

# WEB LETTER



FLORIDA COUNCIL ON  
**COMPULSIVE  
GAMBLING**

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## BREAKING THE SILENCE ON GAMBLING ADDICTION AND CHILD ABUSE

There is consistent evidence of an association between gambling problems and family violence. The effects of a gambling problem present significant consequences for the gambler and loved ones, including spouses/partners, children, and others. Difficulties can be especially challenging for young and adolescent children.

**Gambling addiction** is referred to as the hidden disorder because it is not easy to detect. Often, children growing up in a household with a problem gambling parent live in a constant state of instability. The issues of neglect and child abuse have mind and life-altering impacts on children and families. Exacerbating matters is a child's inability to share their experiences or feelings with others because at times they simply cannot make sense of the situation or communicate their thoughts. They may also fear retaliation and/or be reluctant due to feelings of shame.

Florida Statute 827.03(2)(c) defines **child abuse** as an "intentional act that causes or could reasonably be expected to cause physical or mental injury to a child" [1]. Similarly, "child neglect occurs when a caregiver fails to provide a child with the care, supervision, and services necessary to maintain the child's physical and mental health, including, but not limited to, food, nutrition, clothing, shelter, supervision, medicine, and medical services that a prudent person would consider essential for the well-being of the child; or the caregiver fails to make a reasonable effort to protect the child from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by another person" [2]

**National Child Abuse Prevention Month** is recognized in April each year but is a topic in need of attention all year round. So many children fall subject to neglect and abuse given exposures to the gambling addict's [3]:

- Emotional unavailability
- Mood swings
- Disinterest in child or family life
- Neglect (i.e., leaving a child unattended at home, in a car at the casino, or elsewhere to gamble)
- Failure to meet parental responsibilities or to supply living essentials
- Inability to provide environmental or personal safety
- Disrespect for the law
- Relationship difficulties causing family separations and divorce
- Financial complications resulting in lost homes, relocations, and homelessness
- Lies and deception
- Lack of love

Many children tend to overcompensate when living in the household with a gambling addict. Some may be required to work to help make ends meet, others may be overly responsible or extremely irresponsible, become loners or refuse to be alone, struggle with sleeping and eating disorders, become overcautious or take unnecessary risks [4]. They are also much more likely to develop gambling problems.

Children need to feel safe. We all do! Some steps you can take to help a child is to:

- "Validate the child's feelings. Provide a structured environment as much as possible. Admit lies and secrets. Teach them to check out the real facts. Go over their values. Talk about the unwritten rules of the family (i.e., don't talk outside the family) [5]."
- Get professional help. If you or someone you know needs help to stop child or adult neglect or abuse, call the Florida Abuse Helpline at 1-800-962-2873 or report it online at Abuse Hotline - Florida Department of Children and Families ([myflfamilies.com](http://myflfamilies.com)).

**IF GAMBLING IS SUBJECTING YOU, YOUR CHILDREN, OR ANYONE ELSE TO ABUSE OR OTHER SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES, HEALING ONE DAY AT A TIME IS POSSIBLE. CALL 888-ADMIT-IT (888-236-4848), TEXT (321-978-0555), EMAIL ([FCCG@GAMBLINGHELP.ORG](mailto:FCCG@GAMBLINGHELP.ORG)), LIVE CHAT ([GAMBLINGHELP.ORG](http://GAMBLINGHELP.ORG)), TAP INTO THE 888-ADMIT-IT APP ([HTTPS://LANDING.APPYPIE.COM/888-ADMIT-IT](https://LANDING.APPYPIE.COM/888-ADMIT-IT)), OR REACH OUT ON SOCIAL MEDIA, SUCH AS FACEBOOK AND TWITTER.**

## REFERENCES:

- 1. Florida Legislature (1983). Chapter 287, Abuse of Children, Abuse, aggravated abuse, and neglect of a child. Retrieved Statutes & Constitution :View Statutes : Online Sunshine (state.fl.us).**
- 2. National Council on Problem Gambling. The Effects of a Parent's Gambling on Children. Retrieved EFFECTSOFPARENTSGAMBLINGONCHILDREN.pdf (ncpgambling.org); Berman, L. & Siegal, ME (1992). Behind the 8-Ball. Fireside Parkside Recovery Book, Simon and Schuster.**
- 3. Ibid.**
- 4. Ibid.**
- 5. Ibid.**