

# Changing your relationship with gambling



# Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is for anyone who has recognised that gambling may be an issue for them - that gambling is getting in the way of the life they would like to lead.

If you have arrived at this realisation and made the decision that you would like to change your relationship with gambling, this workbook will help you better understand what might be causing your preoccupation with gambling.

Once you understand this, you will be able to work on approaching situations which usually lead to gambling in a different, more positive way. Whilst this workbook will focus on goals around your gambling, the same principles can be applied in other areas of your life too.

Understanding your motivation for changing your gambling behaviour is important. Unless you are clear that you want to change, you will likely have limited success.

Problem gambling can have many impacts for an individual, their family and their friends.

If at any time you would like additional support from the GamCare team, you can contact us over the phone or online:

**National Gambling HelpLine**

Freephone **0808 8020 133**

Web chat via **gamcare.org.uk**

## In the past 12 months, have you:

- Bet more than you could really afford to lose?
- Been criticised for your betting or told that you have a gambling problem?
- Felt guilt about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

# Setting Healthy Boundaries

We all have boundaries because we all have limitations. Your boundaries usually develop when you are a child, and they are personal to you.

Your boundaries could be physical, defining what you see as an appropriate distance between you and other people, or they could be mental, emotional and/or spiritual boundaries which define how you feel other people should behave around you, and how you will respond.

It is important to recognise our boundaries and find ways of communicating them effectively, and also to be aware of other people's boundaries. Feeling that a boundary has been violated is a common cause for conflict and stress, which can trigger the desire to gamble.

Remember, each person's boundaries will be different dependent on their values, goals, perceptions and experiences.

**Setting a boundary is different from trying to manipulate or control others. When you set a boundary, you are prepared to let go of the outcome.**

**When communicating about your boundaries, it's important to be assertive rather than aggressive - your needs, wants and rights are equal to the other person's.**

**Stand up for your personal rights and express your thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways without violating others' rights.**

Are there any boundaries that need to change to help you stay gambling-free or keep your gambling under control?

Remember that the link between a boundary and gambling can be indirect - for example, if you have trouble saying 'no' when someone asks something of you, this can lead to poor time management, which triggers gambling as relief from stress.

Some questions to think about:

1. What do your boundaries in key relationships and areas look like?
2. How do you know when someone has breached your boundary?

3. (How) do others know that they have breached your boundary (Your outward response may be very different from your inward response!). What are the advantages and disadvantages of your approach?
4. What or who may stop you from setting boundaries? Why is it harder to set boundaries with these people or in these situations?
5. What did you learn about boundaries when growing up?
6. What is your attitude towards boundaries? How do you respond when someone sets a boundary for you?
7. Is there a link between your attitude towards boundaries and your gambling?

**You usually know when someone has crossed your boundary - you may feel angry, anxious, resentful, worn out, smothered, disregarded, disrespected, or hurt.**

Ask yourself:

1. What is likely to happen if you do not set a boundary?
2. Are you prepared to live with the consequences? If yes, is there anything you can do differently to minimise the harm this causes? If no, what steps do you need to take to protect yourself?

**When communicating about your feelings, remember that these are your responsibility. If you blame the other person for your feelings ("You make me feel..."), the other person is likely to get defensive, and they will be less likely to listen to what you have to say.**

Use the map below to consider your own boundaries, so you can begin to think differently about how you communicate then to others.

<p><b>Physical</b> (e.g. your personal comfort zone; what you consider safe and appropriate sexual behaviour):</p>	<p><b>Financial</b> (how you are handling finances and your attitude towards savings and debts):</p>
<p><b>Emotional/mental</b> (what you will share with someone; what you are happy for others to express to you; things you will not think about):</p>	<p><b>Spiritual</b> (what you will and won't do based on your beliefs):</p>

# Assertiveness: Practical Communication Tips

## **Avoid making assumptions:**

- » If in any doubt, check out whether you have understood correctly.
- » Do not assume people will notice/know what you need, ask for what you want.
- » Try to think of other ways of seeing this situation.
- » When giving feedback, focus on behaviour and avoid making assumptions about motives. Your emotions and (negative) thoughts may influence your perceptions.

## **Body language:**

- » Make direct eye contact
- » Your words, tone of voice and body language need to match.

## **Clear communication:**

- » Use short, simple and positive statements.
- » Be clear, direct, honest and firm. If required, stick to your statement or request by using calm repetition over and over again.

- » Deal with one thing at a time.
- » Use 'I' statements to communicate how you feel and what you think.
- » Break down difficult tasks into smaller parts.
- » You do not have to justify your response.
- » You can directly request to the person to stop asking. If all else fails, leave.

## **Timing:**

- » Don't let things build up.
- » Take sufficient time before making decisions.
- » Deal with the present issue and do not bring up the past.
- » Take time out when you have strong thoughts, feelings or impulses or are running on empty.

# Coping with Stress

A certain amount of pressure is helpful, as it keeps us motivated and focussed. However, for many people stress has become an issue.

For many compulsive gamblers, stress is a key trigger. Whilst we cannot avoid stress completely, we can learn to deal with stress more effectively and make choices that lessen the impact we experience.

- » Stress is your individual response to a situation where you feel an inappropriate amount of pressure.
- » Stress is a bodily response that occurs automatically - the key to managing stress is to recognise the symptoms of rising stress levels (physical sensations, feelings, ideas) before they escalate.
- » We often do not notice that we are experiencing stress, until it has reached alarming levels.
- » Stress makes relapse into previous behaviour like compulsive gambling more likely.

Relapse can be prevented by either **reducing** the sources of stress or **increasing** our capacity to cope.

**Your body will respond in the same way, whether the pressure you are feeling is an objective reality or whether you put yourself under pressure by the way you view a situation.**

## **What causes stress?**

- » Major life events (both positive or negative);
- » Daily hassles and uplifts (day-to-day events which can be pleasant or upsetting);
- » Tension between our 'wants' (activities carried out for pleasure, satisfaction or self-fulfilment, which may or may not be good for us) and 'shoulds' (chores or obligations).

# How Stress Manifests for You

How many of the following do you experience when you are stressed?

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>
Do you notice an increase in your gambling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you notice an increase in drinking / smoking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you eat more or less than usual?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel hyper / elated / restless?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have difficulty concentrating or finishing tasks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it difficult to make decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it hard to sleep?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you start to avoid people / activities / work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel grumpy / irritated / angry?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you speak more loudly or quicker than usual?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you overreact more easily?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you experience back pain / stiff or tense muscles?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you experience indigestion / stomach aches / nausea?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you experience headaches?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you experience skin rashes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you experience chest pain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you worry without reason / get panic attacks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you judge yourself or others more harshly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# Coping with Stress

## **Avoid Unnecessary Stress**

- » Manage your time proactively - limit your 'to-do' list and learn to say 'no' when you can't manage an additional task
- » Avoid/reduce contact with people and situations which stress you
- » Take control of your environment, and avoid hot topics
- » Express your feelings in a respectful, assertive way, and find a compromise if possible

## **Adapt to the stressor, change your expectations and attitude**

- » Reframe your thinking - adjust your perspective and eliminate self-defeating thoughts
- » Adjust your standards (aim for 'good enough' rather than perfect)
- » Refocus your energy where you know you can make progress

## **Accept the things you cannot change**

- » Do not attempt to control the uncontrollable, such as the behaviour of others

- » Look at challenges as opportunities for growth, and mistakes as learning curves
- » Move on - let go of resentment for things you cannot influence

## **Look after yourself**

- » Make time for relaxation and things you enjoy in your daily routine
- » Spend time with people who enhance your life
- » Learn to laugh at yourself
- » Strengthen your health (exercise, diet, reduce caffeine/sugar/alcohol; avoid self-medicating with drugs/ cigarettes/alcohol; aim for quality sleep)
- » HALT - watch out for Hunger, Anger, Loneliness and Tiredness
- » TIPS (Truth: be honest about your feelings; Information: know what you are coping with; Priorities: remember your goals; Support: Who can support you and how?)



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