

Web Letter



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Angels in Disguise: Celebrating National Family Caregivers Month

The term “caregiver” most often describes a special kind of person who helps an older adult with daily living activities for varying periods of time. Anyone who has ever experienced the true blessings of a caregiver understands that these individuals are really angels in disguise. It’s not just the diverse tasks performed or the challenging situations that may present each day, but the manner in which caregivers fulfill their duties. They provide comfort, compassion, emotional and physical supports, and furnish protection through observation and assistance, oftentimes during difficult periods of a person’s life. Even an entire calendar year would not be enough time to recognize the tireless work of family caregivers. However, the FCCG proudly sets out to do as much as possible to celebrate these individuals and their dedication during **National Family Caregivers Month**.

On any given day, family caregivers assure that loved ones in their care, who may have varying health and/or cognitive abilities, are cared for when they can no longer aid themselves. Caregiving can include help with showering, preparing nourishing foods, assuring medications are taken on time, providing transportation to appointments, shopping for groceries, and also facilitating participation in meaningful, safe, and enjoyable recreational options when able.

Oftentimes a caregiver spends more time with the person in their care than other family members or loved ones do. This provides the caregiver with the opportunity to detect changes in their loved ones mood or behavior, or recognize signs of financial problems or declining physical or mental health. Essentially, caregivers are in a unique position to identify when a loved one in their care may be developing a gambling problem, and to create an opportunity for intervention.

Caregiving can become overwhelming, so it is important for those doing so much for others, to also take the time necessary to do something for themselves. **It is crucial for loved ones and other family members to pay attention not only to the needs of those receiving care, but to the ones providing it as they may also be struggling.** Without the proper support, caregivers may experience mental health issues, increasing their risk of developing addictive behaviors, such as problem gambling.



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What Do Family Caregivers Need to Know?

Family members and caregivers also 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 them 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 that they're not there alone
- Providing money to adult children to gamble or to pay off gambling debts
- Making excuses in an effort 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 help the gambler 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 s/he will see just how much s/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 for family members. Finally, remembering that loving and caring for the gambler is important but allowing him/her to completely control the lives of family members through a series of irrational behaviors is not natural or healthy.

The Risk of Problem Gambling for Caregivers

Caregiving is often a 24/7 responsibility, which can lead to feelings of confinement, anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. Looking for an outlet or way to escape, a caregiver may turn to gambling. People with underlying mental health factors have an increased risk of developing a gambling problem. A caregiver, for instance, who is depressed and turning to gambling as a way to escape from anxiety or other stressors, may end up gambling for longer periods of time than anticipated, or start spending more money gambling than was planned. This at-risk caregiver may ultimately wind up developing a gambling problem if the behavior continues.

Alternatively, a caregiver may introduce gambling as a form of entertainment for the person they are taking care of — an innocent activity to occupy them. **While gambling can be a fun pastime when done recreationally and responsibly, there is always a possibility for problems to arise.**



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For those who find themselves involved in the life of a loved one as a primary caregiver, or for those who find themselves with a loved one who has a primary caregiver involved in their life, knowing the warning signs for problem gambling is essential.

Warning Signs of a Gambling Problem:

- Loss of interest/participation in normal activities with family & friends
- Increase in gambling and gambling related activities
- Changes in attitude and personality
- Sudden need for money or loans
- Unaccounted for blocks of time
- Secrecy and avoidance when questioned about time and money
- Missing possessions or assets
- Neglect of personal needs (food, utilities, medical)
- Decline in health
- Withdrawal and depression

Fortunately, help and hope is available for those struggling with problem gambling. If gambling is causing difficulties for you or someone you know, the FCCG's confidential, multilingual, 24/7 **888-ADMIT-IT** Problem Gambling HelpLine is ***Your One Sure Thing.***

Contact FCCG's confidential and multilingual 24/7 Problem

Gambling HelpLine:

Phone: **888-ADMIT-IT**

Text: **321-978-0555**

Email: fccg@gamblinghelp.org

Live Chat: [gamblinghelp.org](https://www.gamblinghelp.org)

Tap into the **888-ADMIT-IT App** or reach out on social media, such as **Facebook and Twitter.**

