

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

## Mental Health & Wellbeing

> **Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy**

> **Mental Health & Wellbeing resources**

> **The Mental Health and Wellbeing Team**

> **Collaboration and Initiatives**

> Online Resources

# Problem Gambling

Problem gambling can be defined as any gambling behaviour that disrupts an individual's life or the lives of those around them (for example, their friends, family and loved ones).

On this page:

- [What is Problem Gambling?](#)
- [Strategies to manage Problem Gambling](#)
- [Problem gambling and my studies](#)
- [University Support](#)
- [Community Support](#)
- [Resources](#)

## What is Problem Gambling?

Most people who engage in gambling activities don't have a gambling problem. There are numerous forms of gambling, such as poker machines, lotteries, scratch cards, card games, gambling on races, betting on sports, online gambling, gambling apps, and the list goes on. Each year, 70% of Australians participate in some type of gambling which can be a fun and harmless social activity, but for some, gambling can quickly become an unhealthy obsession with serious consequences.

Problem gambling can happen to anyone from any walk of life and is referred to as an impulsive-control disorder. It is the uncontrollable urge to keep gambling despite the toll it takes on your life. It means that you're willing to risk something you value in the hope of getting something of even greater value. Problem gambling does NOT have to mean you are totally out of control; it is rather defined as a behaviour that disrupts your life, or the life of your loved ones.

Exactly what causes someone to gamble compulsively isn't well understood. Like many problems, compulsive gambling may result from a combination of biological, genetic, and environmental factors. It is however known that gambling stimulates the brain's reward system much like drugs or alcohol can which leads to addiction. The Reward System consists of several brain areas working together to regulate individuals' reactions towards or away from rewards. The brain areas involved in this system are also important for motivation, decision-making and learning.

The impacts of problem gambling can be far reached, and may possible lead you to engage in particular activities or exhibit behaviours that you never thought that you would such as:

- Debt or other financial problems
- Relationship problems
- Loss of employment or problems at work
- Mental and emotional health concerns
- Negative impacts on family, especially children

- Loss of control and furthermore, addiction.

For many, accepting that their gambling is becoming a problem can be difficult. A common reaction is to minimise, hide or deny gambling problems and the harm it could be causing. Some people might also actively lie to themselves or others about how much money or time is being spent on gambling.

Gambling addiction is sometimes referred to as a “hidden illness” because there are no obvious physical signs or symptoms like there are in drug or alcohol addiction. Problem gamblers also typically deny or minimize the problem—even to themselves. You may have a gambling problem if you:

- Feel the need to be secretive about your gambling.
- Have trouble controlling your gambling.
- Gamble even when you don't have the money.
- Have family and friends worried about you.
- Spend more time and money on gambling than you intend to gamble when you feel anxious, sad or depressed / resorting to gambling as a way of coping.
- Have the need to gamble with more and more money to achieve a feeling of excitement.
- Have constant thoughts about gambling.
- 'Chase' losses: gambling to win back what has been lost, particularly after heavy losses.
- Lie to cover up the extent of your gambling.
- Lose a relationship or job because of gambling.
- Rely on others for financial support after heavy gambling losses.

Although it may feel like you're powerless to stop gambling, there are plenty of things you can do to overcome the problem, repair your relationships and finances, and finally regain control of your life. It's NOT a sign of weakness to ask for help and it's NEVER too late to make changes for the better!

## Strategies to manage Problem Gambling

Problem gambling can occur in phases and can develop in a variety of ways.

#### The winning phase:

During the winning phase of gambling addiction, the player gets a taste of what it is like to make that easy money. It becomes easy to rationalize the idea of putting in more funds to continue the profitable streak.

#### The Losing phase:

The high of winning is almost guaranteed to be followed by the equal-and-opposite experience of a losing streak. By the time this inevitable phase occurs, those who have been swept away by the winning phase of the process may find themselves owing a large amount of money.

The Desperation phase: As the elusive winning streak continues to refuse to make another appearance, the ongoing loss of finances results in desperation. Rather than taking the cues from the deteriorating situation and cutting losses, the person addicted to gambling will double-down on efforts to win.

#### The Hopeless phase:

During this final phase, it has become apparent that there is no clear way out of the mess. The debts have piled up, the life savings are spent, and loved ones may have already separated themselves from the chaos. Those who descend into the hopeless phase of gambling addiction are likely to find themselves alone, and struggle to find an escape.

#### Recovery

Even after reaching the so-called hopeless phase, hope remains. It is important that those who have experienced a gambling addiction do not proceed to place all the blame for the situation on their own shoulders. Over time, the brain of someone who gambles excessively will become rewired to seek out the behaviour as something potentially gratifying.

Taking steps to get help to overcome gambling problems can help you regain control of your money, time, and life, and reduce the impacts on your mental health, family, and relationships:

- *Acknowledge you may have a problem* or be at risk of developing a problem.
- *Talk to someone you trust about your gambling.* This will be the first step to finding the best way forward and developing a plan to cut down or stop.
- *Call the Gambling Helpline* (1800 858 858 — any time 24 hours with an [online chat](#) also available.). They can talk to you confidentially and provide information and self-help tools.
- *Contact a gambling help service* such as [Gamblers Anonymous](#). Even one session with a counsellor or support worker can help you assess your situation and set up a plan to help you.

- *Ask a friend to check in with you.* Having the support of a close friend can be a very helpful starting point to check in with how you are feeling and help keep you motivated to resist urges to gamble.
- *See a financial counsellor.* After seeking help for your problem gambling behaviours, a financial counsellor can assess your financial concerns and help set up a plan to manage debts.

#### *Finding alternatives to gambling:*

- To gain a sense of excitement, substitute gambling for a challenging hobby (biking, hiking, rock climbing)
- Overcome shyness or isolation through being more social – you can join a social group, reconnect with family and friends or meet new friends
- To combat boredom or loneliness, find a new hobby that you are passionate about such as music, art, sport or books and find others with similar interests!
- When seeking to find a way to relax after a stressful day, engage in deep breathing, mindfulness or meditation

## Problem Gambling and my studies

Problem gambling has been proven to affect students in a multitude of ways, including creating stress and conflict in interpersonal relations, financial difficulties, loss of time from work or school, and lower academic scores/achievements. These negative impacts on academic performance, caused by problem gambling can furthermore impact an individual's health and wellbeing. While studying, it is important to engage in self-care practices and learn how to combat gambling cravings to enhance your academic performance and achievements.

#### *Self Help for gambling*

- **Learn to relieve unpleasant feelings in healthier ways:** Gambling may be a way to self-soothe unpleasant emotions, unwind, or socialize. But there are healthier and more effective ways of managing your moods and relieving boredom, such as exercising, spending time with friends who don't gamble, taking up new hobbies, or [practicing relaxation techniques](#), and using the [Emotional intelligence toolkit](#)

- **Strengthen your support network:** If your support network is limited, there are ways to [make new friends](#) without relying on visiting casinos or gambling online. Try reaching out to colleagues at work, joining a sports team or book club, enrolling in an education class, or volunteering for a good cause.
- **Join a peer support group:** Gamblers Anonymous, is a 12-step recovery program. A key part of the program is finding a sponsor, a former gambler who has experience remaining free from addiction and can provide you invaluable guidance and support.
- **Seek help for underlying mood disorders:** [Depression](#), [stress](#), [substance abuse](#), or [anxiety](#) can both trigger gambling problems and be made worse by compulsive gambling. Even when gambling is no longer a part of your life, these problems will remain, so it's important to address them.

#### *Dealing with Gambling Cravings:*

- **Avoid isolation.** Call a trusted family member, meet a friend for coffee, or go to a Gamblers Anonymous meeting.
- **Postpone gambling.** Tell yourself that you'll wait 5 minutes, fifteen minutes, or an hour. As you wait, the urge to gamble may pass or become weak enough to resist.
- **Visualise what will happen if you give in to the urge to gamble.** Think about how you'll feel after all your money is gone and you've disappointed yourself and your family again.
- **Distract yourself with another activity**, such as going to the gym, watching a movie, or [practicing a relaxation exercise](#) for gambling cravings

## University Support

WSU resources:

If problem gambling is creating barriers that may affect your study or you want support to optimise your study then the WSU [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Student Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or telephone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370 or sending an email to [counselling@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:counselling@westernsydney.edu.au). Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30 pm.

- **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email [disability@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:disability@westernsydney.edu.au) or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- **WSU [Student Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress

management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402771543 or email [d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au).

- **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

- **Deferred Exam**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

- **Withdraw Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

- **Leave of Absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).



# Community Support

## Community resources:

- **[Lifeline](#).**

If you are really struggling during the night when completing assessments or feel most alone, contact [Lifeline](#) (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14** or, Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back!

- **Mental Health Telephone Access Line**

[Mental Health Telephone Access Line](#) - 1800 011 511

This Mental Health Line is staffed by mental health professionals that can help and provide you advice about your needs and discuss referrals to local mental health services. It is available to everyone in NSW and operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- **Beyond Blue**

[Be you – beyond blue](#): General information about building resilience and facing adversity.

- [University of Sydney Gambling Treatment Clinic](#):

The Gambling Treatment Clinic at the University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Centre is a free and confidential service for gamblers and their family members. The clinics are in discreet and easily accessible locations, and online and phone sessions for those who require it are now available. They offer hour-long sessions on a weekly basis, usually over a two-to-three-month period, depending on your needs. Call on 1800 482 482 for no cost and for confidential gambling treatment with a specialist psychologist. No referral is necessary, but you do need to make an appointment.

- [Gambling helpline](#) – free 24/7 chat, email and phone counselling and support services if gambling is affecting you or someone you care about. 1800 858 858. They also include a Peer Support Line to; connect, be inspired, motivate others, and share your experience & strategies free of judgement.
- [Gamble Aware](#) - a free, confidential service that assists anyone in NSW that is affected by gambling. Information, support, and counselling services can be accessed by phone, online and face-to-face across NSW. All services are free and confidential.
- [National Debt Hotline](#) - a free and confidential service offering resources, advice, and referrals. 1800 007 007 (9:30am to 4:30pm, Monday to Friday).
- [Gamblers Anonymous](#): gaaustralia.org.au
- [Gambler's Help Youth-line](#) (under 25's) - If your betting is getting out of control or if you're worried about someone else, it can be really hard to talk about. But help is available and it's free! Call 1800 262 376 for advice and support, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's anonymous, confidential, and free.
- [Help for family and friends](#) - This guide is designed to help family and friends of someone affected by problem gambling. It provides support and information on where and how to seek help, what to look out for and ways to protect themselves and their families.
- [Reach Out](#) – Provides information on gambling addiction and who to reach out to for support.
- [Mensline Australia](#) – Addresses problem gambling with signs of how people are affected as well as ways to find the help you need
- [Relationships Australia](#) - If you or your partner or a friend has a problem with gambling, help is available. In some states Relationships Australia has dedicated gambling help programs, but all Relationships Australia counsellors can help with aspects of the problem. The support you need could include help to overcome an addiction, financial counselling and protecting the relationships with people you care about. You can phone 1300 364 277 to find out about the support available close to where you live.
- [Better Health Channel](#) – Information on different types of gambling, problem gambling and where to find help to support you.

## Resources

- [Podcasts](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Apps](#)

## Podcasts

### **The Problem Gambling Podcast**

This podcast explores issues surrounding problem gambling and problem gambling related harm. Podcast episodes include lived experiences of individual's who have dealt with problem gambling first hand and advice from qualified health professionals regarding the issues.

<https://open.spotify.com/show/7rMOy6CZTNZUxZYyfBLqne>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/the-problem-gambling-podcast/id1513847715>

## Videos

### **Taking back control: Lies, Compulsion and Recovery | Shamil Gillani | TEDxKingstonUponThamesSalon**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDxxkCNFO0s>

## Apps

- **[Talk Campus](#)**: There is a 24/7 support app called TalkCampus, which is free and available to download on iOS devices (App Store) and android devices (Google Play). WSU students can connect and talk with other students about anything.
- **[Smiling Mind](#)**: Smiling Mind offers a free app to help you practice your daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. There are dozens of exercises tailored to different demographics and desires. All the content and programs are free, which is the perfect apps for beginners to try mindfulness. Free and available on the app store and google play.
- **[Headspace](#)**: Learn to manage feelings and thoughts with the lifelong skill of everyday mindfulness, any time of the day. Free and available on the app store and google play.
- **Gambling less: In-the-moment**: Free on [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#). Designed to provide 24/7 support to help you take immediate steps to address your gambling. Is tailored to your individual needs with interactive activities to curb urges, tackle triggers and explore expectations. By responding to your feedback, the app provides the right type of support whenever and wherever you need it most.
- **Gambling Habit Tracker**: Free on the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#). The Gambling Habit Hacker app can help you meet your goal to change your gambling behaviour. Gambling Habit Hacker allows you to set daily goals to limit your spending or gambling activity each day for a 4-week period. The app checks in with you to see how you are going meeting your goals and provides advice and support.
- **Gambling Addiction Calendar**: Free on the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#). Gambling addiction calendar helps you realize when you are addicted to gambling, and helps you stay accountable for when you let yourself be tempted by the idea of gambling. You can track your progress on how much money and time you have saved since quitting gambling, create your own reasons to quit gambling, add reasons why you would like to see yourself succeed and stop the gambling abuse. the special panic button will help you send a text to a friend that may be able to help you and be an accountability partner, and the distractions section will help you take your mind off the gambling abuse and introduce you to something more positive and soothing.
- **Gambling Addiction Test**: Free on the [App Store](#). This app presents a simple screening questionnaire to measure your level of risk for gambling addiction as well as some information on the nature of addiction and different treatments. Disclaimer: This test is NOT a diagnostic test. A diagnosis can only be provided by a qualified healthcare professional. Please consult a physician if you are concerned about your risk of Gambling Addiction.
- **Gambling Therapy**: Free on the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#). Provides a collection of tools and information to help you identify and overcome problem gambling.

- **Quit Gamble:** Free on the [App Store](#). An app to challenge gambling addiction, by helping you understand why it's so hard to stop gambling. Help you find and eliminate sources of pain and help you become HAPPY and FREE. QG is an alternative to 12-steps - Gambler Anonymous. This gambling addiction app has a different approach, and unlike Gambler anonymous, the goal isn't to create a sober gambling addict, it's to help you become free and happy.
- **Gambless: Addiction Recovery:** Free on the [App Store](#), offering in app purchases. Gambless, using a variety of psychology-based self-improvement articles, self-assessment tools, mental wellness workouts, and life improvement courses, helps you cope with the urges to gamble in order to make your life better.

## Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional. Remember you are not alone and there will always be someone out there who is willing to stay with you through your hard times.

**View a PDF version of this webpage [here](#).**

References:

[Gambling Disorder DSM 5](#)

[The nature of gambling-related harm for adults with health and social care needs: an exploratory study of the views of key informants](#)

[What is problem gambling?](#)

[Australian Government – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

[Australian Government - Gambling Activity in Australia](#)

[Australian Government - The impact of gambling problems on families](#)

[Gambling Addiction and Problem Gambling](#)

[Psych Central – What are the phases of gambling addiction?](#)

[Gambling Help online](#)

[Gamblers Anonymous](#)

[Help Guide - Relaxation techniques for stress relief](#)

[Help Guide – Emotional Intelligence Toolkit](#)

[Help Guide – Dealing with Shyness](#)

[Help Guide – Depression Symptoms and Warning Signs](#)

[Help Guide – Stress Symptoms, Signs and Causes](#)

[Help Guide – Addiction](#)

[Help Guide – Anxiety Disorders and Anxiety Attacks](#)

[Help Guide – Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief](#)