

- Gambling harm is about more than money.
- Harm can affect emotional wellbeing, relationships, finances, and quality of life.
- Gambling harm often develops gradually.
- People do not need to reach crisis point before seeking support.
- Affected others can experience significant harm even when they are not gambling themselves.
- Understanding gambling harm is an important step towards recovery and wellbeing.

How Recover with Pride Can Help

At Recover with Pride, we provide LGBTQ+ inclusive support, information, and guidance for people affected by gambling harm and affected others.

Whether you are concerned about your own gambling or someone else's, you do not have to navigate it alone.

Seeking support is not a sign of failure.

It is a step towards understanding, recovery, and hope.

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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Support for Affected Others



Aila

Aila is a website for women in Scotland experiencing or affected by gambling harm, developed by women with lived and living experience. If you are being harmed by someone else's gambling, Aila brings together emotional support, financial and debt advice, and practical guidance on navigating conversations and setting boundaries, helping you find the right service at the right time. Our monthly Living Room offers a welcoming in-person and online space for women affected by their own or someone else's gambling, and the Lived and Living Library shares stories from women across Scotland. You are not alone.

Links

Website

aila-scotland.co.uk/explore-available-support/support-for-affected-others/

aila-scotland.co.uk/explore-available-support/are-you-supporting-someone-else/

aila-scotland.co.uk

Contact

hello@aila-scotland.co.uk



Ara

Ara provides free support for people across the South West affected by someone else's gambling, including partners, family members, friends and colleagues. Support includes one-to-one counselling delivered face-to-face, by telephone or online by professionally accredited, CBT-qualified counsellors. Sessions focus on emotional wellbeing, coping strategies, recovery and rebuilding confidence.

Ara also offers specialist relationship counselling support, where gambling has impacted trust, communication, finances or family life, helping people to rebuild relationships and move forward together. In addition, our easy access workshops provide practical advice, digital safety support, understanding gambling-related harms, and action planning for those seeking support at the earliest opportunity.

Links

Website

www.recovery4all.co.uk/

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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Support for Affected Others



Betknowmore UK

Behind every person experiencing gambling harm, an estimated 6-10 other people may be affected.

A partner losing sleep. A parent caught between worry and responsibility. A young person living with tension in their home. A friend who wants to help but doesn't know how. A colleague covering up mistakes at work.

If this is you, Betknowmore UK is right behind you.

We offer digital peer support service for anyone aged 18 and above. Our Peer Supporters have City and Guilds assured training and lived experience of gambling harms. They understand what you are going through.

Supporting you through shared lived experience

As part of the statutory levy, Betknowmore UK is funded to provide 1:1 and group support to affected others in England and Scotland.

This support aims to ensure that through peer-led engagement and intervention, people are offered the most appropriate support to address their specific needs.

Links

Website

www.betknowmoreuk.org/affected-other

Breakeven

Breakeven

Breakeven offers counselling support for partners, family members and friends affected by someone else's gambling. Gambling harm can put pressure on relationships, finances and the wider household, and support is available for you too.

You can receive support even if the person who gambles is not ready to seek help. Breakeven works with affected family members and friends to help them understand their experiences and find ways to cope with the impact.

Its family and friends resources also offer guidance on looking after yourself, understanding gambling harms and having supportive, non-judgemental conversations.

Links

Website

www.breakeven.org.uk/family-and-friends

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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Support for Affected Others



Chances

As part of Cyrenians' homelessness prevention strategy – Chances offers person-centred, non-judgemental, and non-time limited support to anyone aged 16+ in Scotland who is impacted by gambling harm. For affected others - the service adopts a Community Reinforcement & Family Training approach focused on their recovery and not the person gambling and supports with:

- Promoting self-care, general wellbeing, independence, and boundary setting
- Understanding gambling behaviour and a loved one's triggers
- Improving communication with the person gambling through positive reinforcement techniques
- Guidance & tools to encourage the person gambling to reduce the harms experienced

Online and phone options are offered Scotland wide and in-person in Edinburgh, the Lothians and Falkirk. Organisational and self-referrals are welcome via email or phone on **07983 137239**. Alternatively, a referral form can be completed (available upon request).

Links

Website

[Chances: Gambling Support](#)

Contact

[07983 137239](tel:07983137239)

chances@cyrenians.scot



Gambling Recovery Therapy

Founded by Lorraine Perrons and Claire Jones, Gambling Recovery for All CIC and Gambling Recovery Therapy Limited combine family experience of gambling harm with specialist professional training.

The CIC's Rebuild & Rise: Reclaim Your Life is a fully funded, trauma-informed 12-week online programme for eligible women across the UK affected by someone else's gambling. It focuses on emotional wellbeing, financial resilience, boundaries, confidence and rebuilding a sense of choice and control. Women can seek support whether or not the person who gambles has stopped or sought help.

Gambling Recovery Therapy Limited also offers private paid one-to-one therapy for people experiencing gambling harm and those affected by someone else's gambling, with a complimentary 30-minute introductory conversation.

Links

Website

www.gamblingrecoverytherapy.com/affected-other

forms.gle/aMA4fJbgDMSpg0Tb9

www.gamblingrecoverytherapy.com/brochure

Contact

contact@gamblingrecoverytherapy.com

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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Support for Affected Others



Recover Together

Recover Together provides a safe and supportive space for people affected by gambling harm, including family members, partners, friends and others impacted by someone else's gambling. Reaching out can feel difficult, and people may not always know what support they need or where to start. We're here to listen and walk alongside them, helping them find a way forward that feels right for them. Our approach is shaped by lived experience of gambling harm and recovery, and we meet people with empathy, honesty and no judgement, providing support, understanding and connection.

Links

Website

recoverttogether.org/what-we-do/affected-others/



Shiltons' Silverlining

Shiltons' Silverlining supports partners, family members, friends and loved ones affected by someone else's gambling. Its Affected Others service offers a confidential space to talk, be heard and feel understood.

The charity recognises that someone else's gambling can bring anxiety, financial pressure, relationship difficulties and isolation. It offers emotional support, guidance and information to help people cope with the impact and find a way forward.

Built on lived experience, the service recognises that affected family members and friends need support for their own mental health, wellbeing and relationships too.

Links

Website

shiltonssilverlining.org/affected-others/

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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