

# 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?**

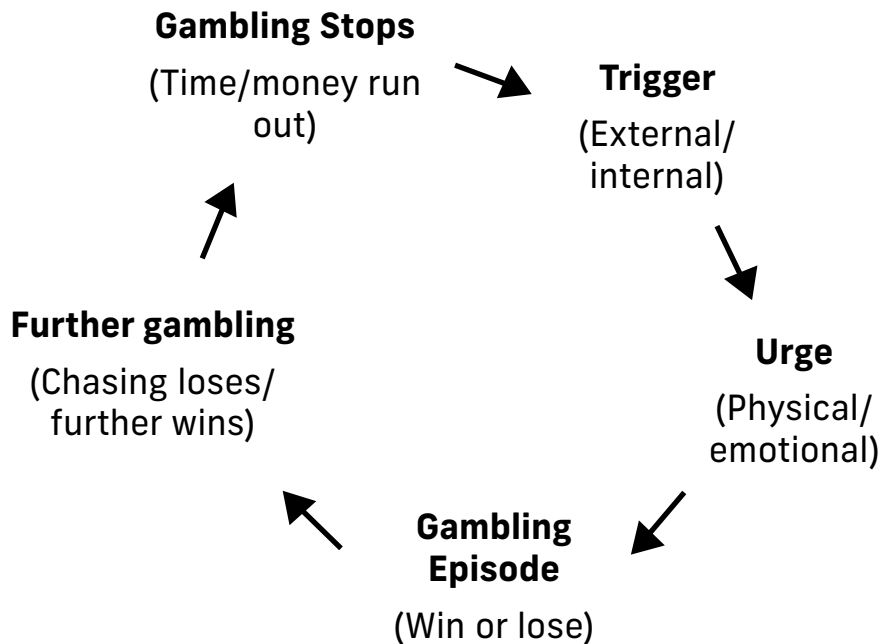
Many people think that a problem with gambling is just a money issue, but there are many different reasons why gambling may become a problem. Sometimes money worries are like a smokescreen - because you can focus on them and their consequences, it seems easier to deal with money problems rather than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

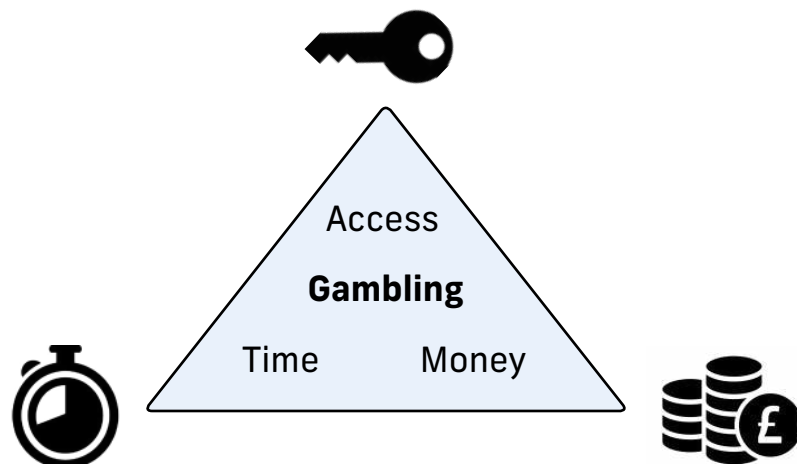
Rate the impacts gambling has in your life, where 5 is 'could not get worse' and 1 is 'could not get better'. **What are your top two priorities, and how can you work to reduce these impacts?** Place your own list of goals somewhere that you refer to often, to keep your goals fresh in your mind and can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





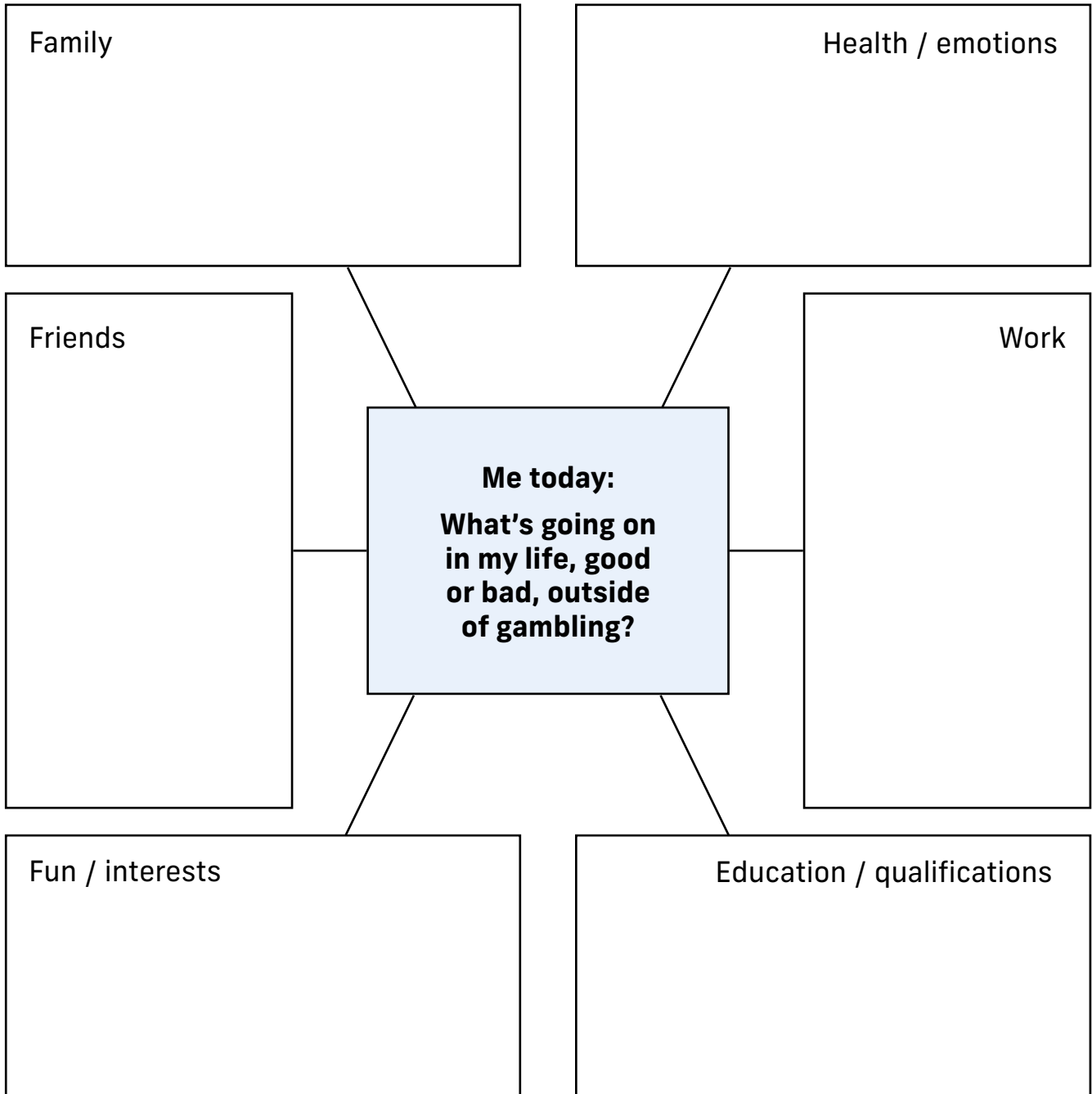
# My Gambling Diary

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>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I have a strong urge to gamble today</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>I can abstain from gambling today</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<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 1050 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](https://www.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?



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