

# Gambling Harm: effects on family/whanau

## Short and long-term effects on family/whanau

- Arguments, conflict and stress in the relationship.
- Loss of trust from lying or hiding spending on gambling.
- Family financial problems caused by growing losses and debt/lost jobs.
- High levels of distress, anxiety and depression from constant arguments and tension, leading to physical problems also.
- Isolation from friends and family/whanau.
- Poor communication.
- Confusion of family roles and responsibilities.
- Emotional abuse, anger and violence.
- Family breakups – separation and divorce.
- Development of gambling and other addiction problems in other members of the family.
- Inability to afford adequate housing; needing to move often - for children, results in loss of friends, school, and stability.
- Family members can also suffer anxiety and depression, leading to suicidal thoughts.
- The gambler may experience legal problems from fraud/theft, leading to criminal record or imprisonment and absence from family/whanau.

## Signs of gambling for Family/Whanau to watch out for

- Increasing debt/money problems in spite of adequate income (there can often be plausible stories).
- Unexplained absences/less time spent on usual activities, and rationalisations for absences from the family.
- Deterioration of mood and appearance over time without other explanation.
- Raising credit/asking for loans with promises to pay back, often not met.
- Minimising to others, the time/money spent gambling.

## Financial protection Ideas

- Open separate accounts and credit cards rather than joint ones and ensure no further funds can be raised on mortgages.
- Limit access to cash and savings from the person gambling.
- Don't 'rescue' or 'bail out' the person by giving money to repay debt (they may use it for further gambling).
- Talk the situation over with trusted friend or counsellor (support); take stock of current financial position and seek budget advice and develop a debt repayment plan (if necessary).
- Take control of the finances and all payments/monitor mail.

- Remove and protect valuables (rings, jewelry) from being pawned.
- Consider legal advice.

### Short and long-term effects on Children

- 'Loss' of the gambling parent through 'physical and emotional unavailability' (because they prioritised their gambling).
- Strain and conflict in parents' relationships - picked up by children and they may blame themselves for problems.
- Emotional pain, violence and neglect.
- Separation from wider family networks (due to parental isolation).
- Loss of 'safety'.
- Material and financial deprivation.
- Experiencing negative emotions from gambling affected parents.
- Potential loss of parents through separation/divorce; spending time in prison.

### Other Impacts on Children

- Effects of emotional abuse and witnessing abuse can be as damaging to children as direct physical abuse
- When children have to manage with frequent violence at home and going to school, they learn to keep secrets
- 70% of domestic violence incidents are witnessed by children; this can range from seeing to hearing, and observing the aftermath (blood, bruising, injury); also feeling tension
- The older children may try to protect the vulnerable parent and/or younger siblings and take on roles 'older than their age' (growing up too fast)
- Long-term, trauma can lead to anxiety, depression, all types of addictions
- If there are ongoing violence problems, Oranga Tamariki may have to remove children from the home and place them with foster parents