



SENIOR FOCUS

Concerning Seniors with Gambling Problems

VOLUME 8

888-ADMIT-IT

About the
Florida Council on
Compulsive Gambling
(FCCG)

Hundreds of thousands of Floridians struggle with serious to severe difficulties due to gambling. Helping problem gamblers, their loved ones, and others is our organization's mission. As a not-for-profit educational and advocacy organization under contract with Florida state government, the FCCG is here to help.

For information, call:
888-ADMIT-IT
(888-236-4848)



Gambling Problem?
We're here to help.

24-hour Confidential &
Multilingual HelpLine

888-ADMIT-IT

www.gamblinghelp.org

It's Never Too Late to Start Over

It's hard to believe that at age 78, I am starting my life over. My wife's gambling addiction forced us into foreclosure on our home, severed the relationship with our son, and nearly ended our marriage. In less than two years, Gloria depleted our entire life savings and brought me to the brink of losing my mind.

I recall the late nights, Gloria's absence, and her constant need for money, but it never occurred to me that she was gambling. Upon receiving credit card and bank statements with large sums of money owed or withdrawn, I remember the shock, as well as the grave moment I approached her in disbelief. It was then I learned that she had begged, borrowed, and stolen from family members and despite her repeated promises to repay, it wasn't realistic or possible. Worst of all, because her gambling resulted in neglected important family events and taking financial advantage of our son's generosity, we lost the relationship with our son and his family. Though Gloria's gambling lasted for only 18 months, she destroyed everything we built together over 53 years of marriage.

I'm grateful I saw an ad for the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling's 24-hour gambling hotline and called 888-ADMIT-IT. The person who



answered assisted us in securing a support system. We became active members in the self-help groups of Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon, went to a therapist, and worked with a financial counselor.

Even though there are few men in Gam-Anon, I forced myself to keep attending meetings, and the truth is that it saved my life and my marriage. These services helped us to develop a plan, to survive the loss of our home and our son, and to get back on our feet. However, Gloria and I needed to return to work because we had no alternative. Surprisingly, the change in work venue really proved helpful. Gloria was able to better structure her free time and it assisted us in moving our recovery plan forward.

"Even though there are few men in Gam-Anon, I forced myself to keep attending meetings, and the truth is that it saved my life and my marriage."

Today, Gloria is remaining abstinent from gambling, is working hard to make amends with our son, and is doing her best to regain my trust, to be a loving wife, and a lifelong partner. A year ago life seemed unbearable and making changes appeared impossible. Since then, we have come to learn that it's never too late to start over.

Determining Whether Gambling is a Problem

Many times when a family member is experiencing the effects of a gambling problem, it is most frequently caused by a spouse or partner, or an adult child. Regardless of one's relationship to the gambler, the emotional, financial and related effects are the same. Knowing what signs to look for can help determine whether gambling is presenting a problem in your life.

Are you or someone you know experiencing the following due to gambling:

- Facing financial problems?
- Being lied to by someone you care about?
- Becoming emotionally distant?
- Showing symptoms of physical illness?
- Having depressed thoughts or feelings?
- Suffering from legal difficulties?
- Thinking about ending your marriage or relationship?
- Feeling hopeless and don't know what to do?

If you answered "Yes" to one or more questions, gambling may be a problem. For confidential assistance and free self-help and professional treatment, legal, and financial counseling supports, call the FCCG 24-Hour HelpLine at 888-ADMIT-IT. We can connect you with family members within the recovery community so you can share experiences and gain insights about programs and services that may prove most helpful given your circumstances.

Compulsive Gambling Impacts Older Adult Families

Compulsive gambling, like other addictions, can result in unfathomable impacts for family members and other loved ones. However, unlike other addicts, compulsive gamblers do not reveal any outward visible signs of a problem, like staggering while walking or bloodshot eyes. By the time a gambler reaches the end stages of their addiction, the negative impacts that ultimately surface are often devastating and particularly challenging for older adult family members.

In addition to severe financial difficulties, elder family members often experience physical (e.g., stomach, head or heart ailments) and/or emotional (e.g., feelings of depression, anxiety or panic attacks) health problems, as well as unexpected legal troubles, all of which can have short and long-term impacts. The good news is there is real hope for families and free services to help older adults recover from a gambling problem. For information and assistance, contact the FCCG by phone or online. (See next page for program details.)

Assuring a Balance can Keep Gambling Recreational

Often seniors start gambling following the onset of retirement, the loss of a spouse, partner or dear friend, upon relocation of family members or loved ones, or another life altering change. What typically begins as a recreational and social activity, and a means of filling one's time, can over a short period become an uncontrollable compulsion.

Unlike their younger counterparts, older adults bring unique characteristics to gambling recovery because of the skills gained through experience. At the same time, a change in life status or plans can present significant obstacles. Given this reality, it is essential for family members to observe how loved ones are spending time to assure that gambling is not presenting an imbalance in their lives. It is equally important to be attentive to how free time and vacations are spent to examine whether gambling is consistently appearing as a main focal point. Specifically, while gambling is not a problem for most seniors who participate, for many others it becomes an addiction. Assuring balance is the key to keeping gambling recreational.

The FCCG offers the following tips to keeping gambling recreational:

- Use a "buddy system".
- Know and adhere to money and time limits.
- Avoid using credit to gamble.
- Refrain from using ATMs at gambling facilities.
- Treat all wins as bonuses and don't chase lost money.
- Do not use gambling to solve problems.
- Take frequent breaks (e.g., to eat, take a walk, rest, etc.)
- Balance gambling with other interests.
- Don't substitute gambling for other activities.
- Know the HelpLine number: 888-ADMIT-IT.

How Families Enable Problem Gamblers?

Family members frequently do not realize how they may be contributing to the continuation of the gambling by loved ones. Understanding the different ways in which family members enable gamblers can help spouses, children, grandchildren and others in modifying their behaviors so real change can occur.

Some of the common things that families do to enable gamblers include:

- Accompanying spouses or partners to gambling facilities so they're not there alone.
- Providing money to adult children to gamble or to pay off gambling debts.
- Making excuses to explain absences or an inability to participate in different activities.
- Encouraging siblings to go gambling because otherwise they seem depressed or bored.
- Agreeing to family vacations at gambling destinations.
- Rationalizing that a gambling parent or grandparent can use their money how they see fit.
- Saying or doing nothing to confront the problems caused by the gambling.
- Hiding the gambling problem from other family members or close friends.
- Giving up trying to change the situation.
- Failing to address the unhappiness in their lives.

While there are many reasons why family members enable compulsive gamblers, the primary one is their desire to avoid conflict at all cost. Another pattern with enabling is thinking that if family members help the gambling addict he will see just how much he's loved and will want to change to make the family happy. However, the reality is that gamblers do not change to make others happy. Real change only happens when gamblers are ready to change themselves. Understanding this distinction is an important first step.

Finally, remembering that loving and caring for the gambler is important but allowing him to completely control the lives of family members through a series of irrational behaviors is not natural or healthy.

Free Services and Supports Can Make All the Difference

Knowing where to go and what options are available to assist family members in learning how to cope with compulsive gamblers and associated problems are important steps to getting the help needed. The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling offers a series of free programs and services to help families recover from the devastating effects of compulsive gambling, whether or not the gambler seeks help.



24-Hour HelpLine (888-ADMIT-IT)

This around the clock, confidential and multilingual service provides support, information and resource referrals to self-help, professional treatment, peer-to-peer connections, financial, legal and other assistance, pending individual caller needs.

A Chance for Change Recovery Program

The FCCG's *A Chance for Change Program* is three 7-part series of recovery workbooks for loved ones, gamblers and elder gamblers. The comprehensive program, available in English and Spanish, assists families in addressing all aspects of the addiction and its impacts.

Peer-to-Peer, PATS & Soft Transfer Programs

HelpLine callers can speak to a recovering family member, as well as a compulsive gambler, as part of the FCCG's Peer-to-Peer Connection Program. Callers in need of professional treatment but who lack insurance or an ability to pay can participate in the PATS Program, which allows family members and others to attend a session with a professional therapist for free. The FCCG's Soft Transfer Program will schedule the appointment while callers are on the phone.

Self-help Supports

Self-help is a crucial element of the healing process. The FCCG supplies information about the self-help groups of Gam-Anon (support group for persons adversely affected by the gambler), for Gamblers Anonymous (recovery fellowship for gamblers) and to Celebrate Recovery, which is a worldwide Christ-centered recovery ministry that works the 12 steps of recovery. All of these programs are totally free.

**For online supports and
the Live Chat program, visit:
www.gamblinghelp.org**



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WHEN GAMBLING BECOMES A PROBLEM

888-ADMIT-IT

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Warning signs of problem gambling among older adults

- Gambling when Social Security and pension deposits are paid
- Distancing from loved ones and old friends
- Failing to show up at family events
- Insisting upon vacations at gambling locations
- Disregarding financial responsibilities, even those they can afford
- Becoming secretive about trips to gamble
- Disappearing assets or money
- Spending less time at home
- Experiencing depression, stress, or changes in mood
- Refusing to tend to basic personal or health care needs
- Abusing alcohol or other substances



If you or someone you know has a problem due to gambling, call 888-ADMIT-IT or visit us online at www.gamblinghelp.org.