

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Helping Someone Who Has a Gambling Problem

Trying to help someone you think may have a gambling problem can be risky business. You may not even be sure the problem is gambling. Unlike alcoholism and other drug dependencies, problem gambling is often an invisible disorder. There is no smell on the breath, no stumbling of steps or speech. It's easy to mistake the problem of gambling as simply a matter of someone needing "advice" about how to manage money or time more effectively.

It's often difficult to help someone close to you who has an addiction—any addiction—unless they admit they have a problem.

Call It Like You See It

As a friend or colleague, the most you can do is express your concern. A message from the heart goes to the heart. Try saying, "You're a good friend (or colleague) and because of that I'm worried. It's the borrowing, the time lost from work, etc., and I've also noticed you've been gambling (or talking about it) quite a bit. I read something the other day about problem gambling, and where people get help. I can get you a copy if you like." If they seem resentful or evasive, don't push. Let it go. However, if the behavior affects your work or if it involves an illegal activity, it would be wise for you to discuss it with your supervisor or human resources department.

If you are an affected family member, you may have talked with the person, expressed your concerns, tried to be supportive or perhaps lectured, complained, wept—attempted all sorts of things to make the person stop gambling. Perhaps these efforts worked for a short time, but the stress from this situation may have affected your relationships, and health.

Keeping Things in Perspective

It is important to keep in touch with your own feelings and determination about what is best at this time and to realize that you are not responsible for the gambler's behavior. By focusing on yourself and making positive and possibly tough choices, the other person will see you making changes. They may, in turn, feel the need to make some of their own. Some of these positive changes may involve a decision to stop protecting the gambler, and taking action to find out how to safeguard your financial resources, family, and health. And stick with it!

Contrary to popular belief, not all change is hard. However, sticking with a decision to make a change can be challenging! Deciding on what to change or how to go about it can sometimes be confusing, especially when your feeling conflicted. You may find it useful to talk to a professional counselor to address your circumstances to determine the best way to deal with the situation. Remember that you can't change someone else, but you can change yourself… and this may motivate other people to change too!

When dealing with someone who gambles, keep in mind:

- There is no such thing as a "sure thing" or a "system" for winning at games of chance. Belief in such things is part of a problem gambler's preoccupation with luck and superstition.
- Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs) are among the most additive forms of gambling. The rapid action and "sensory thrill" (lights and sounds; win or lose) has been compared to the "high" of drug use.
- Many factors contribute to problem gambling, but people who are experiencing a lot of stress in their lives may be more susceptible. Finding healthy ways to unwind may be the first small step.

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Supporting a friend, colleague or loved one with a gambling problem can be very difficult. As you go through this process, keep in contact with your own network of friends, family and colleagues—you may need them for support! With your concern and care, you may be able to make a big difference in someone else's life. But remember, you're only of use to others if you're taking care of yourself. Be sure not to get in too deep helping someone with an addiction as potentially serious and all-consuming as gambling.