

How to have a conversation about gambling



It takes courage and commitment to support someone struggling with gambling on their journey to change. Although you're an important part of this process, remember it's your friend or loved one who has to take responsibility for their own gambling.

Getting a conversation going is one of the most important things you can do. It's the first step to your friend or family member opening up and acknowledging that they're struggling. There are strategies you can try.

First, test the water

Leave brochures about gambling and gambling support around the house.

Regularly and patiently let them know that you're genuinely interested in talking to them about it. Ask open questions.

Talk about gambling in a more general sense. For example: "I've been doing some reading about gambling harm lately ..."

There are lots of videos on the GambleAware NSW [Facebook](#) page and on [YouTube](#) that you might want to take a look at or get your loved one to watch. A great starting point is You're Stronger Than You Think. It has a positive message and spells out the importance of seeking help for gambling problems.

Your loved one won't open up if they don't feel they're in a safe space, where they know they'll be supported rather than blamed or judged.

GAMBLEAWARE
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Think carefully about the words you use

You may be justified in feeling angry, but making critical or belittling comments, nagging or blaming your loved one may be counterproductive.

Some basic principles

Express facts, thoughts and feelings without placing blame.

Use “I” not “you” statements.

Show that you’re listening.

Be understanding.

Plan your responses, and think about how they may react.

How you might start

“I’ve noticed you’ve been a little down lately. Are you okay?”

“What’s been going on for you? Is there anything I can do to help?”

“I’ve noticed you gambling a lot recently. It’s really starting to make me worry.”

“You know you’re my friend and I care about you a lot. That’s why I’m saying this. I’m upset because I’ve seen you do some really risky things.”

“I can see you’re not happy right now, and that upsets me. I want to help.”

What if they get angry?

This can be challenging. If it is safe to do so, see if these strategies work:

- Validate their anger. “I can see that this is really affecting you.”
- Let them know that getting angry is okay, but getting aggressive isn’t. “You have every right to feel angry, but I can’t accept your shouting or your threats.”

- Let them know how their aggression affects you. “When you shout at me I feel hurt and disrespected.”
- Encourage them to express their emotions more constructively. “I would really like to continue to discuss this as calmly as possible. I’m interested in why you feel this way and would like you to tell me more about it.”

What if they refuse to talk?

If your loved one denies they have an issue with gambling – to you or to themselves – it’s not up to you to make them talk or take action. Pushing it could make the situation worse. Moving forward is a process that can take weeks or months.

Never forget – your safety comes first

If you feel threatened or you don’t feel safe, or you’re concerned about the welfare of your family or children, your safety must come first. Talk to a counsellor, have a safety plan in place, and call **Triple Zero (000)** in an emergency.

Help is close at hand

No matter how you’re affected by gambling – your own or someone else’s – GambleAware can help. For free, confidential advice and support, and to find services near you, go to gambleaware.nsw.gov.au or call us on **1800 858 858** 24/7.

GambleAware is funded through the NSW Government’s Office of Responsible Gambling. GambleAware’s purpose is to work towards zero gambling-related harm in NSW through research, education and support for individuals and communities.