

Talking about gambling: a guide for media professionals and people who support public conversations about gambling harm

How we talk about gambling makes a difference.

Gambling is part of many people's lives and affects everyone differently. Your choice of language can influence how people think about gambling harm and those affected by it.

Using the wrong language can contribute to the embarrassment, shame, low self-esteem, and guilt that can be felt by those who experience gambling harm. Language can perpetuate stigma and discrimination and create barriers to help seeking.

This factsheet will help you promote safe, respectful and productive public conversations about gambling harm.

What is gambling harm?

The term "gambling harm" covers all possible consequences of gambling. It shifts "problem gambling" from an individual burden to a public health issue.

The most obvious type of gambling harm is financial, but there are many others. These include relationship difficulties, health problems, emotional or psychological distress, issues with work or study, cultural stresses, and criminal activity.

When you talk about the experience of gambling harm, you are not just talking about people who gamble. Gambling affects families, friends, carers, community organisations, educators, industry, healthcare professionals, and the community.

Talking about people affected by gambling

There is no one-size-fits-all formula for talking about gambling harm. The key to avoiding stigmatising language is to take a respectful, humanising approach that does not define a person by, blame or judge them for, the challenges they face.

When you talk about the impact of gambling on a person, avoid referring to them as a "problem gambler". This term defines the person as the problem and implies that change is not possible. It makes gambling harm seem like an individual issue, which doesn't acknowledge its impacts on intimate partners, family, social networks, and the community.

You should also avoid terms like "addict", "addiction" and "habit", which label a person in a profoundly stigmatising way. Instead, describe the person first and then the characteristic.

The following are some more inclusive, strength-based alternatives:

- a person who gambles
- a person at risk of gambling harm
- a person experiencing gambling harm
- a person who has issues with gambling
- a person struggling with their gambling
- a person negatively affected by gambling
- a person with lived experience of gambling harm
- someone worried about a loved one's gambling
- a person affected by someone's gambling.



Talking about how we should gamble

We often hear the phrase ‘gamble responsibly’. Gambling responsibly means that a person has control over their gambling and doesn’t let it negatively impact other areas of their life. However, telling someone to “be more responsible” or “gamble responsibly” isn’t always the best approach.

Some alternative phrases to help people to understand the risks of gambling include:

- gambling more safely
- lowering your risk of gambling harm
- staying in control of your gambling
- managing your spending on gambling
- becoming more gamble aware.

Images matter

The imagery chosen to accompany or illustrate gambling-related content is important. Avoid images that reinforce negative stereotypes, like people looking depressed and despondent.

Pictures of gambling products or environments can influence how people think about gambling. Avoid using images that glamourise gambling or portray it as a harmless activity.

Case studies

Using case studies about gambling harm can bring the issue to life. They lend authenticity, give the writer credibility, provide a human interest element and make the issue meaningful.

People share their personal stories for various reasons, including to raise awareness of the risks and harms associated with gambling. This is a generous act that can be at the expense of the teller’s own privacy and that of their family and friends, and sometimes has a negative impact on other aspects of their life, such as future job prospects.

It is therefore incumbent on media professionals to be respectful of people’s preferences, make informed and sensitive choices about the language and images they use, and be mindful of the possible implications of the messages they communicate.

Positive choices can generate thoughtful discussions, promote community understanding, alleviate stigma, encourage others to acknowledge that they need help and empower them to seek treatment and support.

Tips for media interviews

It is important to think carefully about the impact a media interview can have on people affected by gambling harm. You should:

- where possible, speak with people who are supported by a counsellor, a peer group, or have personal support to help them share their stories safely
- practise basic courtesies such as maintaining eye contact, listening carefully, and using a caring, non-judgemental tone of voice to acknowledge the bravery it takes to share their story
- ask them if this is the first time they’ve shared their story and what kind of reaction they’ve had previously
- ask them why they want to share – this allows them to validate their experience and recognise that they may want to help others
- check in at the start that they are okay to talk about this and, if they (or you) seem uncomfortable, check that they are okay to continue and let them take a break or change their mind at any point
- make sure they have supports in place before the interview, check in with them after the interview, tell them when the story will be published and check in again after it has been released

- check they understand how the story and any images will be used, including the potential for ongoing, unmoderated and trolling commentary on social media
- offer them the opportunity to tell their story anonymously, using their first name only or a pseudonym
- if you have done similar stories before, share your experience, how it affected you and the response your story received – this can help put them more at ease, and make them aware of the sorts of reactions to expect
- where possible, allow them to review and give consent for specific quotes or information that you want to include in the story
- include details of Lifeline and the GambleAware Helpline in the story for readers who may be impacted by its content.

The Office of Responsible Gambling is here to help

The Office of Responsible Gambling works to:

- prevent and reduce gambling harm, for people at risk and the broader community
- improve individual and community wellbeing, for those affected by gambling harm
- support people to make informed choices about gambling
- contribute to public debate and influence gambling harm prevention and minimisation by government, industry, community, and other stakeholders.

You can find out about our work by visiting our website <https://www.gambleaware.nsw.gov.au/>

The website offers a range of information, including research, tips on how to gamble more safely, resources for parents and professionals,

and details of how to access GambleAware support services.

Support is available across the state

GambleAware offers free counselling services throughout the state for people affected by gambling and their loved ones.

Support is available in 40 languages and there is also a dedicated Aboriginal service.

For more information and resources visit www.gambleaware.nsw.gov.au

As well as face-to-face counselling, support is available 24/7 by phone (1800 858 858) and online <https://www.gamblinghelponline.org.au/tools-resources/chat-counselling>

For further information

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