

# Reporting Gambling:

## A Guide for Journalists

Evidence is growing of the substantial harm caused by gambling. This guide is designed to help journalists report on the topic in a fast-moving landscape, provide the latest facts, guidance, experts for comment and support links/helplines to use.

### Contents

1. Key Facts
2. Gambling Harm – Definition
3. Guidance: Three things to include, Keep in mind, Suggested phrases, Unhelpful terms and alternatives
4. Gambling Harm – Causes
5. Sources of Help for Readers
6. About Us

*For full sources and the evidence behind this guide, see the companion [Evidence document](#)*

28 May 2026

# Quick Reference

At-a-glance reminders for newsrooms. Full guidance follows in the rest of this document.

## Three things to include

### Do not frame gambling as harmless

Acknowledge the very real financial, health and social consequences.

### Include a support message and link

Add the helpline to any story about gambling harm.

### Always get a comment from the gambling company

On how the harm was allowed to happen, given their responsibility to prevent it.

## Language — avoid / use instead

Avoid	Use instead
'Problem gambler'	'A person harmed by gambling', or 'a person experiencing a gambling problem', or 'harmful gambling'
'Compulsive gambler' / 'Pathological gambler'	For someone at the severe end, 'a person with gambling disorder'
'Gambling addict' (as a label)	'A man whose life was ruined by gambling', or 'someone with an addiction to gambling'

## Ready-to-use signposting text

*"Gambling can be harmful and addictive and can damage families and friends too. If you or someone you know needs help, contact The National Gambling Helpline **0808 8020 133**."*

Full sources and the principles behind this guidance are in the companion **Evidence document**.

# Voices on This Issue

The following statements are from experts, advocates, and people with lived experience of gambling harm.

*"The British public is increasingly concerned about the negative effects of the changing gambling landscape on society. Many have experienced these impacts themselves or know someone who has. This guidance supports journalists and provides readers with accurate and informative coverage of this important issue."*

— The Rt Hon. the Lord Foster of Bath, Chair of Peers for Gambling Reform

*"Digitalisation has transformed gambling, but the consequences of this shift and its effects on consumers have not yet been fully recognised and involve stories yet to be told. These guidelines are relevant across all areas of news because gambling touches all areas of society."*

— Heather Wardle, Professor of Gambling Research and Policy, University of Glasgow, Chair of the Lancet Public Health Commission on Gambling

## People with lived experience of gambling harm have said:

*"I came off after the interview and felt, 'You've made me feel like crap. You want to portray me in a way that's not me'. Media want gambling harm sensationalised. The story focused on the debt rather than emotionally what gambling did to me."*

— Anonymous

*"After I appeared in the news, I felt like wherever I went, I was being judged. I was concerned that, because people have only read this one-sided, damaging version of the story, that people would verbally attack me or say things about my child."*

— Anonymous

*"I know it's their job to report, to sell news. But I think the media need to think really hard about the families that are behind the individuals."*

— Anonymous

*"The journalists did not stigmatise me at all, and they allowed me to say what I was comfortable with. They wanted to show that there's a reason behind gambling harm, and it can impact your future life."*

— Anonymous

# Key Facts

'Problem gambling' is shown in quotation marks where it refers to a survey measure (the Problem Gambling Severity Index, PGSI), not a term we recommend — see [Unhelpful Terms and Alternatives](#).

Full context for the figures below is in the companion [Evidence document](#).

## £16.8 billion

Consumers' net losses to gambling companies in Great Britain, 2024/5

### Gambling in Great Britain

- Four out of five people in Great Britain feel there are too many opportunities to gamble nowadays, and only 12% believe that gambling is good for society, according to the Gambling Commission.
- A 2025 survey found nearly two-thirds of Britons think that gambling has a somewhat or very negative effect on people, while only one in ten say it has a positive one. 65% said they want to see stricter regulation on the gambling industry, with support from across the political spectrum.
- Between 1.2 and 1.7 million adults (2.7%) are estimated to experience 'problem gambling' in Britain, and around a further 6 million people (11.5%) are at risk. These rates of harm include those who do not gamble, gamble only occasionally or on the national lottery only. ([Gambling Survey for Great Britain](#))
- In Great Britain, 17% of adults gamble weekly on activities besides lotteries. Among this group, one in six experience 'problem gambling' and more than half (54%) are experiencing at-risk gambling.
- Fast, continuous gambling activities carry up to five times the likelihood of experiencing 'problem gambling' than others, irrespective of how frequently or how many different types of gambling someone takes part in and age, gender, socio-economic position and ethnicity.

### Losses to the Public

- Since the Gambling Act 2005 relaxed rules on industry, British consumers' net losses to gambling companies have risen from £8.4 billion in 2008 to £16.8 billion in 2024/5 ([Industry Statistics](#)).
- Global net losses by individuals are projected to reach £530 billion by 2028 ([Lancet Public Health Commission on Gambling](#)).

### Gambling Harm

- In 2024, of those adults in Great Britain who gambled in the past 12 months, an estimated 2.38 million borrowed money or used savings to gamble, and 459,000 lost something of significant value such as a home, business, car or been declared bankrupt because of gambling.
- Analysis of 7 years of banking transaction data for 6.5 million individuals showed that a 10%-point increase in gambling spend was associated with an increase in payday loan uptake by 51.5%.
- This study found that gambling was linked with fewer social activities and higher rates of future unemployment and physical disability, irrespective of age, gender or annual income.
- At the highest levels, gambling 30% or more of annual expenditure, the likelihood of mortality is about one-third higher, for both men and women, younger and older.

# Key Facts (continued)

**144,000 children**

and adolescents in Great Britain experiencing 'problem gambling' (a further 264,000 at risk)

## Affected Others

- It is estimated that for each person experiencing harmful gambling, six other people close to them are affected.
- About half of the harm experienced by the person who gambles, is also experienced by those close to them.
- Around 2 million children may be living in households with an adult experiencing 'problem gambling', based on YouGov data.
- This YouGov survey found the number of people affected by family or friend's gambling has increased from 6% in 2020 to 8% in 2024 – equivalent to an estimated 4.3 million adults in Great Britain.

## Younger People

- Younger adults aged 18–34 are more likely to be involved in higher-risk gambling such as casino, slots and in-play betting, while older generations are more likely to play the national lottery only.
- Those 18–24 are more than six times as likely to experience 'problem gambling' and eight times more likely to experience serious adverse consequences than those over 55.
- In 2025, three in ten (30%) of 11- to 17-year-olds spent their own money on any gambling in the last 12 months.
- Approximately 144,000 (1.2%) of children and adolescents in Great Britain are experiencing 'problem gambling', and another 264,000 (2.2%) are experiencing 'at risk' gambling.

## Gambling and Public Health

- In 2024, a [Lancet Commission](#) described gambling as a serious global public health issue.
- In 2025, the UK government introduced a [compulsory levy on gambling companies](#) to provide funding for independent research, prevention of harm and NHS treatment.
- In the same year, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence ([NICE](#)) published guidelines on how to treat gambling harm.

# Key Facts (continued)

**117–496**

gambling-related suicides a year in England

## Suicide and Gambling

- Gambling harm is identified as one of six common risk factors for suicide in the 2023 [National Suicide Prevention Strategy](#) for England.
- There are between 117 and 496 gambling-related suicides a year in England.
- In a study tracking young adults over time, those whose gambling harms increased were almost 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than those whose gambling was unchanged.

## Coroner Inquests: Gambling-Related Deaths

Increasingly Coroners are linking suicide with gambling disorder and highlighting the responsibility of gambling companies. Below are a few examples.

### **Luke Ashton, 40 — Leicester (Died 2021)**

In 2023, the [coroner expressed concerns](#) that Betfair, part of Flutter UK & Ireland, did not intervene in his gambling when they should have, missing opportunities that could have prevented his suicide.

### **Jack Ritchie, 24 — Sheffield (Died 2017)**

The [coroner ruled](#) that the system of regulation did not stop him gambling when he was obviously addicted to gambling.

### **Lee Adams, 36 — London (Died 2020)**

After making 628 bets in an hour, the [coroner found](#) there were missed opportunities by Virgin Games, owned by Gamesys Operations Ltd, and was surprised the levels of gambling did not trigger further interaction or intervention.

# Gambling Harm – Definition

Gambling is not an ordinary kind of leisure; it can be harmful and addictive.

'Gambling harms' are the negative impacts from gambling and go beyond the person who gambles, impacting families, friends and society more widely. These can include:

- Physical and mental health problems
- Financial difficulties, debt or ruin
- Poor work/study performance and job loss
- Relationship and family breakdown
- Isolation
- Homelessness, crime, imprisonment, domestic violence and suicide

Gambling can become a clinically recognised addiction, known as gambling disorder, with constant preoccupation and an inability to stop despite the damage it causes. Signs include:

- Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money
- Feeling irritable when trying not to gamble
- Gambling to escape problems
- After losing money, often returning to get even
- Hiding gambling from others

Importantly, harm can occur with any gambling, not just addiction and affects many of those who gamble but would not be diagnosed with gambling disorder. Those experiencing gambling disorder may experience more harm individually, but most gambling harm in society comes from those experiencing lower-level harms, because this affects many more people.

## Guidance for Stories

### Three Things to Include

#### **Do not frame gambling as harmless**

Acknowledge the overall financial losses to consumers and the very real negative financial, health and social consequences to individuals and families.

#### **Include this message and link to support**

*Ready-to-use text*

*"Gambling can be harmful and addictive and can damage families and friends too. If you or someone you know needs help, contact The National Gambling Helpline 0808 8020 133."*

#### **Always get a comment from the gambling company**

In stories with people harmed by gambling, always get a comment from the gambling company as to why they enabled someone to gamble dangerously when safeguards should prevent this. Seek comment from the Gambling Commission as to the extent gambling regulation is protecting public health, children and vulnerable people, ensuring gambling is fair to consumers and not linked with crime.

# Guidance for Stories (continued)

## Keep in Mind

### **Be aware of how you reflect the industry**

Don't advertise/glamorise companies by emphasising winning or illustrating stories with pictures such as casinos, champagne and sports cars. Don't repeat industry messages, such as 'gamble responsibly', which puts the blame on the individual when companies have a responsibility to stop people from gambling harmfully. Like tobacco and alcohol companies, the gambling industry uses lobbyists, creates its own messaging and funds research.

### **Don't perpetuate stereotypes**

Don't perpetuate stereotypes of people harmed by gambling as older, white men with dramatic losses. Women as well as men, from all classes, occupations and ethnic groups, are affected and younger generations are experiencing the greatest harm with the digital transformation of gambling. Gambling harm is not just about losing money and is not necessarily about people who lose huge amounts. Often, the amounts lost may appear small, but they are devastating, with significant impacts on their lives and the lives of others.

### **Be sensitive to avoid worsening harm**

Seeing yourself or other people like you described in very judgemental ways can be triggering and can cause further harm to people already vulnerable due to gambling harm. Stigma and discrimination add damage to their mental health, relationships and work opportunities and prevent them from accessing support and treatment.

### **Treat interviewees as you would other vulnerable people**

You wouldn't call a potential suicidal person 'weak' or 'reckless', nor a morbidly obese person 'greedy.' Don't use terms like these for people harmed by gambling. Treat interviewees as you would other vulnerable people, such as those bereaved, people with mental health or substance use issues.

### **Close comments on online stories about gambling**

Close comments on online stories about gambling to reduce further harm, judgement, and stigma.

### **Follow the Samaritans' guidelines on reporting suicide**

Follow the [Samaritans' guidelines on reporting suicide](#) for stories on gambling-related suicide and consider using a trigger warning in a story about gambling harm, particularly if it relates to a suicide attempt/self-harm.

# Suggested Phrases for Context

The following suggested phrases can be added to specific types of stories to provide important context for readers.

## 1. In stories about big gambling losses by celebrities/sports stars, consider adding:

*"Relatively small losses, when happening regularly, or to someone on a low income, can be devastating and lead to financial and mental health struggles. The Gambling Commission considered net losses of £125 a month or £500 a year to be possible signs of unaffordable gambling, considering 25% of the UK population has less than £125 discretionary income per month, and 9% have no discretionary income."*

## 2. In stories about huge wins, consider adding:

*"In Great Britain, consumers' net losses to gambling companies rose from £8.4 billion in 2008 to £16.8 billion in 2024/5, according to the Gambling Commission."*

## 3. In court and crime stories linked to gambling, consider adding:

*"Gambling companies are required to monitor customers for vulnerabilities and patterns of harmful gambling behaviour, interact with them to minimise the risk of harm and check the source of their funds. If they do not, the companies are failing in their statutory obligations. The Gambling Commission has a responsibility in law to prevent gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder or being used to support crime."*

## 4. In stories where someone is criticised or blamed for gambling losses/behaviour, consider adding:

*"Gambling disorder is a recognised medical condition with an increased suicide risk. Signs of addiction include repeated gambling that continues despite creating multiple problems in a person's life, preoccupation, and an inability to stop. For help, contact The National Gambling Helpline on **0808 8020 133**."*

# Unhelpful Terms and Alternatives

'**Problem gambler**' is an outdated term which blames and shames the person concerned, when in fact a multitude of commercial, social and psychological factors are at play. It stems from academic usage in the 1980s/90s. Unfortunately the language continues in research because it is part of a still commonly used survey tool, called the [Problem Gambling Severity Index \(PGSI\)](#).

**Compulsive/Pathological Gambler** are also outdated for the same reason.

Avoid	Use Instead
'Problem gambler'	'A person harmed by gambling', or 'a person experiencing a gambling problem', or 'harmful gambling'
'Compulsive gambler' / 'Pathological gambler'	For someone at the severe end, use 'a person with gambling disorder'
'Gambling addict' (as a label)	'A man whose life was ruined by gambling', or 'someone with an addiction to gambling'

Describing someone as a '**gambling addict**' is pejorative. Consider softening the language, turning the judgement away from the individual, e.g. **a man whose life was ruined by gambling**, or **someone with an addiction to gambling**. In interviews, ask the person how they want to be described.

# Gambling Harm – Causes

**Gambling harm is not caused by individual weakness; it's the product of an interaction between gambling, people and their environments.**

The most powerful and consistent risk factor for gambling problems is continuous play games such as slots, casino games or in-play betting. Risk also comes with how frequently and for how long someone gambles, how much they spend as a proportion of income, and the number of different activities they take part in. The problem is more harmful gambling is more profitable for gambling companies.

## Commercial Factors

The design of digital gambling products, making them rapid and continuous, and their wide availability via smartphones and personal devices, can make them highly addictive. Combined with easy access to credit and insufficient safeguards mean it is possible for anyone to gamble dangerously.

Gambling companies use sophisticated psychological and technological techniques to hijack the human reward system and draw people in, accompanied by intensive marketing and harnessing commercial arrangements with media and sports to reach huge audiences – all driven by data and AI.

They also use clever slogans in PR and marketing, placing the onus on the individual, such as 'gamble responsibly' and 'gamble safely,' indirectly blaming the player if they are harmed.

## Regulatory Factors

Gambling companies are required by law and regulation to intervene when people show signs of gambling harm and to verify the source of their funds. But scrutiny of gambling companies is rarely raised when discussing harm or addiction, or in courts when an individual is accused of a crime linked to gambling.

## Psychological Factors

Neurodiversity, stress, trauma, mental health challenges or hormonal and brain chemistry imbalances can increase vulnerability to gambling harm, and to the techniques used by industry.

## Social Factors

Where gambling is part of peer groups, such as at sports clubs and games, cultural attitudes and advertising/sponsorship exposure can normalise gambling and mask the risks.

## Economic Factors

Financial stress or experiencing poverty can make gambling appear to be a solution to money problems, even when it increases harm. Gambling harm is associated with being less affluent, living in a deprived area and having less education.

## Political Factors

Government decisions and policies shape the commercial, economic and social factors - and influence how gambling harm is distributed across society. Gambling harm makes health and social disparities between groups worse.

# Sources of Help for Readers

If you or someone you know needs help with gambling harm, the following services are available.

## The National Gambling Helpline

Run by GamCare

**0808 8020 133**

## GambleAware

National Gambling Support Network service helpline on **0808 8020 133** or live chat on

<https://www.gambleaware.org/>

## The NHS Website

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/addiction-support/gambling-addiction/>

## The NHS Primary Care Gambling Service

<https://www.primarycaregamblingservice.co.uk/>

# About Us

This guide was produced by **Tackling Gambling Stigma** <https://tacklinggamblingstigma.com/>, a not-for-profit organisation aiming to remove the stigma and discrimination related to gambling harm. Founded in 2021 by Clare Wyllie and Alexander Källman, they have more than a decade of experience in tackling gambling-related harm. Research was conducted by Dr Elizabeth Killick and Michelle Potiaumpai. Advisors were Nicola Peckett, Communications Director, previously responsible for Samaritans media guidelines on suicide, Dr Annie-Claude Savard, Associate Professor, School of Social Work and Criminology, Laval University, Matt Zarb Cousins, Gamban and Nadine Ashworth, Thrivin' Together. Journalist Jacqui Thornton acted as a consultant, co-author and liaison with print journalists who advised on these guidelines.

This project was funded by the philanthropist Derek Webb, who had no involvement in the design, delivery, or content of the work, which was carried out independently by Tackling Gambling Stigma. This evidence-based resource was developed based on an analysis of news coverage of gambling and input from:

- Media professionals (editors, sub-editors, journalists) across a range of outlets.
- People with lived experience of gambling harm, personally or as affected others.
- The public (people who gamble and those who do not).
- Public health professionals, medical professionals, parliamentarians, government officials and gambling reform advocates.
- Good practice from related fields (suicide and mental health reporting).

*Companion: Evidence document can be found at [www.reportinggambling.org](http://www.reportinggambling.org)*