

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?

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.



Reducing or Stopping Gambling	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Continuing to Gamble	
Disadvantages	Advantages

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
How do you feel?	
Where do you feel this in your body?	
Can you give this feeling a name?	
Can you associate a colour with this feeling?	
Why do you think you feel this way?	



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