

Helping a gambler

Diagnosing a gambling problem in a partner can be difficult. Sometimes it takes time to realise there is a problem because it's natural to want to believe that your partner is doing what they say.

There is still a stigma attached to admitting a problem with gambling. We know people often blame and judge an individual (and don't acknowledge the influence of poker machines).

Those who develop problems often feel ashamed and guilty and fear telling anyone because they think they will be labelled, told they are weak or "should be able to control their behaviour".

The first sign of a gambling problem might be a change in communication patterns. People with gambling problems are often so busy hiding this part of their life that they have to pull away from those close to them to continue the deception.

It's not unlike having an affair – the issues around breach of trust are much the same. Once a partner realises there is a gambling problem in the household, they are usually supportive and will work through the issues.

Partners need to be firm that the person with the problem must accept responsibility for their behaviour and seek help. Partners should not take on the responsibility of gambling-related debts.

Once the problem has been acknowledged, the partner can take positive steps. Be involved in the household budget and know where money is being spent. Keep track of investments, and it can be a good idea to maintain separate bank accounts and credit cards.

It is reasonable to track a partner's daily patterns as a way of rebuilding trust; regular communication between couples is a sign of a healthy relationship.

Partners need to make time for each other and get used to doing things together again, such as going to the movies or for a weekend drive.

Be aware of the struggle ahead and try to be available at times when the person recovering from a gambling problem may be vulnerable.

Seek help from the Gamblers' Helpline, Gamblers' Help financial counsellors and your local GP. These are all excellent resources at this difficult time.

Survival tips

- **If you suspect there might be a gambling problem, look for signs that your partner seems distant and uninvolved in day-to-day life**
- **Be firm and insist the gambler takes responsibility for their behaviour and seeks help**
- **Get help from financial counsellors, your GP and Gambler's Helpline: 1800 858 858**