

A Self-Help Guide to Gambling Responsibly



Introduction

Acknowledgements

The Aboriginal Responsible Gambling Strategy would like to express its gratitude to the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba for their permission to reproduce and adapt this handbook.

Special thanks are extended to the clients who participated in the making of this manual. Their willingness to share their experiences – particularly the strategies that helped them to overcome a gambling problem – is appreciated.

We would also like to acknowledge the efforts and diligence of the following organizations and staff who contributed to the development of this resource for Aboriginal communities in Ontario. A special thanks to David Courtney, Grand Council Treaty #3; Glenn Forrest, Six Nations of the Grand River; Sharon Reynolds, Metis Nation of Ontario; Kathy Adcock, Nishnawbe Aski Nation; Dean Sayers, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres; Mary Drake, Ontario Metis Aboriginal Association and Leslie Bannon, Ontario Native Women's Association. Their dedication to the field of problem gambling is recognized and deeply appreciated.

To the Reader

As we developed this handbook, we realized that it would be impossible to include everything we'd like and still keep it a reasonable handbook size. We've tried to include the information that our former clients found most helpful and abbreviated some for the sake of clarity and easy reading.

You may notice that your experiences with gambling don't exactly match the examples we've used. However, most of the basic ideas we talk about can be applied, no matter where you've gambled or what games you've been involved in.

We sincerely hope that this book will be a starting point for making the changes you feel are necessary for your personal situation.

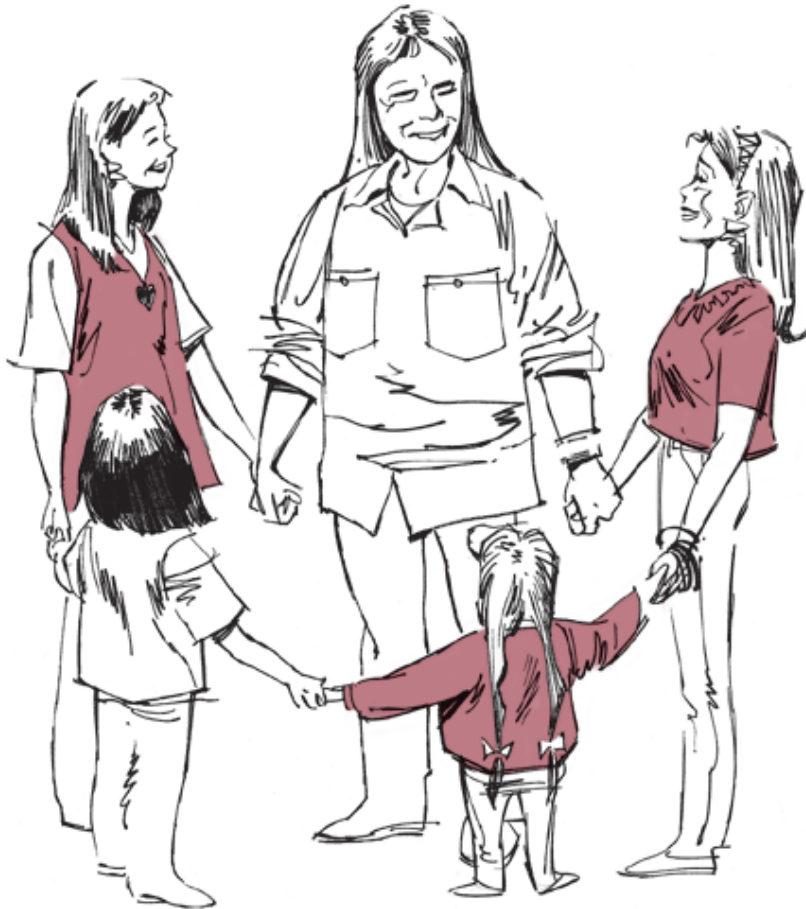


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Welcome

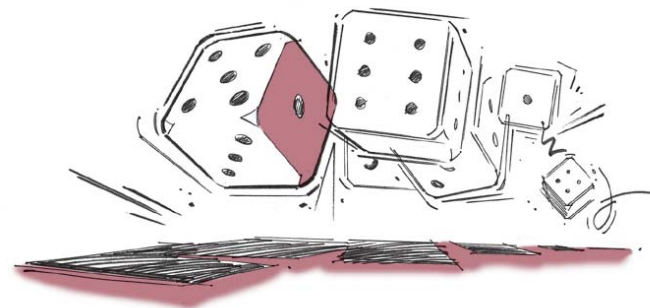
If you're reading this handbook, you're probably concerned about your gambling and the effect it's having on your life.

Gambling may have caused you some financial troubles. Gambling may have also caused problems with your relationships, your work, the law or even your health.

This handbook should help you to better understand your gambling and the role it has played in your life. Hopefully, you can learn how to make changes, if that's what you decide you need to do.

Remember that changing a behaviour doesn't happen overnight – it often takes a number of steps before you're successful. You've already taken an important step by recognizing that your gambling has caused some problems.

As you read through this handbook, take the time to really think about how you can use the information in your life. You can make changes and there is always help available if you need it. You don't have to let gambling interfere with your life.



Gambling: From Recreation to Problem

Many people who gamble occasionally are able to control the amount of time and money they spend. For them, gambling can be a harmless form of recreation.

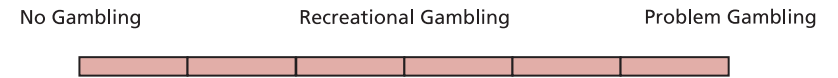
Most of the people who have come to seek gambling services have become more seriously involved in gambling. They've found they sometimes have difficulty controlling their gambling and it has created problems.

Many of the "problem gamblers" we see started out as "recreational gamblers." The progression from one to the other can take place over a matter of years or within months. Often, a person doesn't fully realize that gambling has turned into something unhealthy until problems become too big to ignore.

Reading through the table on the next page can help you understand some of the main differences between recreational gambling and problem gambling.



Range of Gambling Behaviours



Recreational Gambling

- stays within a budget
- losing is no big deal
- doesn't disrupt life
- often gambles with others
- can take it or leave it

Problem Gambling

- exceeds limits (time and money)
- losing causes financial problems
- affects relationships, work or your mood
- hides the amount of gambling and losses
- constantly thinks about gambling
- gambles to win back previous losses
- borrows money for gambling
- gambles until all money is gone
- feels ashamed about gambling
- desperate: "I deserve a win, I need a win"

Language You Might Hear

You may have heard different words used to describe gambling that causes problems.

The term “problem gambling” is used to describe gambling that results in negative consequences to someone’s life. The medical community describes a serious gambling problem as “pathological gambling” while Gamblers Anonymous (GA) uses the term “compulsive gambling.” All of these terms could be used to describe a “gambling addiction.”

Regardless of the words used, experience has shown that for people with a serious gambling problem, quitting gambling completely is the safest course of action.

Is Gambling a Problem for Me?

Here are some of the most common signs of problem gambling:

1. Spending more time and money on gambling than you plan or would like.
2. Trying to win back money by betting even more money.
3. Doing things you normally wouldn’t do (i.e. lying, not paying bills, borrowing money).
4. Often thinking about gambling or how to get money for gambling.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

Are any of these signs a part of your life? Yes No

Are you concerned about your gambling? Yes No

Has gambling changed from entertainment into something more serious? Yes No

If you answered ‘yes’ to any of these, you may have a problem with gambling.

On the next couple of pages you’ll find Pat’s Story, an example of one person’s experience with problem gambling.

Pat’s Story

My name is Pat and I’m a 34-year-old with two children. I have a good job at an Aboriginal organization and I get along fairly easily with others. I also have a problem with gambling.

I remember the first time I played bingo. It was when I was twenty-one years old. Bingo had already been around for a few years, but I had no real interest in playing. One night I was out having a drink with a couple of friends and they asked if I wanted to go play. I didn’t know how bingo worked, but I said I’d give it a try. In less than five minutes I had my first bingo and was up over \$100.

My friends teased me that it was just beginner’s luck, but over the next few months it seemed like I ended up ahead most of the times I played. I don’t remember how long it was before I was playing every night.

Over the next few years, I’d often slip off and play the slots when I was away on business. About two years ago I got my first “royal.” I still remember the feeling as I watched the machine click off my credits while people congratulated me on my good luck. It also felt good to make double bill payments that month.

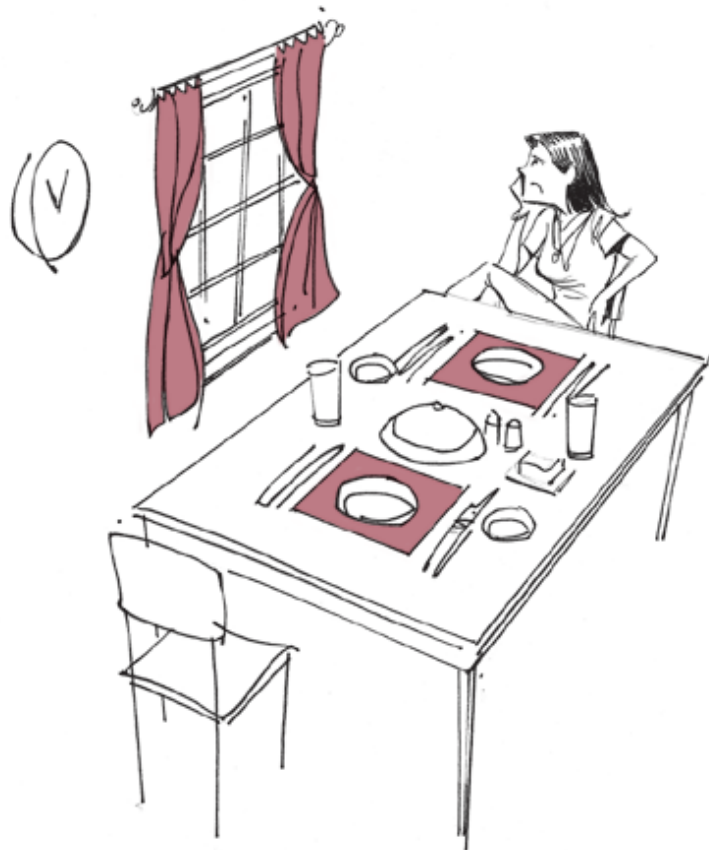
The following winter, I started to drop by the casino during the day or after work to see if I could make a little extra money. One Friday after I had been paid, I lost \$60 in the first half-hour. I knew my string of bad luck would have to change, so I took out some more money from a nearby ATM machine and continued to gamble. I didn’t stop gambling that night until my whole paycheque was gone.



I couldn't bring myself to tell my partner what had happened, especially since there had already been complaints at home that I was spending too much time gambling. I was surprised at how easy it was to cover up the loss – I handle most of the finances for my family. But it sure felt strange keeping something from my partner when normally we tell each other everything.

I thought it would be a one-time cover-up because I wouldn't let it happen again. Once I got my money back I'd quit – or so I told myself.

Since then there have been lots of lies, cover-ups and arguments. I never did get my money back. I'm behind on my bills and I owe money on my credit cards. I don't see my friends as much, and it feels like everything in my life has changed – especially me.



Family Reactions to Problem Gambling

When someone has problems with gambling, it also affects the people around them. As gambling takes up more and more time and energy, family and friends start to feel changes in their relationships with that person. They may notice that the person isn't home as much or that his or her mind is often somewhere else.

Family and friends can experience a variety of emotions as the relationship deteriorates:

- loneliness, feelings of isolation or abandonment
- anxiety, worry, tension
- self-doubt
- anger
- hopelessness, frustration
- betrayal

These feelings can be confusing and stressful. Family members often can't understand why the gambling continues despite the problems it's causing.

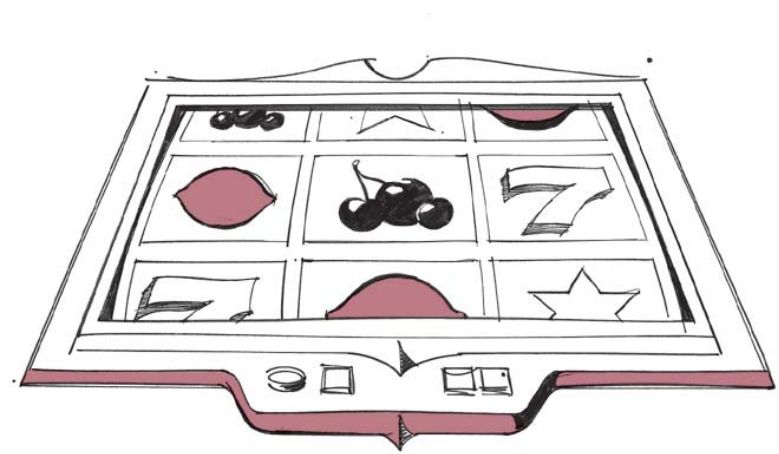
Family members often try to get involved because they're worried about what's happening. They may:

- ask lots of questions
- try to control the gambling
- try to solve the person's problems
- make threats if the gambling continues
- withdraw from the relationship

The person who is gambling can feel nagged and controlled. People often choose to hide their gambling losses rather than deal with a confrontation. Eventually, family members do find out the truth.

Loss of trust can be the most damaging blow to the relationship.

Has gambling affected any of your relationships? How?



Understanding Why Gambling is a Losing Game

Most people know that if you play bingo, VLTs, slots or any other casino game, you'll lose money over time. However, not everyone really understands why it works this way.

Three ideas are especially important to understand:

Randomness

All gambling games are based on the fact that no one can predict what will happen next – in other words, they're completely random.

For example, slots have a computer chip (Random Number Generator) that continually produces random numbers, even when no one is playing the game.

When you push the deal or spin button, it's like blindly putting your hand into this river of numbers, pulling one out and putting it on the screen. If this number is a "winning number" (a winning poker hand or line-up combination), you win. If not, you lose. Unfortunately, there are always more losing numbers in the river than there are winning numbers.

The casinos make sure that all their games are totally random so that it's impossible to figure out a system for predicting what will happen next.

In most areas of life, we can learn from our past experiences. We get better the more often we do something (i.e. skating, pool, video games, piano). With slots and VLTs, once you've learned basic strategy, it's impossible to get better.

As you become more familiar with a machine, it's natural to notice patterns. However, even if you see a pattern a few times, it doesn't mean that it's more likely to occur than any of the other possible combinations. What's already happened has no effect on what will happen next.

The same principle applies to flipping a coin. Even if you've flipped nine tails in a row, the odds on the next flip are still 50/50 – what has already happened has no effect on what will happen next. The coin has no memory

of earlier flips; neither does the part of a slot machine that determines whether you win or lose.

When you're gambling, the old sayings "practice makes perfect" and "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again" simply do not apply.

House Advantage

All bingos, slots and casino games (roulette and all casino card games), pull-tabs, scratch tickets and lotteries have a built-in house advantage. In the short term, you might find yourself ahead, but the longer you play, the more certain it is that you'll have lost money.

Casinos and bingo halls are in the business of making money. They need to know that at the end of the day, they'll have collected more money than they've paid out. They always make a profit because they have a house advantage on every game they operate.

For example, the house advantage on slots is about seven percent. This means you'll lose an average of seven cents from every dollar you bet. The longer you play, the more you lose.

The Effect of Occasional Wins

One more aspect of gambling that can influence you is the fact that there's no way to predict when you'll win.

Sometimes it's hard to walk away from a game when you've lost money, especially when you feel the very next spin/deal may be a winner. You may have had the experience of saying "one more spin, one more spin" over and over, but still not being able to leave.

If you've ever had a big win, the urge to keep betting and betting can be stronger. You remember your wins and you always hope it may happen again.

Any time you start gambling, this hope can keep you playing until all your money is gone. The best way to avoid this urge to keep placing bet after bet is to stay completely away from gambling so that you don't risk getting caught up in that cycle again.

Getting Help

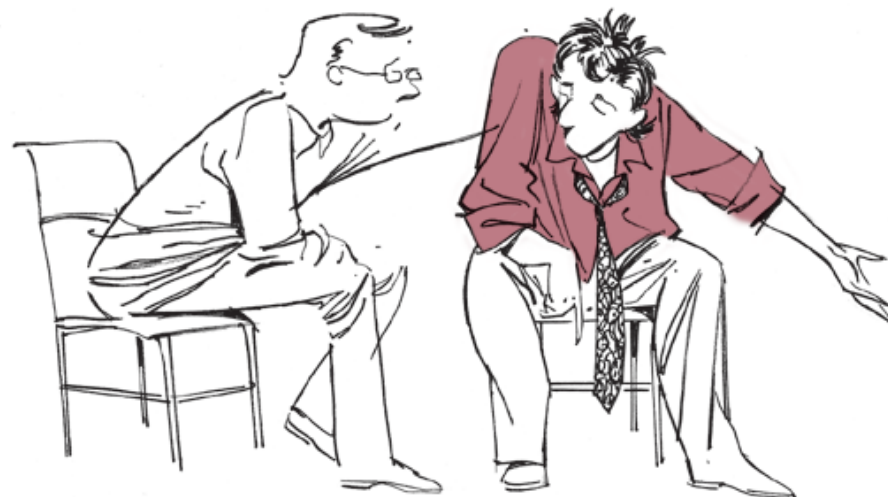
We're all different. What works for one person might not work for the next. Some people make the decision to quit gambling and are successful without any outside help. Most people find that getting some support makes quitting that much easier.

You may find that family and sometimes friends are willing and able to help. Gamblers Anonymous (a self-help group), or your local Native service providers can also assist you in addressing your gambling. Individual counselling is also strongly recommended.

Family and Friends

Family members and close friends can help you stay away from gambling. They are often willing to plan other activities with you during your "high risk" times. They can also take over some of the money management responsibilities.

However, when someone does decide to quit gambling, family and friends may not be convinced that the promises to quit are sincere, at least not at first. Sometimes getting support through counselling, self-help groups or other sources can also be very helpful.



Gamblers Anonymous (GA)

“Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from a gambling problem.”

GA teaches a twelve-step recovery program designed to help people stay away from gambling and lead balanced lives.

Local Native Service Providers

There are many Native organizations that provide health and social services and referrals to counsellors and other agencies that can help. On-reserve, contact your local band office to find out what supports are available in your community. In cities and towns, try contacting your local friendship centre, Native women’s association or Metis local. Aboriginal Health Access Centres may also be able to provide advice and referrals.

Individual Counselling

Counselling can take many forms and can focus on a gambling problem, other addictions or emotional issues that may be contributing to a gambling problem, or a holistic approach to improving wellbeing.

There are certified gambling addiction counsellors, although only a few are Aboriginal. Many Native service providers are training their existing workers to have an awareness of gambling issues. There are also a variety of psychologists and psychotherapists in most areas.

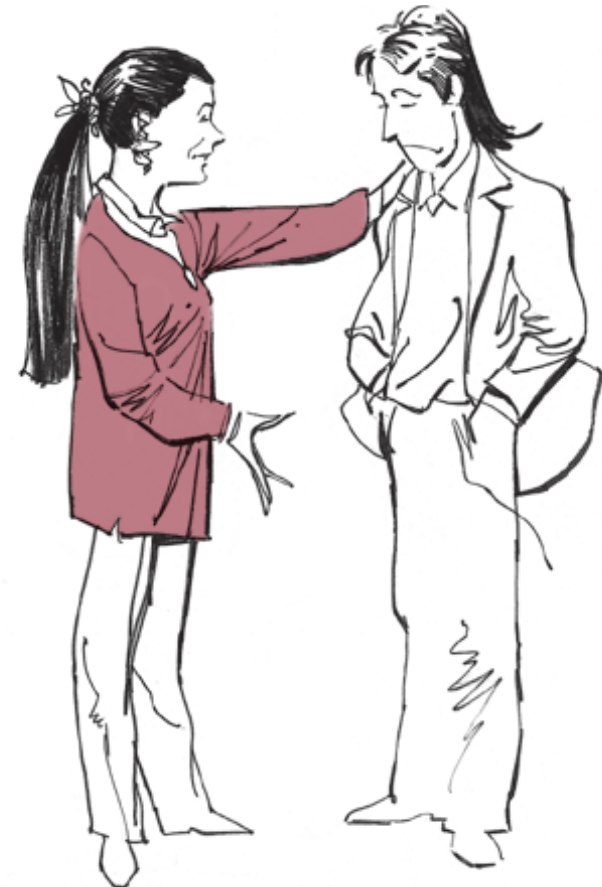
Many traditional Aboriginal healers will work with people to try to address their specific gambling issue in the context of greater overall health and wellness.

Choose What’s Best for You

Regardless of where you decide to get support, we’ve found that certain steps are helpful when you’re trying to quit gambling. The next section of the handbook describes some of these steps. Choose the steps that you think will work best for you. You may have already tried some of them, but sometimes it takes a combination of steps to be successful. Sometimes it also takes several tries (just like quitting smoking). So don’t give up on yourself!

Contacts

Check out the resources and organizations listed at the back of this Handbook for contact information.



Thoughts That Might Cause Gambling Urges

There are some common thoughts that may influence you to gamble or keep gambling, including:

“If I keep gambling, my luck is bound to change and I’ll win back some of the money I have lost.”

Gamblers often have a hard time accepting that all the money they’ve lost is gone – it hurts when you’ve lost a lot of money. It may seem to make sense to try to win back that money.

Unfortunately, you’ll have the same chances as everyone else – you may win in the short term, but over time you’ll lose more money. Risking more and more money in the hopes of winning back lost money is commonly called “chasing.”

“I’ve almost won in the past, so I must be close to a big win.”

Gamblers sometimes feel that if they’ve come close to winning, they should keep playing because the big win is close. A “near miss” (i.e. only one card missing from a royal flush) doesn’t mean that you’re getting closer to a win. What happens in the future is totally unaffected by a near miss hand. Close only counts in horseshoes – not in gambling.

“My lucky number/machine/feeling will help me win.”

This kind of superstition is fairly common. When you read it on paper it may sound a little silly, but many people do put faith in “lucky feelings” or objects. Again, the truth is that feeling lucky has absolutely no effect on the outcome of a game.

“I have a strategy that’ll help me win.”

Most gamblers develop strategies they hope will help them win. For example, they may mistakenly think that picking their “lucky” lottery numbers will increase their chances of winning. The truth is that the outcome of all casino games, lotteries and VLTs is random and subject to the house advantage. When you become involved in a game (placing bets, choosing cards and pressing buttons), you might feel you can influence the outcome. This belief is commonly referred to as the “illusion of control.” And it is an illusion.

The most important thing you can remember is that gambling will cost you money in the long run.



Resisting the Urge to Gamble

One of the biggest challenges is resisting the urge to gamble. Fortunately, there are many ways to make this task easier. It helps to start by figuring out what your “high risk” situations or triggers are. Then you can plan how to avoid or deal with these situations, which include:

- access to money
- “high risk” times
- opportunities to gamble
- nothing to do (boredom)
- feeling bad
- unbalanced lifestyle

Access to Money

Your own experiences may have shown you that having easy access to money – paydays, pocket money, access to personal savings or credit lines – can cause gambling urges. That’s why it’s so important to limit access to money. Think of it as putting up roadblocks that prevent you from getting gambling money.



This may not sound very appealing – most people like to be able to get their money whenever they want it. Nevertheless, if you get a strong urge to gamble, having some financial roadblocks already in place will help you resist that urge.

Here are some ideas for limiting your access to money. Take a look and see what might work for you.

Effective Ways to Limit Your Access to Money

- Give financial control to someone else.
- Get rid of bank cards and credit cards (or at least cancel the cash advance privileges).
- Carry small amounts of money – ask yourself how much money you actually need in a day.
- Change banking arrangements (require two signatures for all withdrawals, move money from joint accounts to a significant other’s account, etc.).
- Cancel any credit lines.
- Be accountable for money spent (arrange to show your receipts to someone, etc.).
- Pay bills by phone or direct payment.
- Set a reasonable budget to repay debts.

The more steps you take to block your access to money, the more success you’ll have in interrupting your gambling. Try starting with the tightest restrictions that you can and ease up as you become more confident that you can stay away from gambling.

If you think you could use some help managing or reorganizing your finances, contact community financial counselling services, your bank or financial institution, and/or a local Native service provider.

Identifying “High Risk” Times

We already talked about how access to money is often associated with gambling. For many people, certain times of the day or week are also associated with gambling. If you can anticipate your “high risk” times, you can plan to avoid gambling during those times.

Urges to gamble can be triggered by free time, stress, feeling isolated from others or even certain times of the day or week (e.g. payday, evenings, weekends, etc.).

Looking through the following list can help you figure out what feelings give you the urge to gamble:

- feeling tired or low
- feeling bored or restless with nothing to do
- feeling mad, frustrated or depressed
- feeling good or “lucky”

Again, having a plan for dealing with your gambling triggers can help you resist them. You might want to write down your ideas. For example: “If I feel bored and restless, I’ll take the dog for a walk.”

Effective Ways to Reduce Gambling Urges at “High Risk” Times

- Look for patterns in your gambling (where you gamble, when you gamble, who you gamble with) and plan to be busy during your “high risk” times.
- Be accountable to someone during your free time (phone your spouse as you’re leaving work, agree to meet someone over lunch, etc.).
- Schedule and take part in activities with others.
- Change your routines that may lead to gambling (don’t drive past your favourite gambling locations, don’t go to the bar on payday, etc.).

- Limit your use of alcohol and other drugs – lowered inhibitions can lead to increased risk-taking, including gambling.
- Develop new interests and re-establish old ones.
- Spend more time with your children.

Problem gambling involves secrecy and avoiding responsibilities. If you plan to be busy during your “high risk” times, you probably won’t get as many urges to gamble and it’ll be easier to resist them.

Avoiding Gambling Opportunities

If you want to avoid playing bingo, for example, it’s probably a good idea to avoid spending time at bingo halls or around people planning to play bingo. You may need to plan to do something else after work if your friends or co-workers are going to the bingo hall.

For some people, gambling has been at the centre of most social outings with friends and family. You may need to suggest other activities, such as going to a movie, out for dinner, bowling, cross-country skiing, etc. Let your family and friends know that you want to quit gambling and ask them to not invite you to gambling-related activities.



Another step that many people take is filling out the Voluntary Exclusion Form available at major casinos. Once you complete the form, you're banned from the casino for a specified time period. This step is particularly effective for people who have done most of their gambling in the casinos.

The longer you stay away from gambling, the more likely it'll be that you'll succeed at quitting. As time goes by, you'll notice that your urges to gamble will occur less often and will no longer be as strong. Having gambling opportunities can lead you back into your gambling problem. Experience tells us that if this happens the gambling problem usually gets worse.

Replace Gambling with Healthy Activities

Gambling usually serves some function in a person's life. Some people gamble for excitement, while others gamble to escape from stress, depression or boredom. You'll probably find it's easier to stay away from gambling if you can get involved in more healthy activities.

You may have to think to remember how you filled your time in the past. Often, as people become more and more involved in gambling, they abandon the hobbies and activities that brought them pleasure in the past. Reconnecting with the activities that you used to enjoy may take some effort, but you'll probably find it rewarding and it'll help you stay away from gambling.

Making a list of activities that you can do in your spare time is a good way to ensure that you'll have options if you get an urge to gamble. You're much more likely to be successful at resisting your urges if you can do something else that you enjoy.

Activities & Hobbies I Enjoy:

Restore a Healthy Balance to Your Life

Getting involved in healthy activities is a great way to bring a sense of balance back into your life. Hopefully, you can find activities you enjoy that can challenge you on different levels – intellectually, physically, spiritually and emotionally.

The important thing is to find activities that make you feel good about yourself and help you grow as a complete person.

Successful recovery from any addiction involves restoring a healthy balance in your life and connecting with people and activities that contribute to your wellbeing.



Ideas to Keep in Mind

- Be prepared to put as much effort into feeling better as you were putting into gambling.
- Ask for help – people can't help if they don't know what you're struggling with.
- Make use of the resources that can offer you support in staying away from gambling.

Be careful that you don't replace gambling with another addictive or unhealthy habit.

Taking Care of Yourself

Another cause of gambling urges can be feeling tired or low. Everyone has times when they get tired, so it's important to plan what you'll do when this happens to you. Getting enough sleep, eating regularly and exercising can all help you feel better and make it easier to resist gambling urges.

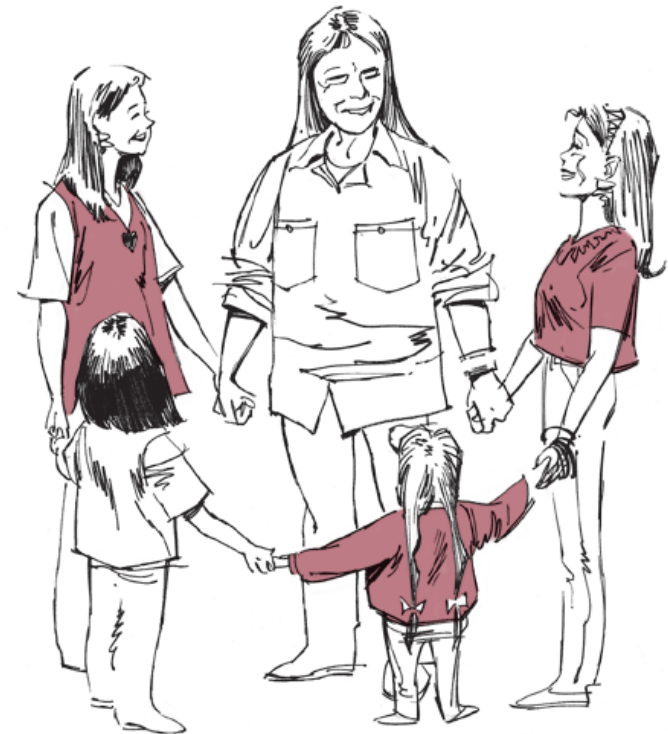


Making a Plan

We've tried to cover a range of options for someone who wants to reduce or quit gambling. You might want to re-read portions of this handbook and mark some of the strategies that you'd like to try. In the end, you're the best judge of what will work in your life.

Be honest with yourself and don't be afraid to ask for some help if you think you need it. You've already taken an important step by admitting that your gambling has caused some problems in your life and by searching for ways to avoid more problems in the future.

Many people before you have struggled with problem gambling. Many of these people are now living their lives free from any ongoing negative effects from gambling. You can too!



Resources

Aboriginal Responsible Gambling Strategy

See contact information on last page.

Grand Council Treaty #3

Independent First Nations

Metis Nation of Ontario

Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres

Ontario Metis Aboriginal Association

Ontario Native Women's Association

Union of Ontario Indians

Gambling Related Information

Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline

Toll-free 1-888-230-3505 (24-hours)

www.opgh.on.ca

CAMH

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

33 Russell Street

Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S1

Toll-free 1-800-463-6273

www.camh.net

Responsible Gambling Council (Ontario)

505 Consumers Road, Suite 801

Toronto, Ontario M2J 4V8

Toll-free 1-888-391-1111

www.responsiblegambling.com

Gamblers Anonymous

1930 Yonge Street

P.O. Box 1135

Toronto, Ontario M4S 1Z4

Telephone 1-416-366-7613

www.gamblersanonymous.org

The National Council on Problem Gambling

208 G Street, N.E.

Washington D.C. 20002

Telephone 1-202-547-9204

Facsimile 1-202-547-9206

www.ncpgambling.org

Nechi Training, Research & Health Promotions Institute

P.O. Box 34007 Kingsway

Edmonton Alberta T5G 3G4

Toll-free 1-800-459-1884

Facsimile 1-780-458-1883

www.nechi.com

Za-geh-do-win Information Clearing House

P.O.Box 40

Naughton, Ontario P0M 2M0

Toll-free 1-800-669-2538

Facsimile 1-705-692-9039

www.za-geh-do-win.com

Emergency

Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline

Toll-free 1-888-230-3505

Crisis Lines – check your local phone book

Financial Counselling

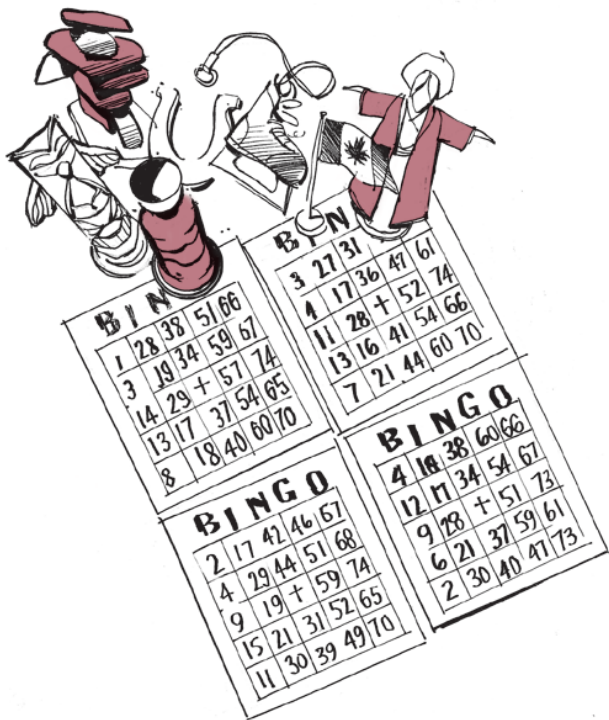
See your bank or financial institution for the service nearest you.

Legal Counselling

Legal Aid Ontario

Toll-free 1-800-668-8258

www.legalaid.on.ca



Additional Reading

Books

AFM Gambling Behaviour Self-Study Workbook (1999), Marles, Christine; Maynard, Rona.

Behind the 8-ball: A Guide for Families (1992), Berman, Linda.

Deadly Odds: Recovery from Compulsive Gambling (1994), Estes, Ken; Brubaker, Mike.

Losing Your Shirt: A Recovery for Compulsive Gamblers and their Families (1992), Heineman, Mary.

When the Stakes are Too High: A Spouse's Struggle to Live with a Compulsive Gambler (1991), Allison, Loraine.

Videos

Compulsive Gambling and Recovery (1997)

Easy Money, Hard Times (1994)

Gambling: The Chance of a Lifetime (1997)

Gambling Fever (1991)

High Stakes: Seeking Solutions (1994)

Man Alive: Selling Hope (1993)

Big Hand for a Little Lady

Cincinnati Kid

The Hustler

The Lady Gambles

The Queen of Spades

The Color of Money

Wall Street

The Gambler

The Gambler Returns, Part 2

Casino

Let it Ride

Ontario Problem
Gambling Helpline:

1-888-230-3505

Free, anonymous and confidential. This province-wide information and referral service is available 24 hours.

Contacts

- Grand Council Treaty #3 1-807-467-8144
- Independent First Nations
 - Six Nations of the Grand River 1-877-650-9700
 - Shoal Lake #39 First Nation 1-807-733-3318
- Metis Nation of Ontario 1-705-529-6215
- Nishnawbe Aski Nation 1-807-623-8228
- Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres 1-800-772-9291
- Ontario Metis Aboriginal Association 1-800-423-3361
- Ontario Native Women's Association 1-800-667-0816
- Union of Ontario Indians 1-877-702-5200

