



# UNDERSTANDING GAMBLING ADDICTION

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Short guides to understanding addiction and mental health

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For some people, gambling is fun and exciting. Betting a small amount of money, with the chance to win far more, can be exhilarating. However, gambling can become addictive. That feeling of 'almost winning' can drive you on to place more and more bets, or to gamble a larger amount of money, because of the hope that you might win.

It is important to remember that most formal forms of gambling are illegal for under 18s. However, if you find yourself enjoying, or getting caught up in, gambling, there are several important steps you can take to prevent or treat an addiction.



## WHAT IS GAMBLING ADDICTION?

Whether someone places bets on the football, plays the lottery, or joins an online casino, the act of gambling can provide a buzz. The thought that you might win money, no matter how much, can drive you to part with your cash even though the chance of winning may be very small. In most cases, an individual might spend a few euros, and then take a break from placing any more bets. In this case, gambling will cost a similar amount to other hobbies or activities that you might enjoy. However, if gambling gets out of hand, huge amounts of money can be gambled with, and ultimately lost.

Online gambling has grown in popularity, and individuals can now place bets at any time of the day or night, without leaving the house. This has meant that in many cases the physical barriers that used to be in place for gambling, such as going to a betting shop or having to prove your age in person, are gone. Teenagers today may therefore be at greater risk of developing an addiction to gambling than the generations before them.

In some areas, gambling addiction is recognised as a medical condition called gambling disorder. If addiction is present, it can lead to compulsive gambling in which you no longer feel in control of your actions, spend more than you can afford, or want to gamble all the time.

## THE SYMPTOMS OF GAMBLING ADDICTION

If an addiction to gambling has already formed, you may have noticed that gambling is affecting how much money you have, your friendships and your behaviour. You may even start to see an impact on your mental health.



- Spending a lot of time thinking about gambling, or wanting to place a bet
- Being unable to stop gambling, even if you want to or think you should
- Spending more money on bets than you can afford
- Using a lot of your free time to gamble
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Not keeping up with your schoolwork because you are busy gambling
- Losing interest in other activities that you used to enjoy, such as sports or music



- Hiding your gambling from others, or lying about it when others ask
- Borrowing or stealing money to be able to place bets
- Going into debt because you have spent so much
- Continuing to gamble to try to win your money back or pay back your debts to others
- Feeling anxious, irritable, angry or depressed about your gambling
- Neglecting your personal hygiene because gambling feels more important.

If you have noticed any of the above signs, you should seek advice from an adult you are close to, or a professional such as a counsellor or addiction specialist. Talking to someone else may help to put your habits in perspective. This is one of the first steps to managing any addiction that might have formed.

## WHAT CAUSES GAMBLING ADDICTION?

Gambling is popular because of the effect it has on our brains and thought processes. Psychologists looking into gambling have found that the feeling of “nearly winning” makes us feel excited that we have almost achieved what we hoped. For example, if you need to roll two sixes to win, but get a five and a six, you might think you are almost there. This spurs individuals on in continuing to gamble, because it increases the sense that a win is coming soon. In reality, your next roll will not be related to your previous attempts.

Scientists have explained that those who gamble can feel overly sure of their chance of winning if they choose bets themselves. An example of this is picking your own lottery numbers, or selecting your own scratch card. However, these types of gambling are chance based. Every player has the same chance of winning because there is no skill to selecting the winning numbers. Even when your gambling chances can be influenced by skill or expert knowledge, such as when betting on horses, football teams, or playing poker, the odds will always be in favour of the casino or betting company and the outcome will never be certain.

It is possible to stay in control of occasional gambling by setting boundaries and knowing your limits. However, the psychology of nearly winning, or feeling certain that you will select a winner, can be exhilarating. Sadly, in trying to achieve this feeling repeatedly, an addiction to gambling may occur.



## HOW DO I RECOGNISE GAMBLING ADDICTION?

It can be hard to admit to yourself that you have an addiction. If you are addicted, you may feel that even if you wanted to, it would be impossible to stop. If you are unsure if you have developed a dependence on gambling, it may be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do you gamble because you feel like you have to, rather than because you enjoy it?
2. Are you worried about how much time or money you spend gambling?
3. Do you try to hide how much you gamble from your friends or family?



4. Is gambling leading to risky behaviours such as stealing or gambling to try to repay a debt?
5. Are you gambling more than you can afford to?
6. Is gambling reducing your desire to see friends, spend time with family, complete schoolwork, or go to work?

If you have answered yes to any of the above, or if you think you have some signs of gambling addiction, you should seek support and advice from a parent, teacher or healthcare professional.

## HOW CAN I AVOID AN ADDICTION TO GAMBLING?

Gambling addiction can cause serious problems. Luckily, there are ways to both avoid becoming addicted, and to treat gambling addiction.

If you already gamble, the surest way to avoid becoming addicted to gambling is to stop now. Abstaining from gambling will prevent you from becoming caught in a cycle of searching for the next betting-related rush. However, if you want to enjoy gambling responsibly, it is important to follow safer gambling practices that help to reduce the risk of dependency.

### Set a budget

Before you spend any money, decide exactly how much you are willing to spend. This limit must be sensible, and should not involve using every euro you have, borrowing money or going into debt. Even if you have gambled for a long time and have never set a budget before, you can start doing this now. Once you have spent the money you allocated, be sure to stop gambling.

### Create a time limit

Time can fly by when you are having fun, so before you start gambling, set an alarm for when you are going to stop. The longer you play for, the higher your chance of losing.

### Request self-exclusion

Online casinos and betting shops should have a feature that allows you to request self-exclusion. You may choose to request this at any time, but should certainly consider it if you feel that your gambling is becoming out of control. You can select how long you want to be prevented from gambling, and then the company will not let you gamble until the time limit is up. This is a great feature for taking matters out of your own hands, and making the mature decision to take a break.

### Don't drink or take drugs

Combining alcohol, drugs and gambling can be a lethal combination for your finances, so only ever gamble when you have a clear mind. When under the influence of drugs or alcohol, you are likely to make riskier decisions, and could end up losing a lot more than if you had been sober.



## Don't gamble when you are upset

If you are feeling upset, angry, irritable, anxious or annoyed, you may not be able to make sensible decisions. Wait until you are feeling better before you gamble.



## The house always wins

It is important to remember that the casino or betting shop will always win. Although you might hear stories of those who hit the jackpot, casinos stack their odds against you, so most people will lose. Although gambling might be fun, remember you have a higher chance of losing your money than winning any.

# HOW CAN I MANAGE AN ADDICTION TO GAMBLING?

If you already think you are addicted to gambling, do not panic. There are ways to stop gambling, and services in place to support people who want to stop. Some of the steps can be taken on your own, and others may require the support of friends or family, or for you to seek professional help.

## Abstain

The only way to get over an addiction is to completely stop the activity. Those who have had an addiction to gambling will not ever be able to gamble for fun again, as the risk of becoming dependent once more will be too high. You may need to readjust your mindset to accept that gambling is no longer for you, and can only be part of your past.

## Request self-exclusion

Wherever you are gambling, including online or in person, request self-exclusion. Requesting this in as many places as possible will help you to avoid betting any more money.



## Remember that you will not win

The odds are stacked against gamblers to ensure the casino always wins overall. If you feel tempted to gamble, remind yourself that no matter how skilled you might be, if you bet, then you will lose your money.

## Take up a new hobby

Gambling may have formed a large part of your life. You will therefore need to find something to fill the emptiness that may seem to appear when you stop. This could mean joining a sports team, getting into new TV shows, or spending time with your friends.



## Seek professional support

Like any addiction, a dependency on gambling can be difficult to overcome. Seek help from your teachers, a school counsellor, your doctor or an addiction specialist to begin breaking the patterns and cycles of gambling. You may also find it helpful to seek financial advice if gambling has caused you to go into debt. A list of resources is available at the end of this article.

## Find a support group

Online and in person support groups are available for those who have, or have had, an addiction to gambling. Talking to others who understand how you are feeling can help you feel supported and better able to leave gambling behind.



# I HAVE A FRIEND WHO MIGHT HAVE A GAMBLING ADDICTION. WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP THEM?

It can be upsetting and confusing if a friend seems to have an addiction to gambling, especially if you have never felt the desire to gamble yourself. Remember, it is not your fault that they have become dependent on gambling, and it is not your job to manage the addiction, either. Only your friend can truly control their gambling, but you may be able to support them as they attempt to stop. To start a conversation about their gambling habits, you could:



- Say that you feel worried that they are spending a lot of time or money gambling
- Let them know that you want to help them
- Ask if your friend has also felt worried about how much they gamble
- See if your friend will open up about the money they have spent, or whether they are in debt or owe other people money
- Find out if they would like to cut down on, or stop, gambling
- Suggest that your friend speaks to their parents, a teacher, counsellor, or a healthcare professional
- Offer ideas of other things you could do together that do not involve gambling, such as playing sport, meeting other friends, or going to the cinema.

If your friend denies that there is a problem, rejects your offers of help, or becomes angry with you, try not to take it personally. You can only support them if they will let you. If you remain worried you must seek help from an adult including their parents, your parents, a teacher, or another responsible adult.

It is important to note that you must never offer to lend the gambler money or pay off their debts for them.

# I THINK MY CHILD MIGHT HAVE A GAMBLING ADDICTION, WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

If you think your child might be gambling, or may have an addiction to gambling, you may have noticed:

- An unusual or new interest in sport scores, racing, or casino games
- Withdrawing from friends or family
- Changes in their personality or behaviour
- Spending a lot of time on their phone, particularly if you notice they are using online betting sites
- Truancy from school or a fall in academic achievement
- Borrowing money from you



- Money missing from your purse, or money being stolen from elsewhere
- Selling their possessions
- Other possessions missing from the house
- Having more money than usual, or less
- Having new possessions with no believable explanation
- Suddenly becoming worried about money.

# WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD HAS A GAMBLING ADDICTION?

If you think your child might be gambling, it is wise to have a gentle but frank conversation with them about the facts behind gambling. In particular, explain that the odds are always stacked against the player, it is very unusual to win, and most people will lose far more money than they win. If your child is determined to continue betting, help them to understand the safety precautions they can put in place to prevent gambling becoming addictive, such as setting time limits and having a clear budget.

If your child already appears to have a gambling addiction, you may need to request professional support for them. Depending on the severity of addiction, this could include seeking counselling or specialist addiction support. You may also find it helpful to talk to your child's teachers, the school counsellor, or any youth workers or sports' coaches who work with your child. Mental health and addiction charities may also be able to offer valuable advice. Your child will need to abstain from gambling to recover from the addiction.







To support your child, you will also need to abstain from gambling so that, where possible, they are not exposed to it. You may need to consider protecting certain items in the house if your child has run into financial difficulties. Keep important documents such as passports, house deeds and bank details safe, and put any valuables, including jewellery, in a safe place. Maintain a record of your finances, and those of your child, to check for any discrepancies or unexpected payments. Avoid sharing PIN numbers with your child, and do not lend your bank cards to anyone else. In serious cases, you may need to seek financial advice on protecting your family's home or other assets.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Gambling can be a fun activity for adults, but it is illegal for under 18s and can lead to gambling addiction. This form of addiction can cause poor mental health and serious financial difficulty. If you think you, or someone else, might be struggling with gambling addiction, you must seek help from a parent, teacher, counsellor or addiction specialist.

The following services may be helpful:

YSPI Crisis Information:

[ineedhelp.ie](https://www.ineedhelp.ie)

Gamblers Anonymous Ireland:

[gamblersanonymous.ie](https://www.gamblersanonymous.ie)

Gambling Care Ireland:

[gamblingcare.ie](https://www.gamblingcare.ie)



## HELP AND ASSISTANCE

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family you should contact your GP or Out of Hours Service immediately.

You can also get immediate support and information 24/7 by

 **FREETEXT HELP TO 50015**

Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential and YSPI has no information on mobile numbers that use the FreeText service



For information on:

- Emergency Contacts
- National Helplines
- Local Support Groups
- Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic
- Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge

 **WWW.INNEEDHELP.IE**

**Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.**

**Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112**

# ABOUT YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION IRELAND

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland was founded in 2007 as there were no national charities focusing specifically on the problems and issues of youth suicide and self-harm in Ireland. We now provide a range of services aimed at mental health awareness and suicide prevention amongst teenagers.



Our main programme is **“Let’s Talk About Mental Health”** ([www.letstalk.ie](http://www.letstalk.ie)). This is a programme for students, teachers, parents and those who work with young people in schools, colleges, GAA clubs and youth organisations around Ireland.

Let’s Talk About Mental Health is a comprehensive mental health awareness and suicide prevention programme for ages 16+. As part of the programme we also provide a video workshop presented by John Sharpson that any organisation can book through our website at [www.letstalk.ie/video.php](http://www.letstalk.ie/video.php).

We provide a wide range of free information including our “Let’s Talk About Mental Health” magazine delivered to schools and organisations as well as the “Coping With” series of mental health guides.

We also operate a 24/7 FreeText Crisis Information Service and fund a Youth Crisis Counselling Service at [www.youthcrisiscounselling.ie](http://www.youthcrisiscounselling.ie).

Full details are available at [www.yspi.ie](http://www.yspi.ie)



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## UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

1. Understanding Alcohol Addiction
2. Understanding Drug Addiction
3. Understanding Gaming Addiction
4. Understanding Gambling Addiction
5. Understanding Pornography Addiction
6. Understanding Sex Addiction
7. Understanding Consent

## Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

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