

# Changing your relationship with gambling



# Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is for anyone who has recognised that gambling may be an issue for them - that gambling is getting in the way of the life they would like to lead.

If you have arrived at this realisation and made the decision that you would like to change your relationship with gambling, this workbook will help you better understand what might be causing your preoccupation with gambling.

Once you understand this, you will be able to work on approaching situations which usually lead to gambling in a different, more positive way. Whilst this workbook will focus on goals around your gambling, the same principles can be applied in other areas of your life too.

Understanding your motivation for changing your gambling behaviour is important. Unless you are clear that you want to change, you will likely have limited success.

Problem gambling can have many impacts for an individual, their family and their friends.

If at any time you would like additional support from the GamCare team, you can contact us over the phone or online:

**National Gambling HelpLine**

Freephone **0808 8020 133**

Web chat via **gamcare.org.uk**

## In the past 12 months, have you:

- Bet more than you could really afford to lose?
- Been criticised for your betting or told that you have a gambling problem?
- Felt guilt about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

# Why people gamble, and why it may be an issue

There are many reasons that people gamble, including:

- » For entertainment and a chance to play;
- » Because they enjoy the environment;
- » Hope for a big win;
- » For a thrill or 'the buzz';
- » As a problem-solving opportunity, or a chance to 'beat the system';
- » To gain social acceptance;
- » To change their self-image;
- » To escape - as a safe 'bubble' where they can stop thinking about something else temporarily;
- » As a form of punishment - indirectly expressing anger, for example.

**Do you recognise any of these motivations yourself?**

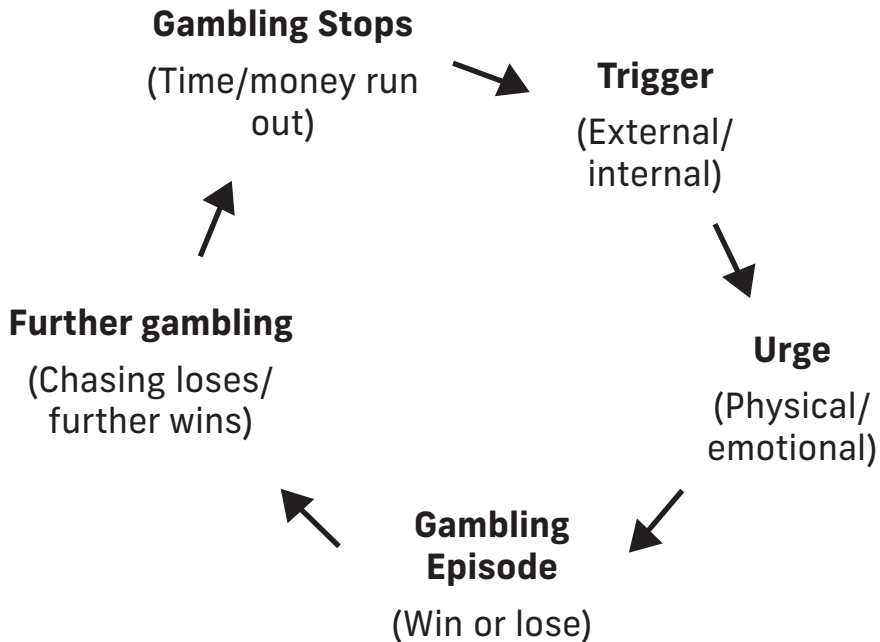
Many people think that a problem with gambling is just a money issue, but there are many different reasons why gambling may become a problem. Sometimes money worries are like a smokescreen - because you can focus on them and their consequences, it seems easier to deal with money problems rather than other issues.

A preoccupation with gambling can also create problems with jobs and relationships, and can have a ripple effect on health and wellbeing for an individual as well as those they care about.

**How you define a problem will determine what you believe you can and cannot do about it.**

Be aware that changing your relationship with gambling may not 'fix' other areas of your life which are also challenging, although you may be able to change the way you think about a situation so that you can approach it differently, for a better outcome.

# The Problem Gambling Cycle



Triggers are fluid and may change over time, so it is a good idea to get into the habit of reflecting regularly on what is going on in your life and how this makes you think and feel.

## Honestly answer 'yes' or 'no' for each of the statements:

- I can win (back) money through gambling
- I do not have the money to gamble
- Gambling affects key relationships
- Gambling puts my job or studies at risk
- I have made several unsuccessful attempts to control my gambling
- Gambling helps me to forget about other issues for a while
- Gambling helps me to deal with difficult feelings

# Setting your goals

Think about whether you want to cut back your gambling or stop completely. The more often you have said 'yes' to the questions over the page, the less likely it is that trying to control your gambling is likely to work.

- » Consider every 'yes' as a sign that you should try to stop gambling altogether.

**Setting yourself a goal should be a positive experience. Try to frame your goals as what you want to achieve, rather than something you do not want.**

Setting 'SMART' goals is one way of defining what you want to achieve and measuring your progress:

**S**pecific: Who will do what, and how?

**M**easurable – How will you know that you have achieved your goal?

**A**ttainable – Is the goal realistic and under your control?

**R**elevant – Why is this important for you? What is your motivation?

**T**ime-framed – When do you want to have achieved your goal?

It helps to write down your goals to:

- » help you clarify what you want to achieve;
- » keep you focussed;
- » enable you to see your progress.

It is normal to have mixed feelings about stopping gambling. Change takes focus and energy, and gambling also usually offers something that appears to be of value (at least in the short-term). Honestly discussing what is going on for you with others that you trust, without holding back, may help you to become more aware of what is driving your behaviour.

# Goal Setting: What to Consider

	<b>Controlling Your Gambling</b>	<b>Stop Gambling Completely</b>
<b>Money</b>	Never borrow money to gamble. Gambling should be paid entertainment - how much can you afford to spend per week / month?	If you have debts, how will you repay them? Make a plan so that you aren't tempted to gamble when money is tight.
<b>Time</b>	Think about <b>how often</b> you gamble and <b>how long</b> for. Even if your finances are OK, you may be neglecting other activities or risking your health.	How will you spend the time you previously spent gambling? Think about hobbies you may have neglected or something you may have always wanted to try.
<b>Relationships</b>	Key relationships in your life may have been damaged by your preoccupation with gambling. What can you do to rebuild or strengthen these relationships? How can you regain trust with the people you care about? You may need to talk openly with your loved ones and ask what they feel could make a difference.	
<b>Locations</b>	If you gamble both on- and off-line, do you notice a difference in your level of control? Think about the limits you set and ensure you keep track of time and money spent.	Self-exclusion, blocking software and other tools are available to help you stop gambling. It may also be helpful to set goals around internet usage if you struggle with online gambling.
<b>Gambling Activities</b>	Think carefully about activities which are particularly problematic for you, which you may need to avoid completely.	Some activities, such as raffles, the lottery or scratch cards, may not have been problematic for you before, but consider they may be triggers going forward.
<b>Accountability</b>	To regain trust from others, it may be helpful to demonstrate accountability. Is there anyone you can be accountable to, and how will this work? Can you keep a recovery diary, or ask someone you trust to check your bank statements at random intervals? Who can you talk to about your progress regularly?	

# My SMART Goal Planner

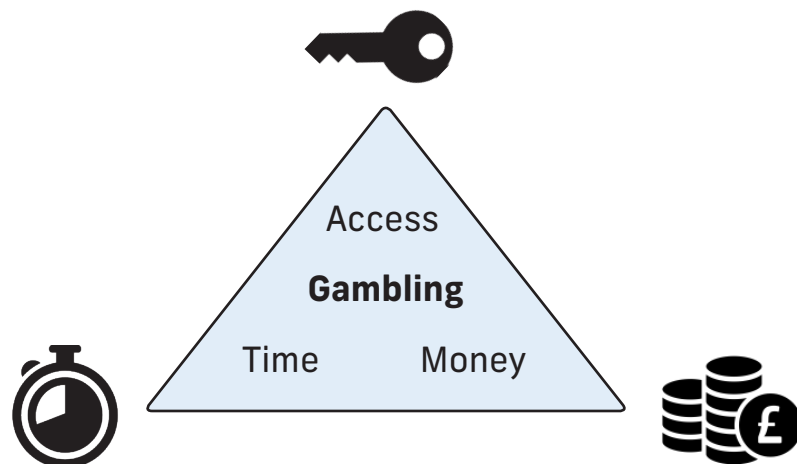
Rate the impacts gambling has in your life, where 5 is 'could not get worse' and 1 is 'could not get better'. **What are your top two priorities, and how can you work to reduce these impacts?** Place your own list of goals somewhere that you refer to often, to keep your goals fresh in your mind and can keep working towards them all over time.

Problem Area	Impact /5	How can I reduce this impact by 2?	Priority
My gambling			
Physical and Mental Health			
Relationships			
Housing			
Work/ education			
Money			
Social life/ lifestyle			
Legal issues/ crime			
Alcohol/ drug use			

# Access, Time and Money

You need three things to be able to gamble. Use the map below to work out how you can best limit or reduce the access you have to gambling, the time you have to gamble, and how much money you have to gamble.

Access	Time	Money





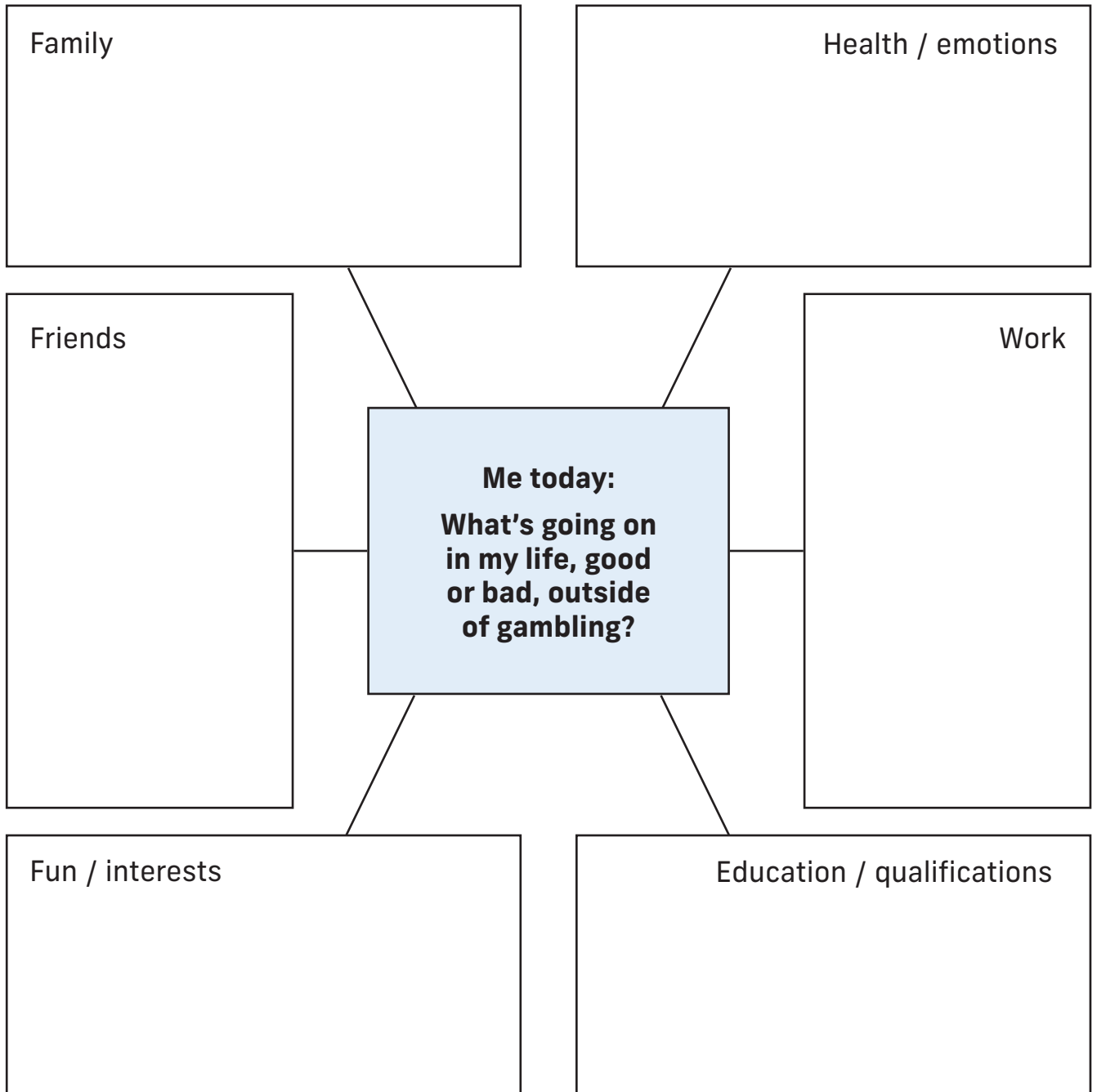
# My Gambling Diary

Print or copy as many of these pages as you need to keep track of your gambling behaviour over time.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Very much	Completely
<b>I feel in control of my gambling problem today</b>					
<b>I have a strong urge to gamble today</b>					
<b>I can abstain from gambling today</b>					

<b>Did I gamble today?</b>	
<b>If yes, how much time did I spend gambling today?</b>	
<b>If yes, how much money did I spend on gambling today? (Including winnings)</b>	
<b>What was my state of mind today?</b>	
<b>What events happened today which made me feel this way?</b>	



# Triggers, Lapses and Relapses

If you have a strong urge to gamble, it may seem like it is inevitable and you don't really have a choice. Examine what you're thinking and feeling and you should be able to identify what triggers you to want to gamble. Examples include:

<b>External Triggers (Situations)</b>	<b>Internal Triggers (Changes in thoughts, feelings and attitudes)</b>	<b>Interpersonal Triggers (Relationships)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Passing a gambling venue</li><li>» Watching a sporting / gambling event</li><li>» Receiving marketing messages about gambling</li><li>» Talking about gambling</li><li>» Reading sports / racing pages</li><li>» Receiving an unexpected bill or expense</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Changes in feelings, e.g. depression, loneliness, boredom, anger/frustration, impatience, overconfidence, mood swings</li><li>» Finding reasons or making excuses to return to gambling</li><li>» Denying or 'forgetting' how bad the problem has been</li><li>» Defeatism (e.g. now I've started, I've blown it anyway)</li><li>» Self-pity</li><li>» Unrealistic goals or expectations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Stress at home or work</li><li>» Conflict</li><li>» Communication problems</li><li>» Being invited to gamble</li><li>» Expecting changes from others</li></ul> <p data-bbox="1050 1046 1481 1289"><b>You may experience one or many of these triggers. It can be useful to keep a record so you can identify patterns in your behaviour.</b></p>

When you are trying to stop or control your gambling, there may be occasions when you gamble again or gamble more than planned. This may be a sign that there are triggers for your gambling which you have either not recognised yet or not learned to deal with differently.

There is a difference between a **lapse** (a single occurrence of gambling after being gambling-free, or an occurrence of heavy gambling after a period of reduced gambling) and a **relapse** (a return to repeated episodes of gambling, returning to old behaviours or abandoning positive changes).

**A lapse does not have to lead to a relapse. What you think, feel and do if you lapse will determine what happens next.**

If you lapse, seek help as soon as possible so that you can reflect on what may have gone better and how you can learn from the experience. This can help you stick to your goals and prevent a relapse.

It may be tempting to hide (for example by skipping support sessions), but don't beat yourself up.

Finding support, and talking about the experience in a safe environment, can help you process your thoughts and feelings so that you can move forward positively.

A lapse is not a sign of complete failure. It's not desirable or inevitable, but lapses can occur because change is difficult. Changing old habits takes effort and is mostly trial and error. Don't give up!

**If there is a practical step you can take that would make gambling or excessive gambling more difficult, but you are reluctant to take it, ask yourself what gambling appears to offer that you are reluctant to give up?**

- » Think about the situations which may be 'high-risk' for you and try to avoid them or address them differently.
- » You can self-exclude from gambling activities and venues, or download blocking software (find more information at [gamcare.org.uk](http://gamcare.org.uk)).
- » Switch TV channels when gambling adverts come on.
- » Avoid meeting people who are not supportive of you, or at least meet in a neutral location.

# Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS)

These are the 'thinking errors' we take for granted in an established, negative belief system. How many do you recognise?

ANT	Example
<b>'All or nothing'</b>	Things are either all good or all bad - you may use phrases like 'I can never do anything right'.
<b>Over-generalisation</b>	Using isolated incidences to predict that the same thing will happen again, such as 'I've relapsed once, so it will happen again'.
<b>Mental filters</b>	Focusing on one negative thing, allowing it to overshadow everything else, e.g. 'I've gambled again, I'm a bad parent'.
<b>Disqualification</b>	Dismissing positive experiences, maintaining a negative belief - e.g. "I may not have gambled today, but once doesn't count."
<b>Jumping to conclusions</b>	Making assumptions without factual support - remember to examine your evidence for thinking a certain way.
<b>Magnification/ catastrophising</b>	Focusing on the worst possible outcome, exaggerating the importance of a negative experience, e.g. 'I've lapsed, I will always be a gambler'.
<b>Emotional reasoning</b>	Confusing feelings with facts, e.g. 'gut instinct'.
<b>Unrealistic expectations</b>	Focusing on the things you cannot control.
<b>(Mis)-labelling</b>	Putting yourself/others down by name calling, rather than focusing on the specific behaviour in a specific situation, e.g. 'I'm such a loser'.
<b>Personalisation</b>	Taking responsibility for something which is not wholly in your control.
<b>Fortune telling</b>	Randomly predicting that things will turn out badly, when there is no evidence for this, (which can become a 'self-fulfilling prophecy').

## Alternative ways of thinking...

Useful questions to ask yourself if you notice any of the automatic negative thoughts on the previous page include:

- » What is the evidence for my current belief?
- » Could there be an alternative explanation?
- » What is the worst that could happen? If it did, how could/would I handle it?
- » What is the most realistic outcome?
- » What would I tell my best friend in a similar situation?
- » What is the effect of believing this? What would happen if I changed my thinking?
- » What can/will I do about this?
- » How would others view this situation?

**For example:**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Automatic thoughts</b>	<b>Consequences</b>	<b>Alternatives</b>
Seeing your friend place a bet on their phone.	"They must have a good strategy - if I do that too, I will win." "If I win, I'll take my partner on holiday." "Last time I bet with that site, I won."	You lose your entire stake. You feel stupid, low and anxious.	Acknowledge that with the money you don't gamble, you can continue to save to take your partner away.

# Plan Ahead, Move Forward

- » Try to avoid places you associate with gambling.
- » **Plan ahead when you know an engagement is coming up that could be challenging. Think of potential exit strategies, and identify someone you can ask for support if needed.**
- » Being active can take the focus of gambling - structure your day, plan how you spend your time; make time for hobbies.
- » **Eliminate easy access to money. Have budget and be conscious of spending; let someone else manage your money for a while if needed.**
- » Be aware you may have to address other habits and addictions (drinking, smoking, drug-taking) to successfully combat gambling issues.
- » **Identify trustworthy people who you can openly share your struggles with. It may be easier to speak to a neutral third party, like a counsellor.**
- » Acknowledge if and when you think about gambling - remember that this can only cause damage if you decide to act on it. Sharing these thoughts can reduce their power over you.
- » **It is common to feel resentful and angry when we feel we have no choice in a decision. Notice how you think and feel when you tell yourself "I cannot gamble" rather than "I choose not to gamble".**
- » Sometimes acceptance is a big step - for many gamblers, accepting that they will not regain what they have lost is a major issue.
- » **It is important to acknowledge progress and celebrate your achievements. It is also important to be realistic and not expect a 'perfect' day or week.**
- » Take time to regularly review your life: Are you aware of positive changes? If yes, what did you do differently to achieve these? What blocks your current progress, and is there anything you can do about this?

# Gambling and Relationships

Relationship issues may have been present before your gambling started and may be one of your triggers. Your gambling will have likely amplified problems, but be aware that addressing your gambling behaviour will not automatically solve other issues.

Repairing relationships means addressing issues, rather than suppressing or avoiding them.

There may be things you need to address and/or change, such as being honest with your loved ones. Those close to us are often the first to spot changes in attitudes, so it's helpful to listen to the feedback you receive from others.

## Cravings and Urges

### **Craving - e.g. "I want it badly"**

An intense desire or yearning, which is linked to expectations, so that even before gambling you are anticipating what gambling will offer.

### **Urge - e.g. "I have to do it now"**

Leading to a (relatively sudden) impulse to engage in an activity such as gambling.

**Cravings and urges are a normal, although uncomfortable, part of our human experience. Remember, they are temporary. The better you understand them, the better you can cope with them.**

It is unrealistic to expect cravings and urges to gamble to disappear overnight. You will find that they become less intense over time as long as you do not act on them.

Doing things differently will feel unnatural at first, but you need to learn to switch off your 'auto-pilot' and become conscious of your decision-making.



Coping with cravings and urges will require different techniques for each of us.

'Urge surfing' is a mental technique that teaches you to cope with a craving or urge for its natural duration without either repressing or feeding it - simply accepting it as a temporary discomfort.

**Think of urges as ocean waves, which start small, then grow in size, but eventually peak and subside again.**

**Imagine you are a surfer on the wave and that you are trying to stay on top - don't jump in the water, and don't try to travel in the opposite direction.**

**Be mindful and aware of your surroundings, to interrupt thoughts about gambling. It will take practice, but stick with it.**

Once you have identified the triggers which cause your cravings and urges, you can begin to examine your feelings in more detail.

If the feeling you get from gambling is negative, find something different which will bring about an opposite feeling.

If the feeling is positive, find something else that gives you the same feeling - although you may have to accept that other experiences are likely to feel less intense than gambling experiences.

Make a list of beneficial activities that you enjoy and try to plan them into your day.

# What Will I Gain?

Write down the things you will gain from reducing or stopping gambling. Keep this list handy so you can challenge negative thoughts or feelings as and when they occur and keep focus on the positives. Keep adding to your list as you discover new things to look forward to.

You can use the following chart to help you consider the advantages and disadvantages of reducing or stopping your gambling.



<b>Reducing or Stopping Gambling</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>Continuing to Gamble</b>	
<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Advantages</b>

# Building a Support Network

**What problem do I have?**

**Who may be able to help me?**

**When and how can they help?**

# Building a Support Network (cont.)

As well as reconnecting with family, friends and colleagues, there are lots of ways you can find support both off- and online. Examples of potential support include:

- » The GamCare Forum at **[gamcare.org.uk/forum](https://www.gamcare.org.uk/forum)** is a peer support network for people affected by problem gambling to share their experiences, seek support and help others. Supporting others may be a rewarding experience for you, as well as receiving support.
- » GamCare also offer daily live online group chat via **[gamcare.org.uk](https://www.gamcare.org.uk)**
- » The National Gambling Helpline, (**Freephone 0808 8020 133** / live chat at **[gamcare.org.uk](https://www.gamcare.org.uk)**) can offer information, advice and support for anyone affected by problem gambling
- » SMART recovery groups - a facilitated recovery group to help people recover from addictive behaviours. Find out more: **[smartrecovery.org.uk](https://www.smartrecovery.org.uk)**
- » Gamblers Anonymous is a 12-step programme of abstinence. To find the nearest meeting, visit **[gamblersanonymous.org.uk](https://www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk)**

## Dealing with Guilt and Shame

**Guilt is linked to behaviour, e.g. "I have done something wrong."**

This includes things you have done as well as things you have failed to do. Real guilt occurs when you are specifically responsible for something, and false guilt is when you feel wrongly responsible for something you could not control.

**Shame is linked to identity, e.g. "I am wrong."**

Shame is a feeling that you are defective, that you have failed in the eyes of others, that you are unworthy or unlovable. This judgement may be real, or it may only exist in your imagination.

**If you are trying to escape guilt and shame through gambling, alcohol and/or drugs, you are likely to increase these feelings.**

- » Acknowledge your guilt or shame and seek help to work through it.
- » Learn to distinguish between false guilt and real guilt - what was in your control?
- » Accept your limitations - you are human, after all.
- » Where possible, make amends and seek forgiveness for actions which were wrong. If direct amends are not possible, you could seek indirect amends such as donating to charity, volunteering or helping others.
- » Acknowledge what is going well. For example, write down three things which you are grateful for at the end of each day.
- » Do not give into shameful feelings which appear to 'permit' your old, damaging behaviour. Do not give into feelings of hopelessness, you **can** make positive changes in your life and feel the benefit.

**Values are the traits, principles and qualities that you consider vitally important in your life - your template of what is the right and best way to live.**

**If you are not true to your values or do not apply them consistently, this creates conflict and you may experience stress, confusion, guilt, dissatisfaction, frustration and a sense of emptiness. Your life may feel out of balance and your self-esteem will be negatively affected.**

**Gambling may cause conflict with what is important to you, or may be a way of expressing one of your core values. If it is the latter, think about how can your express your core value a less damaging and more positive way.**

Gamblers often find that they are expressing difficult emotions through gambling, but this can only offer temporary release. No activity, including gambling, can permanently remove or change how you are feeling. Whilst emotions cannot be controlled, we **can** learn to manage them better.

# Dealing with Difficult Emotions

While many people use the terms to mean the same thing, an **emotion** is instinctive or intuitive, whereas a **feeling** is your conscious experience of an emotion. Your feelings, both good and bad, are indications of how well things are going in your life and where issues may need to be addressed.

What we think and say will affect the way we feel, and this affects the way we act. A negative thought leads to negative expectations, which leads to self-defeating behaviour and a negative outcome.

**There is a difference between not being aware of your emotions, or trying to suppress them, and not having emotions at all.**

Try to become aware of your heartbeat, breath and tensions/pain when experiencing different situations, and you will learn more about how your body communicates emotions through your feelings.

Be aware that some feelings may mask more difficult emotions - such as sadness covering anger, or vice versa.

## **What could stop you from expressing your emotions?**

- » Fear of losing control?
- » Fear of being ridiculed or rejected?
- » Fear of being seen as 'weak' or dependent?
- » Fear of being exposed or vulnerable?
- » Fear of causing conflict/trouble/disagreement by expressing your feeling?
- » Fear of not having the 'right' words to express yourself?
- » Fear of causing pain to someone and/or yourself if others cannot handle the intensity of your feelings?

These fears may go back to things you have experienced in the past.

Feeling different emotions is a normal part of being human, but we are often encouraged to hide how we are feeling, particular in certain cultures and/or upbringings.



**Many people try to deal with difficult emotions by ignoring them or pushing them down. However, when you bury an emotion, you bury it alive and it will eventually come to the surface.**

### **Managing your emotions better**

You cannot stop yourself from experiencing emotion, however you can find ways of managing them. Do not tell yourself that you shouldn't feel something - find a way to deal with the feeling in a positive way.

- 1) Increase your awareness - perhaps by keeping a journal, paying attention to what is going on in your body, your dreams and the feelings they summon.
- 2) Be specific - when you say you are bored, what do you mean? Are you lonely, lacking a creative outlet or stimulation, or trying to hide other feelings?
- 3) Give yourself permission to cry - you may feel that you will never stop if you start crying, but the emotional intensity will lessen over time.
- 4) Release pent-up energy (especially when you are feeling angry) before talking to someone - hit a chair with a pillow or scream in an empty room. If you are often stressed or angry, regular exercise and meditation can be helpful.
- 5) Gain perspective - tell your story and your responses to it to someone you trust. To help you to be completely honest, it is often easier to talk to a neutral third party like a counsellor. It can also be helpful to imagine this was your friend's story. How would you respond?
- 6) Take responsibility for your own actions - focus on yourself rather than what others have done wrong or could do better.
- 7) Avoid - where possible, stay out of situations that will cause emotional difficulties for you.

# Mood Diary

AM	PM
<b>How do you feel?</b>	
<b>Where do you feel this in your body?</b>	
<b>Can you give this feeling a name?</b>	
<b>Can you associate a colour with this feeling?</b>	
<b>Why do you think you feel this way?</b>	



# Setting Healthy Boundaries

We all have boundaries because we all have limitations. Your boundaries usually develop when you are a child, and they are personal to you.

Your boundaries could be physical, defining what you see as an appropriate distance between you and other people, or they could be mental, emotional and/or spiritual boundaries which define how you feel other people should behave around you, and how you will respond.

It is important to recognise our boundaries and find ways of communicating them effectively, and also to be aware of other people's boundaries. Feeling that a boundary has been violated is a common cause for conflict and stress, which can trigger the desire to gamble.

Remember, each person's boundaries will be different dependent on their values, goals, perceptions and experiences.

**Setting a boundary is different from trying to manipulate or control others. When you set a boundary, you are prepared to let go of the outcome.**

**When communicating about your boundaries, it's important to be assertive rather than aggressive - your needs, wants and rights are equal to the other person's.**

**Stand up for your personal rights and express your thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways without violating others' rights.**

Are there any boundaries that need to change to help you stay gambling-free or keep your gambling under control?

Remember that the link between a boundary and gambling can be indirect - for example, if you have trouble saying 'no' when someone asks something of you, this can lead to poor time management, which triggers gambling as relief from stress.

Some questions to think about:

1. What do your boundaries in key relationships and areas look like?
2. How do you know when someone has breached your boundary?

3. (How) do others know that they have breached your boundary (Your outward response may be very different from your inward response!). What are the advantages and disadvantages of your approach?
4. What or who may stop you from setting boundaries? Why is it harder to set boundaries with these people or in these situations?
5. What did you learn about boundaries when growing up?
6. What is your attitude towards boundaries? How do you respond when someone sets a boundary for you?
7. Is there a link between your attitude towards boundaries and your gambling?

**You usually know when someone has crossed your boundary - you may feel angry, anxious, resentful, worn out, smothered, disregarded, disrespected, or hurt.**

Ask yourself:

1. What is likely to happen if you do not set a boundary?
2. Are you prepared to live with the consequences? If yes, is there anything you can do differently to minimise the harm this causes? If no, what steps do you need to take to protect yourself?

**When communicating about your feelings, remember that these are your responsibility. If you blame the other person for your feelings ("You make me feel..."), the other person is likely to get defensive, and they will be less likely to listen to what you have to say.**

Use the map below to consider your own boundaries, so you can begin to think differently about how you communicate then to others.

**Physical** (e.g. your personal comfort zone; what you consider safe and appropriate sexual behaviour):

**Financial** (how you are handling finances and your attitude towards savings and debts):

**Emotional/mental** (what you will share with someone; what you are happy for others to express to you; things you will not think about):

**Spiritual** (what you will and won't do based on your beliefs):

# Assertiveness: Practical Communication Tips

## **Avoid making assumptions:**

- » If in any doubt, check out whether you have understood correctly.
- » Do not assume people will notice/know what you need, ask for what you want.
- » Try to think of other ways of seeing this situation.
- » When giving feedback, focus on behaviour and avoid making assumptions about motives. Your emotions and (negative) thoughts may influence your perceptions.

## **Body language:**

- » Make direct eye contact
- » Your words, tone of voice and body language need to match.

## **Clear communication:**

- » Use short, simple and positive statements.
- » Be clear, direct, honest and firm. If required, stick to your statement or request by using calm repetition over and over again.

- » Deal with one thing at a time.
- » Use 'I' statements to communicate how you feel and what you think.
- » Break down difficult tasks into smaller parts.
- » You do not have to justify your response.
- » You can directly request to the person to stop asking. If all else fails, leave.

## **Timing:**

- » Don't let things build up.
- » Take sufficient time before making decisions.
- » Deal with the present issue and do not bring up the past.
- » Take time out when you have strong thoughts, feelings or impulses or are running on empty.

# Coping with Stress

A certain amount of pressure is helpful, as it keeps us motivated and focussed. However, for many people stress has become an issue.

For many compulsive gamblers, stress is a key trigger. Whilst we cannot avoid stress completely, we can learn to deal with stress more effectively and make choices that lessen the impact we experience.

- » Stress is your individual response to a situation where you feel an inappropriate amount of pressure.
- » Stress is a bodily response that occurs automatically - the key to managing stress is to recognise the symptoms of rising stress levels (physical sensations, feelings, ideas) before they escalate.
- » We often do not notice that we are experiencing stress, until it has reached alarming levels.
- » Stress makes relapse into previous behaviour like compulsive gambling more likely.

Relapse can be prevented by either **reducing** the sources of stress or **increasing** our capacity to cope.

**Your body will respond in the same way, whether the pressure you are feeling is an objective reality or whether you put yourself under pressure by the way you view a situation.**

## **What causes stress?**

- » Major life events (both positive or negative);
- » Daily hassles and uplifts (day-to-day events which can be pleasant or upsetting);
- » Tension between our 'wants' (activities carried out for pleasure, satisfaction or self-fulfilment, which may or may not be good for us) and 'shoulds' (chores or obligations).

# How Stress Manifests for You

How many of the following do you experience when you are stressed?

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>
Do you notice an increase in your gambling?			
Do you notice an increase in drinking / smoking?			
Do you eat more or less than usual?			
Do you feel hyper / elated / restless?			
Do you have difficulty concentrating or finishing tasks?			
Do you find it difficult to make decisions?			
Do you find it hard to sleep?			
Do you start to avoid people / activities / work?			
Do you feel grumpy / irritated / angry?			
Do you speak more loudly or quicker than usual?			
Do you overreact more easily?			
Do you experience back pain / stiff or tense muscles?			
Do you experience indigestion / stomach aches / nausea?			
Do you experience headaches?			
Do you experience skin rashes?			
Do you experience chest pain?			
Do you worry without reason / get panic attacks?			
Do you judge yourself or others more harshly?			

# Coping with Stress

## **Avoid Unnecessary Stress**

- » Manage your time proactively - limit your 'to-do' list and learn to say 'no' when you can't manage an additional task
- » Avoid/reduce contact with people and situations which stress you
- » Take control of your environment, and avoid hot topics
- » Express your feelings in a respectful, assertive way, and find a compromise if possible

## **Adapt to the stressor, change your expectations and attitude**

- » Reframe your thinking - adjust your perspective and eliminate self-defeating thoughts
- » Adjust your standards (aim for 'good enough' rather than perfect)
- » Refocus your energy where you know you can make progress

## **Accept the things you cannot change**

- » Do not attempt to control the uncontrollable, such as the behaviour of others

- » Look at challenges as opportunities for growth, and mistakes as learning curves
- » Move on - let go of resentment for things you cannot influence

## **Look after yourself**

- » Make time for relaxation and things you enjoy in your daily routine
- » Spend time with people who enhance your life
- » Learn to laugh at yourself
- » Strengthen your health (exercise, diet, reduce caffeine/sugar/alcohol; avoid self-medicating with drugs/ cigarettes/alcohol; aim for quality sleep)
- » HALT - watch out for Hunger, Anger, Loneliness and Tiredness
- » TIPS (Truth: be honest about your feelings; Information: know what you are coping with; Priorities: remember your goals; Support: Who can support you and how?)



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