

Grief and Gambling

GM GAMBLING MATTERS

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Many Gambler's Help clients experience stressors and sadness in their lives. Grief is a common issue. A loss may have happened recently and then triggered gambling, or may have happened many years ago but continue to cause sadness. Losses might include death of a loved one, relationship breakdown, reduced physical capacity through illness or injury, loss of employment, children leaving home, or loss of financial assets.

Often gambling can mask grief, and when people stop gambling they can feel overwhelmed as such feelings resurface. It can feel as if they are experiencing their grief all over again, as raw and sad as ever.

A gambling problem can also trigger grief. Often when we go through a difficult time in our lives our grief for past losses can intensify. For example, we may miss our mother who always provided us with comfort and guidance in times of stress. People often also mourn the life they had before gambling and the many things they have lost through gambling eg. relationships, hard worked for financial assets, financial freedom, self-esteem, sense of self, and perceived social status.

The journey to overcoming a gambling problem is often accompanied by a journey through grief. People can describe gambling as a way to escape painful feelings. However, this escape is usually short lived and often ends up creating more pain in their lives. It is helpful, and even liberating, for people to recognize the role that gambling is playing in assisting them to manage grief.

It is important to remember that grief is difficult for everyone. There are many myths and misconceptions about grief - how long it should take, what feelings to experience, when and how to express it, how to cope with it and that, ultimately, we should "get over it". However, in reality everyone copes and expresses grief differently. It is unpredictable and most of us will continue to grieve in subtle ways for the rest of our lives.

To assist in the grief journey it is important to look after yourself through diet, exercise, rest and relaxation. Be gentle with yourself and don't criticise yourself for not coping as well as you or others think you should.

Experiment with coping strategies such as crying, time alone, time with family, time with friends, pampering and self care, remembering or commemorating losses, talking about your loss, letting others know

how you are coping, seeking support from loved ones or from others, and seeking counselling. It is important to remember that each person will find a different way to cope and that not all of these strategies will be helpful to everyone. Grief is an ongoing process which is unique to each person.

Where to get help:

- Gambler's Help 1800 156 789 (if you are also experiencing a gambling problem)
- Doctor
- Counsellor
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (03) 9545 6377 or 1800 642 066
- National Association for Loss and Grief (Vic) (03) 9351 0358

The following websites also have useful information:

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au - look under G in the 'facts sheets A to Z' link.
www.grief.org.au - the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.

In 2007, the Gambler's Help Community Educator's Network (CEN) established a working group to examine issues of grief, loss and bereavement amongst Gambler's Help clients. A statewide audit was recently conducted by Gambler's Help problem gambling counsellors, who reviewed approximately one third of their open cases for the presentation of grief or loss issues.

The audit has helped to quantify the observations of problem gambling counsellors over many years. It also validates gaming venue staff anecdotes that many patrons exhibit problem gambling behaviours after a bereavement eg. increased visits to the venue; extended playing periods; accessing the ATM machine more often; saying that they have spent more than planned.

The findings from the audit indicate that grief and loss are significant issues for Gambler's Help clients. The CEN working group is now in the final stages of preparing a report and developing recommendations based on the findings. GM: Gambling Matters will bring you data from the audit as soon the report is completed.



GAMBLER'S HELP™ 1800 156 789

SOUTHERN



HOT TIP!

RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING AWARENESS WEEK

The Community Education Team at Gambler's Help Southern spiced up activities during the recent Responsible Gambling Awareness Week (26 May to 1 June) with its own "roving chilli" campaign. The Chilli (pictured right) and the Chilli Assistants (below) hit the footpaths of Port Phillip, Glen Eira, Stonnington, Frankston, Dandenong and Casey, attracting much attention. The Assistants were on hand to explain to passers-by the link between the Chilli, the awareness week and its key messages, and to hand out information materials. The Chilli was also photographed participating in a number of alternative recreational activities (example, below right) - these images will be used by Gambler's Help Southern in future harm minimisation campaigns.



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UPDATE

Gaming Venue Applications

Tooraddin & District Sports Club Tooraddin

Increase from 42 to 54 machines
Hearing adjourned at the request of the applicant, to a date to be fixed

Casey Towers Narre Warren

New venue - 60 machines
Decision pending

Pakenham Lakeside Hotel Pakenham

New venue - 60 machines
Decision pending

Langwarrin Hotel Langwarrin

Increase from 44 to 60 machines
Decision pending

Frankston RSL Club Frankston

Increase from 77 to 90 machines
Decision forthcoming



NEW STAFF

Welcome to new counsellors, Michele Glassenbury and Lynne Sampson, who have recently joined our team and are looking forward to further broadening their skill base to treatments for problem gambling.

Michele works 4 days per week - in our Cranbourne office on Tuesday and Thursday and at Intake in Bentleigh East on Monday and Friday. She has come from working in a school setting. Lynne divides her 4 days between Bentleigh East and Frankston, plus one Saturday morning per fortnight at Bentleigh East. On a personal note, Lynne shares her home with her cat Bodhi and her garden of herbs and bonsai.

We hope Michele and Lynne settle into their new roles and enjoy all they have to offer.

Don't Wait to seek financial advice

Financial counsellors at Gambler's Help strongly suggest that people seek professional financial advice if they are in receipt of a large sum of money. People may inherit money, receive a retrenchment package or gain access to their superannuation upon retirement.

Unfortunately, our financial counsellors have dealt with many clients who have gambled away large sums of money, only to be left in a very fragile financial state. A financial plan is imperative so provisions can be made for a secure future. For information about financial planning and planners, visit the website of the Financial Planning Association of Australia at www.fpa.asn.au





Maggie's Real Life Story

- a partner's perspective

For the first time, GM: Gambling Matters brings you a story from the partner of a gambler. Maggie's husband, Sam, is a client of Gambler's Help Southern. They have been together since their teens. Finding out about Sam's gambling changed Maggie's life and she felt it was important to express just how much a gambling problem can affect other people. GM would like to thank Maggie for agreeing to share this part of her Real Life Story. For the full story, go to www.ghsouthern.org.au/mos/content/view/372/28/

I found out actually by accident. When I look back there are times I realise that we were both earning pretty good money and we shouldn't have been in the financial straits we were...to a certain degree I feel like I was perhaps blinkered, blind. I had no reason to question anything he told me because I just trusted him 100%.

A bank statement came to our house...all our accounts, that I knew of, were joint, so I opened it up and it was a personal loan for \$28,000. We'd just extended our mortgage earlier in the year and I thought "They've made a mistake." When Sam came home I said "What's this?" and he got really uncomfortable... he said that he had taken that loan out because of gambling - to support his gambling debts.

I suppose I thought we had the perfect life - we're in love, we've got three really nice, beautiful children. The fact that he'd been lying to me I just couldn't comprehend. I know that people talk about their hearts being broken but I actually felt that physically sick inside - I felt that I was heartbroken. He then came out and told me that he had another personal loan and a large credit card debt that I knew nothing about.

I was going to cut down my work, but unfortunately I have had to increase my hours to help clear the debts as we will be paying off his extra debts, plus our mortgage that we should have had down a lot further.

The loss of trust and that betrayal - it's like he had an affair. He had this whole secret life. I had this idealised picture of Sam - just a beautiful man. He's a really good father, very kind and gentle, the last thing that I could have imagined was that he was a liar and a cheat. That conjures up pictures of other people's husbands who are liars and cheats...and to think that my husband had that in him is just devastating.

Sam's had a bet on the races since he was 17. His nanny was a big gambler. He and my dad got on - they used to talk about horses... He was very interested in horse racing but it was never a problem. He'd only have a little bet in the spring carnival. I'm afraid I work long weekends and I didn't realise the extent of how much it consumed him. He had a phone account and went to the TAB. He said he thinks it stopped being fun a couple of years ago - that's when he got the extended debts. I think initially, when it all came out exactly how much he owed and how long it had been going on for, he was relieved and that made me quite angry. Like he's got this big weight off his shoulders but it's been transferred to me. For days I couldn't go to work because I felt physically sick and heartbroken. And he was this man who was probably quite relieved because he got

caught and it was in the open and that made me feel really angry towards him too.

Our children are young adults - 19, 21 and 22, so you can't hide things. We've had a relationship where we rarely fight. You can't hide it from the kids when you cry for three days. They were horrified and really worried. I think their main concern was that we were going to split up and once they got over of shock of that they started to deal with it.

I've been speaking to a counsellor from Gambler's Help Eastern and she's really helped a lot. At first I said to Sam I was never going to be my mother, so don't think I'll live with you if you continue gambling, that's the end...I think counselling made me look at gambling as whether they choose gambling or the family and to be realistic that he may "reoffend". I had a talk to Sam a couple of weeks ago about "Would you tell me if you did feel like gambling again?" I said if you do gamble again and it's a slip up, but you don't want to put it before your family, then you know that I would still support you. He said, "Well, now I know I would tell you. But if I thought you would just go ballistic and leave me, I probably wouldn't." So I'm glad my counsellor told me to have a talk to him about it, because I think I was worried that I would turn into my mum - very bitter and angry all her life. She had six kids, in such financial stress. I just don't want to be that.

I got Sam to have a look on the website straight away and get help. He's seeing a counsellor at Gambler's Help Southern near to his work...Started off twice a week, then weekly, then fortnightly - he feels it has helped.

Sam is very shamed by it all and I suppose I don't want people judging him for his gambling and looking at him differently to what they know of him. Fortunately we told our really close friends...so that Sam's got someone to talk to, too. I've got a really beautiful girlfriend and she's been a really good support and I've told one sister who's very helpful. My brother I had to tell because he was one of Sam's betting mates and Sam's cousin. So they've all been quite supportive.

It does impact on every aspect of your life as a couple. If gambling has become a problem, it does change everything for ever. I'd love partners to all get some help, someone to talk to, because you do feel isolated and even though you shouldn't, you do feel it's something to do with you that your partner's gambling. So definitely, get some help and understand that you will be angry for a little while. I have to be really conscious of not taking my anger out on Sam because you could quite easily turn everything on the gambler, the one that's changed your life. **(cont. p.4)**

Family and friends who are affected by another person's gambling are encouraged to seek help to deal with their situation. Free and confidential counselling and financial counselling is available at Gambler's Help.

Responsible Gambling Awareness Week

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Maggie's Real Life Story

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Other initiatives undertaken by Gambler's Help Southern during Responsible Gambling Awareness Week were:

Inside Pokies Player Guide

This guide explains exactly what you are up against if you decide to play the pokies - how pokies actually work and why, in the long run, you will lose money. It provides the facts and helps to breakdown the myths about pokies and the chances of winning.

Gambler's Help Southern has long wanted to have this guide professionally formatted and printed for general release. This goal was realised when the City of Stonnington approached the service to offer support for an Awareness Week activity - it was quickly agreed that production of the player guide would be a wonderful outcome. Many thanks to the City of Stonnington, particularly to the Social Planning team!



3,000 copies of the guide have been printed. Contact Gambler's Help Southern on 9575 5353 to request a copy, or or download a pdf version from www.ghsouthern.org.au

Inside Pokies



Player Guide

GAMBLER'S HELP 1800 156 789

Cardinia Leader newspaper inserts

The "Where does gambling fit in your life?" flyer was inserted into over 12,300 newspapers distributed in the Shire of Cardinia. It featured a nine question self-screen about gambling, with suggestions for what to do next provided according to the total score. It also promoted Gambler's Help Southern services and contact details.

We actually got the house changed over to just my name and that was a devastating blow for Sam. I said if you never gamble again, that's fine - you know that we are going to stay together. But I need to have that security. That made me feel sick inside because for a while, even though he went along with it and would always have gone along with it, it made him feel like I thought he was going to fail.

I have said to him a number of times, "You know that I'll never 100% trust you." But I'm getting better. I still open all his mail and he expects me to. At first I was making a point of opening it in front of him - now I just open it and put it on the bench - so that's my little petty revenge so he knew that I was watching him, I guess. I check statements very carefully and he's aware of that and he knows that I will always have trust issues.

I think am a fairly strong woman in a lot of ways. I do have a really good family and the kids are beautiful and Sam, honestly, I just keep telling myself he's a really good man who's just done a very bad thing. I still feel sad that it will never be exactly the same but I do feel that we can move forward as long as he continues to get help. I honestly don't know what I'll do if he does "reoffend". I guess I'll just have to deal with that, if and when it happens and just hope like hell it doesn't...

Gambler's Help Southern provides free, confidential, professional support for gamblers, their families and others affected by gambling.

Services available include:

- Counselling for gambling related issues
- Financial Counselling
- Community Education & Development
- Professional Development
- Multicultural Services

If you have concerns about your gambling, or the gambling of a family member or friend, call Gambler's Help Southern Intake between 9.30 am and 4.30 pm on 9575 5353 or the Gambler's Helpline which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1800 156 789.

**WANTED - FEEDBACK
ON GM: GAMBLING MATTERS**
Go to www.ghsouthern.org.au
and follow the **FEEDBACK** link

GAMBLER'S HELP™ 1800 156 789

SOUTHERN

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