10 Common Lies Compulsive Gamblers Tell

If you’re living with a compulsive gambler, you’re already familiar with the never-ending cycle of lies, half-truths, and deliberate distortion of facts. But if you haven’t yet confirmed (but do suspect) that your spouse or partner has a gambling addiction, look carefully at his or her behavior patterns for signs that gambling has become more than just a casual occurrence. Compulsive lying is one of the symptoms of compulsive or pathological gamblers. These gamblers are addicted to gambling, and lying becomes second nature to them. What are some of the common lies compulsive gamblers tell? Read on.

Lie #1: I don’t have a gambling problem.

Anyone who flat-out denies they have a gambling problem, despite evidence to the contrary, is either well on their way to full-blown gambling addiction or is already there. By the time someone is deep into gambling, their behavior becomes consistent and predictable. They will do anything and say anything to get to their primary goal: gambling. That they stretch the truth or tell outright lies is an understatement. Gambling addicts, even after disastrous losses, bankruptcy and financial ruin, legal problems, deteriorating family and personal relationships, will often steadfastly maintain that they don’t have a gambling problem.

Denial is a coping mechanism the compulsive gambler uses to attempt to mask his or her problem. By hoping to keep the truth from coming out, the gambler tries to buy time – time he or she uses to keep on gambling. Thus, there’s self-denial and denial to others. Both types of denial are symptoms of many kinds of addiction, not just gambling addiction. The more a person swears they don’t have a problem – gambling or alcohol or drugs or other addictive behavior – the more likely it is that they do.

Lie #2: I can stop anytime I want.

Confronting a compulsive gambler – calling him or her on the indisputable facts that indicate gambling has become an addictive behavior – will usually generate this kind of lie in response. The gambler cannot admit to you or him/her self that there’s a problem, number one, and, number two, if that doesn’t work, he or she will profess vehemently that stopping is no problem. To prove it, the compulsive gambler may even stay away from the casino, sports book, Internet gaming, or track for a short period of time.
But the lure of cashing in on the big score, snagging the elusive prize is too great. Before long, the compulsive gambler is right back at it. He or she simply cannot resist the temptation. The urge to gamble has become a craving that gnaws incessantly on the consciousness. To ignore the craving is to suffer – and the compulsive gambler only wants the high that comes from gambling.

Lie #3: My gambling doesn’t hurt anyone.

Most addicts believe – some, even sincerely – that their addiction doesn’t hurt anyone. Some even believe their addiction doesn’t even hurt them. It’s just as true with compulsive gambling as addiction to alcohol, illicit drugs, prescription drugs used nonmedically, or other addictive behavior including compulsive sex, overwork, eating disorders, and so on. In fact, gambling addiction, like all addictions, is considered a family disease/disorder. What happens when one individual in the family is addicted impacts all members of the family.

What kinds of harm does this potentially involve? Depending on the length of time the individual has been gambling, and the other addictions the person may also have, the damage may be extensive. Compulsive gamblers often are addicted to alcohol, nicotine, or other harmful substances. This can result in physical deterioration to the addict as well as mental and emotional difficulties: cognitive impairment, difficulty concentrating, loss of memory, explosive rage, extreme mood swings, depression, psychosis, and thoughts of suicide, among others.

Dealing with the effects of gambling addiction, the family suffers right along with the gambler. As gambling takes up more and more of the individual’s life, taking care of family responsibilities becomes less important. Many gamblers lose their home, go bankrupt, get arrested for various crimes (embezzlement, fraud, theft, violence, DUls, etc.), lose their job or source of income, become violent and abusive to family members, lose their families. As a unit, the family often disintegrates. In fact, without treatment, compulsive gambling is a downward spiral that has, at its final stage, a predictable outcome for the individual: prison, commitment to a mental institution, or death.

Lie #4: I didn’t go gambling.

Meeting the gambler at the door and asking where he or she was is like asking for the inevitable lie: I didn’t go gambling. What else can the compulsive gambler say? Admitting that he or she went gambling is tantamount to admitting loss of control, an inability to set and keep boundaries, and a refusal to keep a promise. If there’s the smell of alcohol and the individual reeks of cigarette smoke or there are other telltale signs of substance use – and you know the person has a history of gambling – hearing the denial will only add fuel to the fire.

You know it’s an outright lie. Confrontation isn’t the way to deal with it. At least, it’s not the solution right now. You need to pick your time for the discussion, and it needs to be when the compulsive gambler is rational, calm, and able to carry on a conversation about the situation in a normal manner.
Lie #5: I have my gambling under control.

If you are the partner or spouse who relies on the compulsive gambler to take care of the bills and other financial responsibilities in the household, you may be tempted to believe this lie. He or she has unrestricted access to the checking and savings accounts, credit cards, lines of credit and other avenues. If, on the other hand, you are the one who controls the purse strings, so to speak, and you constantly give in to the requests for money, you are enabling the compulsive gambler to continue with his or her addictive behavior. You are complicit, codependent, and have just magnified the problem by making it easier for the compulsive gambler to continue.

When someone says they have their gambling under control, they are lying not only to you but also to themselves. A person who only buys a Lotto ticket once in a while will never make this statement. Someone who goes to the track daily, or can’t go by the casino without going in and gambling for hours, maxing out the ATM withdrawals, badgering friends for cash, is very likely to utter these words – and probably more than just a few times. After a while, they just aren’t believable anymore. And the evidence will mount to prove just how big a lie it is.

Lie #6: I didn’t touch our savings.

Desperation sets in the longer the compulsive gambler engages in the addictive behavior. Why is this? While the gambler may initially (in the early stages of gambling behavior) have some wins, the odds are literally stacked against him or her. Sooner or later, the house always wins. It doesn’t matter if the form of gambling is at an actual casino, or sports betting, or Internet gaming, the gambler’s luck eventually runs out.

But the gambler is convinced it’s only a temporary setback. If he or she just keeps gambling, the luck will return. There’s always the big score, the huge payout, just around the corner. All that’s needed is the infusion of cash.

Where to get the cash? Gamblers will rob savings accounts, jockey funds back and forth, hide the passbook or bank statements, and delay the inevitable – all in the futile attempt to keep you from the truth. If you hear your partner or spouse say he or she didn’t touch your savings, you’d better check it out with the bank yourself. Chances are this is just another lie the compulsive gambler tells you.

Lie #7: You won’t believe what happened...

The more deep in debt the compulsive gambler gets – and there’s no way around the fact that this will occur – the more elaborate and exaggerated the lies and stories he or she begins to concoct. There’ll be the robbery that occurred as he or she was depositing money in the bank – and now everything’s gone. Or someone stole his or her wallet and now the credit cards are gone. There may have been an unbelievable investment opportunity and it had a limited window, so he or she had to
jump in now or lose the chance... All this and more will come out of the compulsive gambler’s mouth as a way to explain what happened to your money.

If you hear the words: You won’t believe what happened... don’t believe it. No matter how convincing it sounds, it’s likely a lie.

Lie #8: My friend was in trouble and needed money.

This lie is an evergreen one that almost every compulsive gambler uses on more than one occasion. In fact, it’s so common that it’s nearly predictable that you will hear it sooner or later. Certainly there are times when your spouse or partner’s friends may be in trouble. Who doesn’t have such an experience? But when your partner is a compulsive gambler, you have reason to be suspicious. Naturally, you want to give someone you care about the benefit of the doubt, but after falling for this lie time and time again, you’re again only enabling the addictive behavior to continue.

The story about a friend being in trouble and needing money fast also falls into the lie category of you won’t believe what happened. Elaborate, exaggerated, and preposterous stories – all lies – are part and parcel of the compulsive gambler’s repertoire.

Lie #9: You can trust me now.

Trust is a fragile thing. Once you lose trust in another individual, it’s very hard to ever trust that person again. The closer you are to the person, especially if you are married or live with him or her, the more difficult it is to re-establish trust once it’s lost.

Compulsive gamblers need to be able to continue their addictive behavior. In order to do that, they either have to have a complicit or codependent partner, or they have to convince whomever they need to in order to continue to gain access to cash. Friends will eventually see through the lies and refuse to lend any more money to the gambler. After all, this money is rarely, if ever, repaid. They know it’s going for gambling, despite the lies the gambler tells. They gradually avoid the gambler, refusing to take his or her calls, quickly finding an excuse to leave if approached. There’s no trust there now.

But when you live with the compulsive gambler, have a relationship that’s lasted for some period of time, even have children with the gambler – you have a vested interest in maintaining the relationship. You obviously care for (or have cared for) the person. Your heart breaks over what’s been happening as your loved one slides deeper into gambling addiction. Time and time again, you’ve given in and accepted the lies. You’ve told yourself that it’s only a phase, or it’s not that bad, or he or she will outgrow it. Who’s lying to whom now?
Trust is earned through action. Trust is not gained through words. If your partner or spouse says you can trust him or her now, say that it will take time and action – getting treatment, quitting gambling – for you to again be able to place your trust in him/her.

**Lie #10: I’ll never gamble again.**

The compulsive gambler will tell you what you want to hear – even though it’s a lie. Usually, when you hear the person swear that he or she will never gamble again, it’s after a particularly disastrous loss, arrest, legal entanglement, loss of a job, or other serious consequence.

Instead of letting the lie go unchallenged, you will need to take a stand. Will you continue to put up with this addiction? What are your options? Only you can decide how you will handle your spouse or partner’s gambling addiction. While you certainly can’t force someone else – even one you love dearly – to quit gambling, you can decide how you are going to live your own life. You need to tell this individual how his or her gambling has hurt you and the family, how much you care about the person and want him/her to get help to overcome this situation. You can choose not to involve yourself in his/her behavior. No more lying to friends, family, employer or others about your partner’s gambling. No more excuses. No more looking the other way when the signs and consequences of mounting gambling debt are all around you.

If and when your spouse or partner is ready to admit to the problem and genuinely wants to get treatment to overcome gambling addiction, then you may begin to see a glimmer of hope on the horizon. The words alone shouldn’t convince you. In order for them to have meaning, they need to be backed up by action. Your spouse/partner needs to go into treatment. You can help by looking into available treatment facilities, either residential treatment facility for gambling addiction or outpatient treatment facilities. Remember that the gambling addict has to want to change in order for change to have a chance. He or she will need professional help in order to overcome his/her addiction. With treatment, not only will the addict learn about the disease of addiction, but he or she will also learn how to avoid triggers and learn and practice coping behaviors to prevent relapse. Part of the treatment process will be to identify the underlying reasons why compulsive gambling is so attractive and to work on overcoming those urges.

If the gambler is adamant about not getting treatment but still maintains he or she will never gamble again, there’s nothing you can do about it – for him or her. But there is something you can do for you. Attend Gam-Anon meetings. These are 12-step fellowship groups whose purpose is to help those family members and friends of gambling addicts cope with the situation. You cannot change the gambler, but you can change how you interact with the gambler and change your behaviors so that you are not enabling the gambling to continue.
Bottom line: When you’ve had enough of the lies, you must make a choice. If you set limits, be sure that you’re willing to enforce them. Don’t make a statement that you’re not able to back up. If you say that you will leave the compulsive gambler if he/she doesn’t get help, you’d better be ready to go through with it. Again, what you do is very much your choice. But you don’t have to try to wade through the emotional minefield on your own. Get help and support from others in your situation.

Will the lies ever stop? The good news is that gambling addiction is treatable. If your spouse or partner seeks and completes treatment and attends 12-step meetings (such as Gamblers Anonymous) in recovery, with your support and encouragement (and your own Gam-Anon meeting attendance), there’s a very good possibility that compulsive lies – and compulsive gambling – will become a thing of the past.