You can control your gambling
Who’s this booklet for?

This book is for anyone who has ever suspected that they might have a gambling problem. It uses proven techniques that have helped many other people reduce their gambling or quit altogether. It takes twenty minutes to read through and might change your life.
How do I know if I have a gambling problem?

What’s the difference between gambling for fun and problem gambling?

There are no hard and fast rules, but it might be helpful to ask yourself the following questions, to help determine if you’re at risk of developing a gambling problem:

- Do you gamble more than 5% of your weekly income?
- Do you gamble regularly? Say more than once a week?
- Do you plan your sessions ahead, rather than going spur of the moment?
- Do you gamble alone?
- Do you view gambling as a means of earning money?

If you’ve answered yes to any of the above questions, you might be at risk of developing a gambling problem. Another way to look at it is to ask yourself if your life would be better off if you gambled less or not at all. If so, it’s probably a good idea you keep reading.

There’s nothing to be ashamed of

Developing a gambling problem is NO reflection on your level of intelligence, strength, will power, or integrity.

Gambling problems affect people from all walks of life from lawyers to labourers. While some of the people who develop gambling problems suffer from other emotional issues, for many, gambling problems seem to arise out of the blue.

So don’t be ashamed. Be honest with yourself. Owning up to it doesn’t mean that you have to tell everyone that you have a gambling problem, or that you have to totally stop. What’s more, getting a handle on your gambling is easier than you think, if you’re smart about it.
Is self-help right for me?

If you think that you might have a gambling problem, the first step is self-help. While self-help strategies can be effective for many, if they don’t work for you, don’t despair, there are many more free options available!

Stopping or controlling gambling can be very difficult without addressing your underlying reasons for gambling, which is hard to do without professional help. Once you understand what is making you gamble, stopping is actually quite easy for the vast majority of people.

If self-help hasn’t worked for you, or you believe you might need more help down the track, then read the “Getting Help” section at the end of this book.

SIX STEPS TO SELF-HELP

STEP ONE: EXPLORING YOUR MOTIVATION TO CHANGE

The fact is, not everyone is motivated to undergo a major change such as giving up gambling. Take a moment to figure out where you sit on the spectrum, based on James Prochaska and Carl DiClemente’s “Stages of Change” model.

Exploring your motivations

Knowing your reasons for and against change can help you understand your motivations. The more motivated you are, the greater your chance of success.

Remember, there is nothing to be gained by pretending that you want to change your gambling, just to please others. No one else can make the changes for you. If you deny that a problem with gambling exists, or go through the motions of changing just to please others, no real change can occur.
Where do you sit on the spectrum?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No awareness or reluctance to acknowledge the problem</th>
<th>Thinking about changing</th>
<th>Becoming determined to change</th>
<th>Taking active steps to start changing</th>
<th>Maintaining changes once they are made</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Denial leading to a lack of motivation to change)</td>
<td>(Recognising a problem but still not actively motivated to change)</td>
<td>(Getting motivation and strength to actually do something)</td>
<td>(Motivated to commence actively changing)</td>
<td>(Motivated to continue changes made)</td>
</tr>
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So let’s begin now, by using the worksheet on the following two pages, list the reasons why you feel you should do something about your gambling. Rank the reasons in order of importance. Next, list your reasons in favour of continuing to gamble.

**Getting motivated**

Think about your reasons for continuing gambling for a second. Are your reasons for continuing based on a desire to satisfy your own needs over and above anyone else’s? For instance, is your desire to relax or escape, preventing you from making mortgage repayments?

If you’re still not sure if you’re ready to make a change, it might be useful to ask yourself the questions on pages 13 and 14. Take a second to reflect on each question, and write your answers down.
### Reasons for stopping/controlling gambling

*E.g. Struggling to make mortgage repayments, not spending enough time with children or wife, always needing to lie to cover up your gambling.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
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### Reasons for continuing to gamble

*E.g. Enjoyment, emotional escape, winning money.*

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<th>Reason</th>
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Making a start
Understanding your true reasons for overcoming problem gambling is essential for success. But even if you’re not entirely sure about whether you’re ready to change completely, it’s still probably a good idea to make a start. Sometimes people might be unsure when they start the self-help process, but their motivation increases as they go on.

What would my life look like if I stopped/controlled my gambling?
What could I do with all of the extra time and money? What activities might I engage in? How might I feel different? Who could I spend more time with?
What would my life look like if I kept gambling at the current rate for another ten years?

What’s the worst case scenario? How much money will I have spent? What will happen to my relationships?

Setting a goal

1. Pick a goal: Controlled Gambling or Abstinence (quitting altogether)

While it’s true that many people are able to resume gambling at controlled levels, the problem is that it’s impossible to tell whether this solution will work for you. It’s HARD to maintain control. Being exposed to the familiar sights and sounds of gambling and occasional wins, along with external stress means that it’s more likely than not that your gambling will get out of control again.

2. Write down your goal

Once you’ve finalised your self-help goal, take a second to make a note of it.

Circle one:

My Self Help Goal is to stop / control my gambling
My gambling budget is ____ dollars per week and ____ hours per week.

If controlled gambling is your goal, write down your limits.

3. Involve a partner or a friend as a support person

Talk about your gambling levels regularly with a trusted friend. They might also be able to provide you with emotional support.

Remember, having a friend or family member involved can help keep you on track. Even if you feel confident of success, or you feel awkward at first you are definitely going to need them at some stage, so take a deep breath and ask. If that proves too difficult, consider talking to a professional online, or by phone (see page 64).

**STEP TWO: MONITORING YOUR GAMBLING**

**Why monitor?**

Research shows that we are more likely to remember wins than losses. Because of this, it’s all too easy to convince ourselves that we don’t spend too much money gambling. Recording the level of your gambling serves three important purposes:

- It makes you aware of exactly how much you gamble
- It allows you to monitor and notice any changes in your levels of gambling. Noticing reductions can be highly motivating
- Detailed records can reveal patterns in your gambling (e.g. gambling after a stressful day at work is dangerous). This allows you to make plans and strategies to deal with risky situations.

Monitoring requires effort and consistency. Don’t underestimate its importance. Resist the temptation to think that you know your own habits
– the results will often surprise you. Self-monitoring is an important step in regaining control!

5 important things to remember about monitoring

1. Record gambling transactions immediately rather than relying on your memory
2. Print off enough monitoring sheets (provided below) for daily use, or keep notes in your mobile phone, and with the “Stay on Track” app. See the resources section at the end of this book for instructions on how to download the app
3. Review your records at the end of each week
4. It’s not easy to accurately identify and label our thoughts and feelings. This takes time and practice. Be patient and persevere. It’s an invaluable skill you’re learning
5. Coming to terms with your level of gambling debt can be an important wake up call, but it can cause some people to panic and gamble more. Remember: gambling led you into debt, it won’t lead you out of it. For help with debt consolidation, see a free financial counsellor. Contact Gambling Help on 1800 858 858 for more information.

5 Things to Record

Include information about:

1. The time and place you gambled (include a start and stop time)
2. The thoughts and feelings you experienced before gambling. Including:
   • How you were feeling (E.g. upset, sad, angry)
   • What caused you to feel that way (E.g. a mistake at work, an argument with your partner, outstanding bills, etc.)?
   • Your reasons for gambling (e.g. To escape negative feelings, win money, to pay a bill)
   • A rating of tension, 1=low 10=high (or some other relevant emotion such as depression or anxiety)
3. The net win/loss amount for the session. This can be recorded on the “Stay on Track” app
4. The thoughts and feelings you experienced
after gambling, including how you felt, why, and a 10 point rating of tension (or some other relevant emotion)

5. A running tally of your net gambling debt

*See the example opposite*

**Note:** If you don’t want to record this information on paper, you could use the “Stay on Track” app to record how much you bet and when, and use

| Time and Place | Feelings and thoughts before gambling (include 10 point rating of tension) | Net gambling debt | Net win/loss amount for the session | Feelings and thoughts after gambling (include 10 point rating of tension) |
the “notes” function in your smartphone to record the rest of the information including thoughts and feelings before and after gambling, and tracking your debt. How exactly you record things is up to you, just make sure that you record all of the necessary information immediately after each gambling session.

**Weekly review**
After you’ve monitored your gambling for a week, it’s time to review by asking yourself the following questions. Do this weekly, so that you can track your progress.

**Have I stayed on track?**
Calculate your weekly losses and total time spent playing. Did you stick to your limit? Did you manage to reduce your levels of gambling? If so, give yourself a pat on the back and maybe plan a reward (not a gambling reward!). If you’re using the “Stay on Track” app, it will have already done this for you.

**Is gambling really working for me?**
What do you usually feel like after winning? What do you feel like after losing? Which occurs more often, winning or losing? When is your tension rating the highest? Is it after losses?

**Do I have a plan for my debt?**
Calculate your total debt. Is it growing? Do you have a plan to deal with it? If not, consider seeing a financial counsellor.

**Make Memory Cards**
Make memory cards to remind yourself of important things that you might discover following your weekly reviews, and take them out when you think about gambling. It might be good to keep them in your wallet/ smart phone, or some other private place.

E.g. *If I’m stressed after work and want to relax by gambling, I should remind myself about how I felt after last time I gambled. It was the most tense part of my week!*
STEP THREE: MANAGING GAMBLING CUES AND URGES

Knowing what usually triggers problem gambling can be very helpful in anticipating and managing dangerous situations.

The 3 types of gambling cues

For regular gamblers, certain times, places, and emotions become associated with gambling, and become gambling cues. These cues trigger gambling related thoughts and feelings such as the anticipation of winning. The anticipation of winning is both pleasurable and exciting, and can be difficult to resist. There are three main types of gambling cues to be aware of.

Gambling related cues

For many gamblers, exposure to gambling related cues such as walking past a pub or a TAB, or seeing a Sportsbet ad on television, can trigger a gambling urge. Mixing with people who are heavy gamblers and spend a lot of time talking about gambling can be particularly risky. Peer pressure and constantly being reminded of gambling and big wins can gradually undermine your resolve not to gamble.

Situational cues

For regular gamblers, certain times and places become associated with gambling. The excitement in anticipation of gambling becomes associated with these times and places.

Emotional cues

Certain emotions can act as triggers for gambling episodes. Depression, anxiety, stress, anger, boredom, loneliness, low self-esteem and over-confidence are all common cues. These emotions might also be more likely to come up at predictable times, for example loneliness after work, anger after arguments at home, etc.

Gambling offers an emotional escape in two ways. Firstly, the anticipation of winning which many
gamblers experience is pleasurable, and secondly, the act of gambling itself is highly distracting, meaning you can block out unpleasant feelings for a short time.

**Cues acting in combination**

Sometimes different cues can work in combination. For example, a single cue such as having money in your wallet might be harmless, but when it occurs in the presence of other cues such as going out for lunch with friends, or watching someone else gamble, it might lead to a strong urge to gamble.

**Managing gambling cues**

The next step to managing your gambling is to identify the specific cues relevant to your gambling.

**Review your monitoring sheets for gambling cues**

Based on your monitoring sheets, write a list of any gambling-related cues (e.g. walking past a TAB on the way home), situations (times and places) or emotions (e.g. angry after a fight at home) which seem to be linked to your urge to gamble.

- Are there particular times when you are prone to gamble excessively?
- Are there situations, thoughts and feelings which precede excessive gambling?
- Are there combinations of situations, people, environments, thoughts and feelings that set you off?
Spend a good amount of time to work these out. Then organise them in a chain. What starts the whole chain off? What comes next, and after that, and after that? Continue the chain analysis until you reach the point where gambling starts. You can use the sheet opposite.

**Brainstorm strategies**

Having come up with a list of your main gambling cues, sit down and brainstorm strategies that you can use to avoid contact with these situations. Do this with a friend or partner so that you come up with better strategies and write them down on the opposite page.

**Some ideas to get you started**

- List and arrange alternate activities with your friends/family during high risk times. Carry this list of activities with you so that you’ll have alternative responses at hand
- Plan a route home which avoids your favourite gambling venues, possibly finding a travel-buddy to help you stay out

![Write down your gambling cues and strategies here](image)
• Avoid exposure to sports and racing results
• If friends ask you to gamble, decline. Don’t fool yourself into thinking that you’ll just go and watch. Instead, suggest alternate activities
• Consider requesting that friends avoid talking about gambling in your presence
• If your friends are not supportive of your efforts to overcome problem gambling, you may have to decide whether it’s in your interest to continue mixing with them, or to move on
• Limit access to finances, by leaving your credit/debit cards at home and only taking small amounts of cash with you, if you do go gambling
• Consider handing over financial control to someone you trust for a period of time. This is a temporary measure, as it can affect your self-esteem and relationship
• Consider asking a venue or venues to exclude you from their premises. Call Gambling Help for more information on 1800 858 858.

Take time to really think your strategies through. For instance, what exactly will you say if someone engages you in a conversation about gambling?

Dealing with urges

As much as you might try to manage gambling cues, it’s inevitable that a gambling urge will arise at some point or another. It’s important to have a strategy put into place for these times. Take some time to write down a plan for dealing with urges overleaf.

Here are some suggestions.

• Practice listing the four most negative consequences of gambling for you (use a memory card)
• Avoid fantasising about winning, rather ask yourself, “How will I feel when I lose?”
• Use the memory cards (as in step 2) to remind yourself of traps that you might fall into
• Call a friend or gambling help (1800 858 858), or if you prefer, visit Gambling Help Online, where counsellors can talk to you by live text or email. More information on this service is at the back of the booklet.
Managing Stress

Stress is one of the most common gambling triggers. Many problem gamblers do it to try and escape stress. Unfortunately for many of them, much of the stress they are trying to escape from has actually been caused by their gambling!

Learning to deal with stress is an important life skill, which mightn’t come naturally. If you’re having difficulty dealing with stress, try some of the strategies below, and don’t be afraid to seek professional help.

List your sources of stress and problem-solve with loved ones

Take a moment to list some of the things in life which are currently giving you stress. Then make a time to sit down with your partner or a friend and come up with some strategies to deal with them. You might like to use the table on the next page.

Effective problem solving is a skill which takes practice! Try following these steps:

If a gambling urge arises I will:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
• Write down some stressful situations
• Write down all of the possible solutions
• Write down the pros and cons of each solution
• Pick the best solution, carry it out, and evaluate the outcome. If it didn’t work out, try another solution.

Talk about your Problems
Talking about stressful situations can be stressful, at least at first! This is normal. Because of this, many of us choose to avoid talking about our problems at all. If you’re reluctant to talk about your problems with those around you, go to the “I should be strong enough to stop or control my gambling on my own” section on page 47. Communication is ALWAYS part of the solution, though who you choose to share your problems with is totally up to you.

Goal setting/ time management.
Are you giving yourself enough time to get things done, and are you properly prioritising tasks?

Are you giving yourself a pat on the back when you successfully complete tasks? If not, consider:
• Keeping a to-do list, (you can even use the “notes” function in your smart phone)
• Ranking activities in order of importance
• Allocating each activity an amount of time
• Ticking activities off as you complete them (this gives you a sense of accomplishment)
Look after your physical health

- Make sure you’re getting enough sleep
- Exercise regularly, consider a team sport
- Maintain a balanced diet. Excessive caffeine, alcohol, and sugar consumption contributes to stress, as does smoking. It’s important to consider that while smoking and drinking alcohol may seem to “take the edge off”, regular use actually INCREASES your stress levels
- RELAX! Go for a walk, take a massage, have a long hot bath, go fishing, do a muscle-relaxation exercise, call a friend.

**STEP FOUR: ADDRESS BELIEFS**

**DRIVING PROBLEM GAMBLING**

Relationship between beliefs and behaviour

Each of us hold certain beliefs about how the world works; beliefs that influence our perceptions and drive our behaviour. There are certain beliefs that drive problem gambling. Therefore addressing
those beliefs is important. Consider the following example:

Two people are playing the pokies. Trevor believes that this is his lucky day, gambling is an easy way of making extra money, and that the only way he can impress others is through his gambling skills. Dianne believes that gambling is a way of entertaining herself. She sees herself as a mature adult who doesn’t need to impress everyone. For Trevor, winning is an important source of self-esteem. A win will boost his ego and reinforce his belief that he can win. A loss will undermine his self-esteem, resulting in further gambling to “feel good” again. For Dianne, a win or loss will have little effect on her ego. She will readily accept losing as money she’s happy to spend to be entertained and stop the session there.

Common beliefs driving problem gambling

‘I can make money from gambling’
Gambling is a form of entertainment and when you pay for entertainment you do not expect to make money from it. Essentially you are paying the venue a fee to participate in their games and have some fun. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I expect to spend a set amount of money to be entertained or to make money?
- Am I spending a similar amount of money and time on gambling as I would on other forms of entertainment?

‘I can win’

On the surface this belief appears to be true. Every heavy gambler has had numerous wins and has sometimes walked away with those wins. However what happens over the long-term?

Unfortunately we all have a tendency to focus on wins instead of losses. This is partly due to our ‘wishful thinking’ that leads us to believe facts that support our wishes and ignore facts that do not. Games and track betting are designed to focus our minds on winning. For example poker machines will play happy music when you win and stay silent when you lose. Unfortunately this bias leads many
people to believe they can win frequently because everyone else seems to be doing it.

In reality, how much have you won and lost altogether since you started gambling? The monitoring exercise you did at Step 2 should help with this or try the Gambling Calculator on the Gambling Help website. The results may surprise you.

‘I can control the outcome’

Many gamblers believe they can control the outcomes through skill. This is understandable as a number of features of gambling encourage this belief. Firstly gambling is often treated as a form of competition and we automatically associate competition with skill. Secondly when we gain more experience on a particular game it is natural to feel more knowledgeable and therefore better able to control the outcomes. Thirdly, many games allow us to control how we play, encouraging the notion that we can change our playing strategy to control the outcome.
In reality, the vast majority of games are based on pure chance. No skill, experience, knowledge or strategy can influence the outcomes in any way. Even for the games that have an element of skill (e.g. poker), chance is still much more important in determining outcomes than skill. In all forms of gambling, whether there is an element of skill or not, the odds are stacked against the player. That is why gamblers inevitably lose in the long run.

**Near misses**
Near misses are almost as exciting as actual wins. Often they encourage us to gamble more because we feel the big win is just around the corner.

However, as most games are based on pure chance, the outcomes have no influence whatsoever on each other. A near miss does not change the chances of a win in anyway. Whether you just had a near miss, a big win or a loss, the chances of getting a big win in the next game remains exactly the same and the chances are never in your favour.

**Pokies beliefs**
Many pokie players believe that pokies work in “random” cycles. They can’t predict exactly when a winning cycle will come up, but they believe that the longer they play without winning, the more likely a win becomes, because the machine must make up for previous losses, to achieve a certain return to the player. This is NOT how the machines work.

Machines operate randomly at all times. This means that there are NO cycles, you can’t use what happened on previous spins to help you predict what will happen on future spins. To understand fully you might need to book in to see a gambling specialist, or watch our video Gaming Machines: Facts and Myths on YouTube, but it has nothing to do with machines making up for previous losses.

**Sports Betting and Racing beliefs**
Similarly, many sports bettors and racing wagerers believe that they can “beat the house” by tracking
form and keeping track of a few variables over time. They don’t realise that in order to *consistently* beat the house, professional sports betting companies employ dozens of professional mathematicians and massive computing software capability to track hundreds of variables. This is what it takes. There are NO exceptions.

**Gambling to get out of debt**

It is common for people turn to gambling as a quick and easy way to pay off their debts. They may even feel it is the only way.

However, the reality is that gambling probably caused the debt problem in the first place. You’ve gambled for a long time and are well behind. What has changed? Even on the remote chance you get a few big wins, what are the chances you’ll use that money to pay off your debts vs. continuing to gamble? Even if you use the winnings to pay off your debts, would the experience of winning encourage you to go back and gamble more? What would happen then?

**Gambling is an addiction/illness over which I have no control**

Whether gambling is an addiction or illness is still hotly debated by experts. Regardless of whether gambling is an addiction or not, believing that you have no control over it is unhelpful. It discourages us from taking personal responsibility and do the necessary things to get our lives back on track.

Unlike a drug addiction or illness, there is no external substance or bacteria/virus that enters the body and causes the problem. Problem gambling is a behaviour we repetitively choose to engage in, knowing both its rewards and its consequences. Taking personal responsibility for our actions gives us the power to regain control.

**Addressing your gambling beliefs**

**What are your gambling beliefs?**

Dedicate a good amount of time to write down your own gambling beliefs in the worksheet on page 49. What specific beliefs drive you to gamble?
and gamble too much? Use the list of common beliefs above as a starting point and add your own personal beliefs.

**Analysing gambling beliefs**
The next step is to honestly analyse your gambling beliefs. To do this you need to examine the evidence. For example, if you believe you can make some money from gambling, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- How much have I won and lost in the last month/quarter/year, since I started gambling? The monitoring exercise in Step 2 or the Gambling Calculator tool would be helpful here.
- On balance how much am I up or down by?
- Of all the times I’ve won money, how much did I take away and how much went back into gambling losses?
- Would I have more or less money in the future if I continued gambling vs. stopped gambling?

**Changing gambling beliefs**
Once you’ve analysed your gambling beliefs, it is time to challenge you own untrue and unhelpful beliefs. This is absolutely crucial. It will require a lot of effort and you need to have an honest think about whether the effort is worth it. Referring back to your motivations for change in Step 1 could be helpful.

Let us work through an example together. Let’s say you’ve always believed you can’t control your gambling because the urges are too strong.
Gambling Belief

“I can’t control my gambling urges.”

This belief is not helpful because it doesn’t encourage you to take responsibility for your gambling. Is it even correct?

Analysing belief

Well, there are all those times you gave into your urges, like just yesterday. So there is evidence the belief is true. Hang on, what about last week when you chose to go to the gym after work instead of gambling despite feeling strong urges to do so? What about the six months last year you quit gambling because you had enough of it?

Changing belief

The evidence shows the following belief is more correct:

“I can be successful at resisting gambling urges, especially when I am motivated and consistently making an effort to change.”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gambling belief</th>
<th>Evidence for</th>
<th>Evidence against</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Example) There were a number of close calls. I’m getting closer to a big win.</td>
<td>This has happened a couple of times in the past.</td>
<td>On many other occasions I didn’t get a big win when I thought I was close.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>This has happened a couple of times in the past.</td>
<td>On many other occasions I didn’t get a big win when I thought I was close.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close calls do not help me predict if a big win is close.</td>
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Not only is this belief based on facts, it is also more likely to give you the confidence to stop.
The previous worksheet can be used to analyse and change each one of your gambling beliefs.

**STEP FIVE: HOW OTHERS CAN HELP**

Many people who suffer from problem gambling believe they have to struggle alone to overcome it. In fact, it is far more effective to work with family and close friends who are supportive. It may be your partner, parent, sibling or best mate. Your chosen support person can provide you with feedback, reinforce your motivations and help maintain your efforts, particularly when the going gets tough.

**Ways in which your support person can help:**

How can your support person help you overcome problem gambling? The following suggestions are a good start:

- Communicate openly and honestly about life problems that are your gambling cues. Adopt a policy of solving problems with their support before they lead to gambling
- Do not keep emotions bottled up inside. Tell your support person exactly how you are feeling and what feelings you are struggling with so they can support you
- Talk to your support person whenever you have difficulties dealing with gambling urges. Talk through your urge as well as why you want to overcome problem gambling. The process of turning thoughts into words can often make a difference
- Consider asking the support person to monitor or even manage your finances for a while
- If your goal is abstinence and you lapse, be honest and tell your support person. Dealing with lapses directly and getting support to keep on going is much more effective than concealing it
- If your goal is controlled gambling, again be honest and tell your support person whether you are sticking to your budget or not.
Every person’s family environment and social circle is different. What are some ways you can enlist the help of your loved ones?

Other support
Remember that there are other forms of support available if you need some extra help - (Gambling Help, Gamblers Anonymous etc.). See “Getting professional help” on p59 and Self-help resources on p64 for details.
**Conflict with family and friends**

Family and friends can be a tremendous source of support in your change journey. However, they are also frequently a source of conflict. The many negative consequences of problem gambling affect not only you but your loved ones as well. Sometimes conflict can get out of control, involving constant criticisms, arguments, personal attacks and references to the past mistakes. Such conflict erodes motivation, self-esteem and makes a relapse more likely.

The good news is that as you start to reassert control over gambling, the negative impact of gambling on your loved ones will reduce and your relationships will naturally improve. Remember you all share the same goal at the end of the day: for you to overcome problem gambling. Show your loved ones that you understand how your gambling has affected them and invite them to come along with you rather than work against you.

If you continue to experience serious relationship problems, perhaps because those problems preceded gambling or are due to other causes, consult a relationship counsellor to help you through the issues.

**Borrowing money**

Often people borrow money from their family and friends to cover their gambling debts. This money is often not paid back despite the best of intentions and the cycle of gambling and debt continues. Borrowing money from family and friends is not a solution, it provides temporary relief at best, and can make the situation worse.

**STEP SIX: PREVENTING RELAPSES**

Once you have learnt the skills described in the earlier steps, you need to maintain the gains you have achieved. This is done simply by regular practice and review, and by monitoring any signs of relapse so that you can act quickly to stop it.
Keeping the long view

The path to recovery is often bumpy. There are bound to be ups and downs as you struggle to regain control over problem gambling habits. Therefore it’s important to have realistic expectations of change and to keep your eye on the big picture. Lapses do occur. Often they are just individual hiccups rather than complete failure. A relapse, on the other hand, is where old habits return and take over.

Whether you succeed in the long run depends on how you respond to the hiccups along the way. Take each hiccup as a warning not to become complacent and redouble your efforts in applying the skills you’ve learnt. Re-read this self-help booklet, talk to your support person, talk to a gambling counsellor. If you see each hiccup as a complete failure then you’ll likely feel hopeless and give up, making a complete relapse much more likely.

How to deal with lapses

None of us are perfect and we all make mistakes from time to time, despite our best intentions and sincere effort. So how do you deal with a lapse if it happens?
The first point to make is very obvious – you can stop at anytime. Stop: don’t put in the next note, place the next bet or buy any more tickets. It may seem very difficult when you are back in the old gambling mood, but you are the only one in control of your actions, and you can stop any time. Take time out and change the scene, slow down and take a moment to think, review everything you’ve learnt and all the work you have been doing to change.

Quite often people who have a momentary lapse and use that as an excuse to keep on gambling; “I’ve stuffed up already so I might as well keep on going.” However when we examine this thought closely, we can easily see that the impact of losing $50 is very different to losing $500 which is very different to losing $5,000. Be real with yourself and the likely impact of continuing gambling on your life. Be careful to not use a lapse as justification for a complete relapse. Instead of going down a negative spiral, use a lapse as an opportunity. An opportunity to learn from your mistakes, adjust your strategies and redouble your efforts.

There is also a free wallet card you can order from the Gambling Help website to keep you on track. It is plastic and looks just like a credit card, but instead in reminds you to stop and question your intention to gamble.

**Relapse Checklist**

The following checklist may help you in monitoring the early signs of relapse. Are you:

1. Gambling regularly?
2. Planning the next session?
3. Missing out on other things because of the money spent gambling
4. Chasing wins or losses?

**STEP SEVEN: GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP**

If self-help isn’t working for you, don’t despair. This is all too common. Thankfully, problem gambling is one of the most treatable psychological conditions.
Studies show that treatment is effective for 80-85% of gamblers*, and this is the case for even the most rusted on, long term gamblers.

The sad part is that in spite of gambling problems being SO responsive to treatment, many people suffer for decades, and some may lose hundreds of thousands of dollars before coming into treatment. Then having come in, two months later most of them have stopped! Here are some of the ideas which prevent people from reaching out to professional counsellors for help:

“Why would speaking to someone help?”

Many problem gamblers feel like they’ve already tried everything to stop, so they can’t imagine how speaking to someone about their gambling could possibly help them gain control. The fact is, without addressing your motivations for gambling, it can be near impossible to stop, no matter how smart or determined you are, or what strategies you use.

You might already think that you understand your motivations for gambling, but human beings are pretty bad at being able to figure out the real causes. At Gambling Help, our clients are nearly always surprised when we begin to explore this aspect – there’s always more to it than you think. A specialist gambling counsellor can help you!

“I already know how it works!”

Most people with gambling problems have spent a lot of time gambling, and have also spent a lot of time thinking about gambling. As a result, they are confident that they know how their preferred gambling games work. Sound familiar?

But like most things in life: “We don’t know what we don’t know.” For the vast majority of gamblers, there are big gaps in their knowledge. A specialist gambling counsellor can help you with this.

“I should be strong enough to stop or control my gambling on my own.”

Many of us have been brought up with the belief that speaking about our problems is a sign of weakness, and that dealing with problems
ourselves is a sign of strength. The reality is that most people who keep their problems secret, do so because they are scared of having to deal with, or talk about their problems. In reality, most people keep their problems to themselves out of fear, not out of strength. The greatest sign of strength is reaching out for help when you recognise that you have a problem.

What does treatment involve?
Free and confidential treatment is accessible through Gambling Help services in most NSW communities. No referrals are required.

Typically treatment is successfully completed after 6-8 weekly, one-on-one sessions with a trained counsellor. Call 1800 858 858 to find out more.

And here’s something you should know about all our counsellors: they have seen and helped many people just like you. They will not judge you or think poorly of you. They are on your side from the get-go, able, willing and ready to help you take your life in the direction you would like to.

A final word before we part
Voluntarily giving up something that provides so much excitement and has been such a big part of your life is always going to be difficult. But there is no easy road to an easy life. If gambling has created many problems for you, you can be sure that continuing to gamble is not the way to solve those
problems. You, and only you, can take responsibility to make the necessary changes, which will improve the quality of your life immeasurably.

There may well be setbacks along the way, but don’t give up hope and keep at it. Re-read this self-help book and revise the skills you’ve learnt. Practice is essential to gaining mastery over problem gambling. Get as much support as possible to make the job easier. Finally, thank you for finishing this book and best of luck with the change journey ahead!

Self-Help Resources

Gambling Help
Gambling counselling and information is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, online, over the phone or in person. Contact Gambling Help on Ph: 1800 858 858 or gamblinghelponline.org.au

You can also access a wide range of self-help resources such as wallet cards, the gambling calculator and online forums through Gambling Help’s website: gamblinghelp.nsw.gov.au

Stay on Track App
Download the Stay on Track app to help you set gambling budgets and track your gambling expenditure. Type in “stayontrack” into your app store search function. It’s free and helps you set a gambling budget and record all of your bets.

Lifeline
Call lifeline on 13 11 14 for free crisis support and suicide prevention, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

References

This manual was developed by Martin Wieczorek and Fang Zhou from The University of Sydney Gambling Treatment clinic, based on the work of Professor Alex Blasczcynski and Dr. Fadi Anjoul.