Compulsive gambling isn’t new, and it affects more people than you’d think.

If you care about someone with a gambling problem, chances are you already know about frustration and pain. You know that when it comes to addiction, promises were made to be broken, and all the arguments in the world won’t help. Pleading gets you nowhere; neither do threats, or even shame.

So what works? Treatment.

If you really want to make a difference, help them find professional support. There are countless people who were once trapped in a helpless cycle of gambling, frustration and pain. But when they finally reached out, things got better.

They’d be the first to tell you: treatment works.

“My family didn’t understand it was a sickness. They didn’t understand I couldn’t stop myself.”

Pam, recovering from compulsive gambling
“Our family suffered for way too long. But we got help.”

The warning signs

- Increased frequency of gambling activity.
- Increased amount of money gambled.
- Spending an excessive amount of time gambling at the expense of work or family time.
- Being preoccupied with gambling or with obtaining money with which to gamble.
- Gambling continues despite negative consequences such as financial problems, absence from work or family problems.
- Using gambling as a means to cope with loneliness, anger, stress or depression.
- Borrowing money to gamble, taking out secret loans, cashing in or borrowing on life insurance policies, maximizing credit cards.
- Bragging about wins, but not talking about losses.
- Frequent mood swings – higher when winning, lower when losing.
- Gambling for longer periods of time than originally planned.
- Secretive behavior such as hiding lottery tickets and betting slips or having bills sent to work or another address.

Does someone you care about have a gambling problem? The following list of 20 questions may help you to determine whether someone you know is struggling with compulsive gambling.

1. Do you find yourself constantly bothered by bill collectors?
2. Is the person in question often away from home for long, unexplained periods of time?
3. Does this person ever lose time from work due to gambling?
4. Do you feel that this person cannot be trusted with money?
5. Does this person faithfully promise that he or she will stop gambling, yet gamble again and again?
6. Does this person ever gamble longer than he or she intended?
7. Does this person quickly return to gambling to try to recover losses or to win more?
8. Does this person ever gamble to get money to solve financial difficulties?
9. Does this person borrow money to gamble with or to pay gambling debts?
10. Has this person’s reputation ever suffered due to gambling?
11. Have you come to the point of hiding money needed for living expenses?
12. Do you search this person’s clothing, go through his or her wallet, or check on his or her activities?
13. Do you hide his or her money?
14. Have you noticed personality changes in him or her?
15. Does this person consistently lie to cover up or deny his or her gambling activities?
16. Does this person use guilt induction as a method of shifting responsibilities for his or her gambling upon you?
17. Do you attempt to anticipate this person’s moods or try to control his or her life?
18. Does this person ever suffer from remorse or depression due to gambling, sometimes to the point of self-destruction?
19. Have you ever threatened to break up the family because of the gambling?
20. Do you feel that your life together is a nightmare?

A family member of a person with a gambling problem will answer “yes” to at least seven of the above questions. If you did, call the Problem Gambling Helpline at (800) 333-HOPE or visit our website at www.getgamblinghelp.com. You can get help for yourself or for your family. Resources are available so everyone can afford treatment.

20 questions used with permission from Gam-Anon International Service Office, Whitestone, N.Y.

Your family is not alone. Help is available.

For help now:
www.getgamblinghelp.com
800-333-HOPE

The Problem Gambling Helpline is a statewide, toll-free, confidential way to receive information and/or referral to services.

“In time, you’ll find you can laugh again. And life becomes incredibly better.”

This information is available in accessible formats for individuals with disabilities by calling 651-431-2225 or by using your preferred relay service. For other information on disability rights and protections, contact the agency’s ADA Coordinator.

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