



Why Don't They Just Stop?

Understanding Gambling Harm,
Recovery and Change



University of Brighton

Understanding Gambling Harm, Recovery and Change

One of the most common questions affected others ask is:

"If they can see the harm it's causing, why don't they just stop?"

You may have watched someone experience financial difficulties, relationship problems, emotional distress, or even involvement with the criminal justice system. You may have heard promises to stop, only to discover that gambling has continued.

This can be incredibly confusing, frustrating, and painful.

Many affected others describe feeling caught between wanting to help and struggling to understand why someone continues gambling despite the consequences.

At Recover with Pride, we know that understanding gambling harm can help make sense of behaviours that otherwise seem impossible to understand.



University of Brighton



You're Not Alone in Asking This Question

If you have found yourself thinking:

- "Why don't they just stop?"
- "Don't they realise how much damage this is causing?"
- "How can they keep gambling when they've already lost so much?"
- "Why do they keep making promises they can't keep?"
- "Why am I the one picking up the pieces?"

You are not alone.

These questions are common and understandable.

Many affected others spend months or years trying to make sense of behaviour that appears irrational from the outside.

Gambling Harm Is About More Than Money

It can be tempting to think gambling is simply a financial issue.

However, for many people, gambling serves a deeper purpose.

Some people gamble to:

- Escape difficult emotions.
- Cope with stress.
- Distract themselves from anxiety or depression.
- Feel excitement or stimulation.
- Manage loneliness or isolation.
- Temporarily forget about life's challenges.

Over time, gambling can become someone's way of coping, even when it is creating serious problems.

This can make stopping much more complicated than simply deciding not to gamble.

Understanding the Cycle of Gambling Harm

Many people experiencing gambling harm become trapped in a cycle.

The cycle often looks something like this:

1. A Trigger

A person experiences:

- Stress.
- Anxiety.
- Loneliness.
- Boredom.
- Conflict.
- Financial worries.
- Difficult life events.

2. Gambling Begins

They gamble in an attempt to:

- Feel better.
- Escape.
- Relax.
- Solve financial problems.
- Chase excitement.

Understanding the Cycle of Gambling Harm

3. Harm Occurs

This may involve:

- Financial losses.
- Relationship difficulties.
- Shame and guilt.
- Increased stress.

Understanding the Cycle of Gambling Harm

4. Difficult Emotions Increase

The person may experience:

- Regret.
- Self-blame.
- Anxiety.
- Hopelessness.

5. Gambling Happens Again

Instead of addressing those emotions directly, the person may return to gambling as a way of escaping them.

The cycle then repeats.

For affected others, this can look like someone repeatedly making the same choices despite obvious consequences.

Why Do People Chase Losses?

One of the most difficult behaviours for affected others to understand is chasing losses. This happens when someone continues gambling in an attempt to recover money they have already lost.

Many people believe:

- One big win will fix everything.
- They are close to winning.
- The next bet might solve the situation.

Unfortunately, chasing losses typically leads to further financial harm and deeper difficulties.

Affected others often find themselves asking:

"Why didn't they stop when they still had money left?"

The reality is that many people do not believe they have a problem until significant harm has already occurred.

Why Do People Hide Their Gambling?

Secrecy is one of the most painful aspects of gambling harm for affected others.

You may have discovered:

- Hidden accounts.
- Secret debts.
- Borrowing money.
- Lies about finances.
- Gambling activity that had been concealed for months or years.

Whilst this can feel deeply personal, secrecy is often driven by:

- Shame.
- Fear of judgement.
- Fear of disappointing loved ones.
- Fear of consequences.
- Denial about the seriousness of the situation.

This does not make dishonesty acceptable.

However, understanding why secrecy develops can sometimes help affected others understand what has happened.

Why Do Promises to Stop Sometimes Fail?

Many affected others have experienced hearing:

- "I'll never do it again."
- "This was the last time."
- "I promise I've stopped."
- "Everything is under control now."

When gambling continues despite these promises, trust can be severely damaged.

It is important to recognise that some people genuinely mean these promises when they make them.

However, wanting to stop and being able to stop are not always the same thing.

Many people underestimate:

- The grip gambling has on them.
- The support they need.
- The triggers that lead them back to gambling.
- How difficult long-term change can be.

This does not mean affected others should ignore broken promises.

It means that lasting recovery often requires more than good intentions alone.

Can Someone Recover from Gambling Harm?

Yes.

Recovery is possible.

People recover from gambling harm every day.

However, recovery is rarely a single decision or a straight line.

For many people, recovery involves:

- Being honest about the impact of gambling.
- Understanding their triggers.
- Learning healthier coping strategies.
- Rebuilding relationships.
- Addressing emotional wellbeing.
- Creating practical safeguards around money and gambling.

Progress can take time.

There may be setbacks along the way.

That does not mean recovery is impossible.

Supporting Someone Without Taking Responsibility

Many affected others become exhausted trying to solve the problem for someone else.

You may have:

- Paid debts.
- Covered financial shortfalls.
- Managed their responsibilities.
- Constantly monitored their behaviour.
- Sacrificed your own wellbeing.

Whilst these actions often come from a place of love and concern, it is important to remember:

You cannot recover on somebody else's behalf.

Recovery is ultimately their responsibility.

You can support, encourage, and provide information, but you cannot force somebody to change.

Recognising this can be painful, but it can also be empowering.

What If They Don't Want Help?

This can be one of the hardest situations for affected others.

You may see the harm clearly, whilst the other person minimises or denies it.

If someone is not ready to seek support:

- Continue to express concern where appropriate.
- Avoid arguments that go in circles.
- Focus on what you can control.
- Protect your own wellbeing.
- Establish healthy boundaries.
- Seek support for yourself.

You do not need to wait for someone else to engage with support before accessing support yourself.

When Gambling Harm and Other Issues Intersect

For some people, gambling does not exist in isolation.

It may occur alongside:

- Mental health challenges.
- Substance use.
- Chemsex-related harms.
- Experiences of trauma.
- Domestic abuse.
- Social isolation.
- Criminal justice involvement.

These factors can make recovery more complex and may help explain why change takes time.

Understanding complexity does not remove accountability, but it can help affected others make sense of the wider picture.

LGBTQ+ Experiences and Gambling Harm

LGBTQ+ individuals may experience additional pressures that contribute to gambling harm.

These can include:

- Minority stress.
- Discrimination.
- Family rejection.
- Internalised stigma.
- Isolation.
- Poor mental wellbeing.

For some people, gambling may begin as a coping strategy for dealing with these experiences.

This does not mean gambling harm is inevitable, but it highlights the importance of understanding the wider context of a person's life.

Looking After Yourself Whilst Someone Else Recovers

When someone is receiving support for gambling harm, affected others often continue carrying significant emotional burdens.

It is important to remember:

- Your recovery matters too.
- You deserve support.
- You deserve honest communication.
- You deserve safety and stability.
- You are allowed to have boundaries.
- You are allowed to prioritise your wellbeing.

Supporting someone does not mean sacrificing yourself.

What Can Help Right Now?

If you are struggling to understand why someone continues gambling, consider:

- Learning more about gambling harm.
- Speaking to others with similar experiences.
- Accessing support for yourself.
- Focusing on what you can control.
- Setting realistic expectations.
- Remembering that recovery is a process, not a single event.

Understanding gambling harm will not remove all of the pain or frustration, but it can help you make sense of behaviours that may otherwise feel impossible to understand.

How Recover with Pride Can Help

At Recover with Pride, we support both individuals affected by gambling harm and affected others.

We provide a safe, inclusive and LGBTQ+ affirming space where affected others can:

- Better understand gambling harm.
- Explore difficult emotions.
- Develop healthy boundaries.
- Increase confidence and resilience.
- Reduce isolation.
- Access support and information.

You do not have to navigate this alone.



University of Brighton



Key Takeaway

If you have ever asked, "Why don't they just stop?", you are not alone.

Gambling harm is often far more complex than it appears from the outside. People may continue gambling despite serious consequences because of shame, emotional distress, unhealthy coping strategies, or becoming trapped in cycles of harm.

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

Most importantly, remember this:

You did not cause the gambling. You cannot control the gambling. You cannot recover on someone else's behalf. But you can seek support for yourself.

Refer for support here:

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



University of Brighton



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/



University of Brighton



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/



University of Brighton



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/



University of Brighton



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/



University of Brighton

