



Gambling in the UK

Gambling is an exciting form of entertainment and risk-taking that is popular with the majority of men, women and young people.

Opportunities to gamble are widely available. As well as the more traditional places to gamble, such as betting shops, amusement arcades and casinos, you will find fruit machines in most pubs, and in many cafés, take-aways, cinemas, leisure centres, railway and bus stations. Your local corner shop, newsagent, supermarket or post office is likely to sell lottery tickets and scratchcards. Nearly all forms of gambling are available through new technology, e.g. Internet and WAP phones.

Age and the Law

Slot machines. There are three types:

- (1) Fruit machines with a relatively small cash/token payout; these have no legal minimum age restriction, though many operators follow a voluntary code to partially or totally exclude those under 16 or 18;
- (2) All-cash payout fruit machines; these are age restricted and located in arcades, pubs, betting offices etc;
- (3) Jackpot machines; these have a much bigger payout and are restricted to over 18's by law.

Betting, On or Off Course. It is illegal to allow anyone under 18 to place a bet or to enter inside a betting shop. If this were to happen, the betting shop owner and not the under-age gambler would be prosecuted.

Casinos & Bingo. It is illegal to gamble at a casino or play bingo at a licensed bingo club under the age of 18. In order to do so, you must be a club member.

Pools, the Lottery & Scratchcards. It is illegal to take part in these activities until you are 16 years old. Operators who allow under-age gambling are at risk of losing their franchise.

Problem Gambling

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 become 'problem gamblers'. Since there are no physical symptoms, they are not always easy to spot. Problem gamblers may not realise that they have a problem or want other people to know they gamble too much.

Some Signs to Look for...

- ▶ Gambler cannot keep away from the activity.
- ▶ Gambling seen as legitimate means of 'making money'.
- ▶ Often borrows money but doesn't pay it back.
- ▶ Has money difficulties and debts.
- ▶ No apparent interests or leisure pursuits.
- ▶ Blind optimism – looks only at the here and now.
- ▶ Creates rows at home as excuse to go out.
- ▶ Has mood swings, irritability, restlessness.
- ▶ Lacks interest in family and friends.

Why is it so addictive?

It is not clearly understood why some people get addicted but three possible reasons that lead to problem gambling are:

Action: the thrill or 'buzz' becomes addictive and the gambler needs or wants to experience it again and again;

Escape: becoming involved in the fantasy world of gambling provides an escape from the problems and pressures of everyday life;

Beating the System: the gambler becomes absorbed in the technicalities of the gambling activity and keeps trying to beat it.

Consequences

Gambling ceases to be a social activity when the gambler begins to gamble alone for long periods, and/or chases losses. Relationships with family and friends begin to break down and the gambler often becomes isolated.

Even when not gambling, the gambler spends much, if not most of his or her own time thinking about it or acquiring money to gamble. It can become a 24 hour-a-day obsession.

The problem gambler uses up his or her resources first and then starts to borrow to pay the money back. Many resort to stealing from home and some steal or commit criminal acts outside the home.

The problem gambler creates plausible and complex stories. They become expert liars to explain away the lack of money, the need to get more, and to account for the time spent gambling.

They may truant from school, miss college, stay away from work, and/or neglect family. Over time this will add to the spiral of destructive behaviour and to the depression that many problem gamblers experience.

What can you do?

- ▶ Remember you are not the only family facing this problem.
- ▶ You may be able to help by talking the problem through, but it is probably better if you involve a skilled person outside the family.
- ▶ Keep in mind that it is a serious matter and gamblers cannot 'just give up'.
- ▶ Take a firm stand. Whilst it might feel easier to give in to demands and to believe everything he or she says, this only allows them to avoid facing the problem.
- ▶ Remember that gamblers like to gamble and get something from the activity quite apart from money.
- ▶ Don't forget that gamblers are good at lying to themselves as well as to you.
- ▶ Let them know that you believe it is a problem even though they may not admit it.
- ▶ Encourage them all the time. They have to be motivated to change. This may not happen until they are faced with an acute crisis.
- ▶ Leave the responsibility for the gambling and its consequences with them. Help them admit to it and to work at overcoming the dependency.
- ▶ Do not condemn them, as this is unhelpful and may drive them back to gambling. However, setting firm and fair boundaries to their behaviour is constructive.
- ▶ Despite what they have done let them know that you still love them. Do this even if you have to make a 'tough love' decision, such as asking them to leave home.
- ▶ Do not trust them with money until the dependency is broken. If they agree, it is helpful to manage their money for a short period.

