



## Easy Come, Easy Go?

We all take risks and gambling is a particular style of risk-taking that's exciting and entertaining. Gambling activities are very accessible and the temptation to try our luck or re-experience an early win can be irresistible. Each time you win you may find that you spend your winnings on more gambling, and if you lose you may desperately continue, hoping that a 'big win' is just around the corner... The more you do this, the more absorbed you become in the activity. This is why gambling is so habit-forming.

Most people who gamble keep control of what they are doing and remain 'social gamblers'. However, a significant number of men, women and young people lose that control and, for them, gambling becomes a problem. If gambling has taken over your life and dominates your thoughts, if you cannot stop until you have run out of money, or if you have lost relationships, friends, possessions or jobs as a result of your gambling, then read on, this leaflet may help!

## Do You Have a Gambling Problem?

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do you stay away from work or college to gamble?
2. Do you gamble to escape from a boring and unhappy life?
3. When gambling and you run out of money do you feel lost and in despair, and need to gamble again as soon as possible?
4. Do you gamble until your last penny is gone, even the bus fare home or the cost of a cup of tea?
5. Have you lied, stolen or borrowed just to get money to gamble or to pay gambling debts?
6. Are you reluctant to spend 'gambling money' on anything else?
7. Have you lost interest in your family?
8. After losing, do you feel you must try and win back your losses?
9. Do arguments, frustrations, disappointments make you want to gamble?
10. Do you feel depressed or even suicidal because of you gambling?

The more you answer **'yes'**, the more likely you are to have a serious gambling problem. Speak to someone about this.

## Strategies For Help

### Get Real:

- ▶ Talk to someone you trust (your partner, a friend, probation officer, professional person or the GamCare helpline).

- ▶ Be honest with yourself and others.

- ▶ Stop running away from problems. It never solves anything! Take responsibility for your life, stop blaming others and start addressing the problems, whatever they are: deceit, debt, relationship difficulties, or criminal activities.

### Get Help:

- ▶ Counselling can provide a safe, confidential way for you to talk over your concerns and worries. It offers a forum where you can explore the effects gambling has in your life, and help put it in the context of your life experiences. Additionally, you may find a self-help group understanding and supportive.

### Take Steps:

- ▶ Stop all gambling while you are breaking the dependency. You need to do this in order to break the habit.

- ▶ Record your feelings, e.g. in a diary. If you are not gambling, note how you are feeling and how you have coped. If you have gambled, go through the events that led up to your gambling episode and record your feelings before, during and after.

- ▶ Look for patterns in your behaviour. Do you gamble, or need to gamble when you feel bored, stressed, or under a lot of pressure?

- ▶ Using a calendar, mark each day you do not gamble. This gives you a visual marker of your progress. If you have a bet, use the calendar to see how many days up to then you had managed to stay clear of gambling. Set a target to beat that number.

- ▶ Manage your money. Ask someone you trust to handle your money for an agreed period of time (e.g. 3 months). When the time is up review whether you are ready to take back responsibility for your finances. You will need to start saving to repay any debts you have accumulated.

- ▶ Don't use your debit or credit cash point cards!

- ▶ Reward yourself after a period free from gambling, by spending some of the money you have saved on yourself. Buy something personal that is not related to gambling. If you feel uncomfortable handling the money, take a friend along with you.

### Take Care:

- ▶ Take one day at a time. If you do this, you'll find it easier to break your gambling habit.

- ▶ Be prepared for withdrawal symptoms. You may feel depressed, irritable, shaky, and you may get palpitations.

- ▶ There will be times when you may feel desperate to gamble - don't! Talk to someone about your feelings or find something to distract you until the urges subside.

- ▶ Develop your range of interests, especially those that involve other people. Try to do things with friends and family who are not gamblers.

- ▶ Dependency on gambling must be replaced by a range of activities and interests that will meet similar needs. Try out some sports or activities which have a strong element of competition or taking calculated risks.

### Take Heart:

- ▶ Be positive. The key is to ensure that any changes you make are manageable and realistic. Then with each goal that you achieve, you will grow in confidence and self esteem. You will also find you have the incentive to reach the next goal. If you have been gambling for many years, don't expect your life to improve immediately. It will take a lot of hard work and motivation from you to change.

- ▶ If you have a 'slip' **do not punish yourself** - breaking a dependency is very difficult. Instead, reflect on the day and think about what you have learnt from it. Congratulate yourself for abstaining for so long.

- ▶ Be optimistic - you can overcome a gambling dependency. Some gamblers find it impossible to go back to gambling without losing control, whilst others are able to gamble again at a later stage but in a controlled way.

