

## Finding Help

▶ THE WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING HAS A 24-HOUR HELPLINE THAT PROVIDES INFORMATION AND REFERRALS FOR GAMBLERS, FAMILY MEMBERS AND CONCERNED FRIENDS OR EMPLOYERS OF GAMBLERS WHO HAVE FINANCIAL, LEGAL OR OTHER DIFFICULTIES BECAUSE OF THEIR GAMBLING.



**HELP IS JUST A CALL  
AWAY AT  
1-800-GAMBLE-5**

### **Mission Statement:**

*The Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling provides resources, public awareness and education on gambling disorders while maintaining strict neutrality on the issue of legalized gambling.*

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The Council's public awareness campaign is funded by the State of Wisconsin, Department of Health Services, Division of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services, Bureau of Prevention Treatment and Recovery.

Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling



## Talking About Problem Gambling



**WISCONSIN COUNCIL  
ON PROBLEM GAMBLING**

**1-800-GAMBLE-5**

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## Talking to a Friend or Family Member

If you have a friend or family member with a gambling problem, it's only natural to want to help. The individuals, however, may not be ready or willing to admit that they have a problem and may not want to discuss it. For this reason, it's important to be prepared.

Before you approach the person, try to learn what you can about problem gambling, including its warning signs, negative impacts and options for help and recovery. If possible, speak to someone you can trust about the problem like a counselor, teacher, doctor or parent; you don't need to reveal who the gambler is, but you do need to talk about the issue, get some support and generate a plan of action.

Try to gather some evidence of the negative impact of the gambling such as missed bills, absenteeism from work or deteriorated school performance in case the individuals try to rationalize their actions or deny that they have a problem.

If you can, have the contact information of some local counseling services handy in the event that the persons agree that they have a problem and want help. Whatever you do, the most important thing to remember is that you cannot stop people from gambling. They have to stop gambling themselves once they are ready and willing to change their behavior.



**Get informed:** As stated, it's important to gather what information you can about problem gambling before you approach someone who you think might have a

problem. You might also want to find out what kind of counseling services are available in the community so that if your friend or family member does want help, you can let them know what some of their options are. If you're comfortable doing so, you can even offer to go with the person to counseling—it could make getting help easier and will show that you really care.

**Don't hide the problem:** Often, friends and family of the person with a gambling problem think that they're helping things by making excuses for the individuals, lending them money and covering up their behavior. In reality, all that they're doing is allowing the problem to continue. Rather than hide it, friends and family need to acknowledge the problem by identifying it and naming it clearly. While this may seem more difficult than giving in to the person's lies and demands, in the long run it will give the individual no choice but to face the problem head-on. Friends and family can let the person know that they're there for them and will support them in their efforts to get professional help, but they should leave the responsibility for gambling and its negative consequences to the individual.

**Choose the right moment to talk:** If the individuals with the gambling problem are expressing remorse about their gambling or they've just finished a gambling episode, they may be more open to talking about the issue. If they are and you're prepared to talk to them about it, try to do so in a caring and understanding manner—becoming angry or condemning may just make matters worse. If they try to rationalize their actions, counter it with evidence to the contrary (e.g., the person is frequently absent from work or school, misses bill payments, etc.) or end the discussion. And remember to keep focused on the gambler's behavior, rather than on the person themselves.

**Talk about impacts:** Let the persons with the gambling problem know how their behavior is affecting others, including you, but don't attack them. If they agree that they may have a problem and are willing to seek help, give them the number to the WCPG, 1-800-GAMBLE-5 or a local gambling counseling agency. If the gamblers are hesitant to go on their own, consider offering to go with them and be prepared to follow through.

**Express feelings from an "I" point of view:** When discussing a friend or family member's gambling, try to express your feelings from an "I" point of view (e.g., "when you do this, I feel..."), as this will make the person less defensive and reduce the likelihood of arguments. If there is any chance of violent or abusive behavior, use caution to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone involved.

**Negotiate and set fair, yet firm boundaries:** When talking to a family member about his/her gambling, try to reach an agreement regarding your expectations for future gambling behavior (complete abstinence is usually responsibilities setting fair, yet firm boundaries).

**Be supportive:** Try to support the persons with the gambling problem in making changes for the better: Recognize and acknowledge any positive steps they've made as they work through their problem and give praise when they've successfully achieved their goals. Talk to the persons about how their recovery is progressing, ask how you can help and remember that quitting any compulsive behavior is a difficult process.

**Take care of yourself:** Finding a safe place to discuss your own feelings and emotions can help you cope with your friend or family member's gambling. Even if they choose not to seek help for themselves, the support you get can still make things better for you.

**Remember that change takes time:** It takes hard work and commitment to change one's own behavior. It may take several times before the person is able to successfully change his/her behavior. A relapse is when a person falls back into the old pattern of behavior—gambling. This may occur when the person has difficulty coping with stress. It is important to be able to identify the triggers of stress and learn coping strategies to deal with them. It may mean avoiding gambling venues and friends that gamble. It is possible to get back on track, knowing that it takes one day at a time for change to be successful.

*Information from: Responsible Gambling Council*