



# The Effects of Gambling

**Anne Marie Lee** writes of the damage that a gambling addiction can do to a family. With a focus on respecting the personhood of the gambler, she offers advice on how to identify and address the effects of gambling.



Compulsive addiction tends to be destructive of family life. Partners, children, grandparents, siblings and friends are affected by the behaviour of the addicted person. In 2019 according to an Irish government study there was thought to be 30,000 people aged fifteen and over with gambling problems. €1.3bn was spent on gambling in one year and millions of that money had been stolen.

## Financial Effects

Money will be short, accounts emptied and savings vanish, property may be sold or pawned such as jewellery or household items. The gambling member of the family may steal from the workplace, run up debts, even lose their job. Mortgage payments may be behind, leaving the family vulnerable to losing their home. Friends may be lost through borrowed money not being paid back.

Once the children reach age seven or eight years, they will realise that their family is different from other families. There may be no money for school fees, books and extracurricular activities. They can't have the things other children have. There are no holidays to talk about with their friends back at school. School trips are out of the question.

The gambler will take advantage of any situation that brings money to gamble with. If elderly parents are dependent on the gambler, the gambler can bleed them dry of their savings and convince them to sign over their property.

## Emotional Effects

There is tension and anger in the household. Children feel this tension and learn to tread carefully. The adults



may be ashamed of the situation caused by the gambler and withdraw from social activities and friends. This leaves them with a sense of isolation, no one to turn to. There will be depression and resentment and daily arguments. The situation can escalate to the point of domestic abuse.

The gambler is unable to carry out the role of parent as they are preoccupied with the next 'roll of the dice' and has lost focus on the family. If and when the gambler becomes aware of what gambling is doing to the people around them, the gambler will become guilty and possibly depressed but can do nothing about it. The gambler is unable and if the truth be told, unwilling to stop.

Teenagers whose parent is gambling are affected negatively. They may feel a sense of insecurity in the

family, become anxious or depressed and will be lacking in confidence. The gambling parent may believe their child is unharmed by or is unaware of their gambling. Children know a lot more about what is going on in the family than we may give them credit for. They overhear arguments and one side of a telephone call and can put the pieces together.

Teenagers who have a gambling parent may follow their example if they see it as a way of making money or of having fun. Because it is what they experienced within their family circle they may look on it as a normal activity. Most compulsive gamblers start gambling between the ages of 11–17 years.

### Family Focus

In households where one parent is gambling the family focus tends to be on the gambler and their activities. The gambler's partner may try to hold things together and make things seem as normal as possible for the sake of the children and for social appearances. This parent will eventually burn out and become depressed or have health issues.

Try to focus on the family. Explain the problem to the older children, stressing the fact that gambling is a disease, that the parent cannot stop gambling. Always demonstrate respect for the person of the gambler. Build the confidence of children wherever you can, because confident young people are less likely to follow in the footsteps of the gambling parent. Seek help for the family. ❤️