If your parent has a gambling problem

If your parent or guardian has a gambling problem, it’s probably changed your life in a lot of different ways.

Here are some ways that a parent’s gambling problem might have affected day-to-day life in your family:

- There might be a lot of arguing in your house
- People in your family might seem very stressed, irritable or upset
- Your family might be struggling to make ends meet
- You might see a lot less of your parent who is gambling

These are major changes that can be very difficult to deal with, and they’ll probably bring up a lot of different feelings for you. As hard as it is, try to keep in mind that feeling conflicted about your parent’s gambling problem is normal.

Here are some of the things you might be feeling:

- Lonely - “Nobody gets it.”
- Stressed - “I hate dealing with this on top of everything else.”
- Worried - “Can the collection agency take my computer?”
- Guilty - “If only I wasn’t so much trouble…”
- Confused - “I don’t know when she’s lying, and when she’s being honest.”
- Angry - “I hate her stupid card game!”
- Resentful - “How could she do this to me?”

Talking to someone about their gambling problem

With the right support and/or treatment, many people with gambling problems can recover and lead healthy lives with their families. However, as with any addiction, people with gambling problems have to be really ready before they can make a lasting change. People who are ready to get help usually realize that:

- They have a problem
- They can’t stop on their own
- They are ready to make major and difficult changes

Remember: There is nothing you can say or do to make your parent stop gambling.

Just as you didn’t cause your parent’s gambling addiction, you also can’t make them recover. Still, if you feel comfortable and safe, you can express your concern.
Here are some tips for good communication:

- Discuss your concerns by using specific examples of things you’ve noticed (for example, that they spend a lot of time gambling).
- Tell them that you are worried about them, but try not to judge or accuse them.
- Give them examples of how their gambling is affecting you (for example, that you are having trouble sleeping because you are worried about them or your family’s money).
- Consider providing them with some resources so they can get help on their own when they’re ready.

If you don’t feel comfortable approaching your parent, try talking to someone else in your family who might be able to approach them on your behalf.

If your parent is getting help

If your parent is getting help for a gambling problem or trying to change their gambling habits, try to be supportive and encouraging. Let them know how proud you are of the changes they’re making in their life and how those changes have affected you for the better, too. Your parent will appreciate the support.

Some things to remember about setbacks:

- Recovering from any problem can be a long and difficult process. No matter how your parent is doing as they try to get better, setbacks will happen.
- Many people with gambling problems try several times before they can change their behaviour for good.
- If your parent does have setback, it’s never because of anything you said or did. You’re never responsible for anyone else’s actions.

Taking care of yourself

If your parent isn’t ready to get help for their gambling problem yet, the best thing you can do is take care of your own feelings and safety.

Here are some things you can do to take care of yourself:

- Be kind to yourself. Doing things you know you enjoy, like playing your favourite album, or practicing a sport you like, will improve your mood and make it easier to handle the stress of your situation.
- Get support. Having a parent with a gambling problem can be difficult, especially if you feel like you have to handle it alone. You’ll feel less lonely – and have an easier time at home -- if you surround yourself with friends you feel understand and support you.
- Talk to someone you trust. Someone you trust, like another relative, can help you figure out ways to help yourself and your family. It can also help just to vent about your feelings.