

Why Is It an Issue for Firefighters?

Firefighting is a high-stress profession that can make you more susceptible to gambling addiction for many reasons:

- **Stress relief:** The intense nature of firefighting can lead some to seek escape and stress relief through gambling.
- **Adrenaline rush:** Firefighters are accustomed to high-pressure situations. Gambling can provide a similar adrenaline rush during off-duty hours.
- **Shift work:** Irregular work schedules can lead to increased free time and potential boredom, which may be filled with gambling activities.
- **Camaraderie:** Gambling can become a social activity among colleagues, potentially normalizing excessive betting.
- **PTSD and mental health:** Exposure to traumatic events can increase the risk of developing addictive behaviors, including problem gambling.

Know the Signs

Recognizing the signs of problem gambling is crucial for early intervention. If you or a fellow firefighter exhibit these behaviors, it may indicate a gambling problem:

- Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money
- Unsuccessful attempts to control, cut back, or stop gambling
- Restlessness or irritability when trying to reduce gambling
- Gambling to escape problems or relieve negative emotions
- Chasing losses by continuing to gamble
- Lying to family members or colleagues about gambling habits
- Jeopardizing or losing important relationships or career opportunities due to gambling
- Relying on others to provide money to alleviate financial troubles caused by gambling
- Neglecting work responsibilities or family obligations due to gambling

RESOURCES

National Council on Problem Gambling

www.ncpgambling.org
1-800-522-4700

Chat: www.ncpgambling.org/chat

Gamblers Anonymous

www.gamblersanonymous.org
Find local meetings and online support groups

International Association of Fire Fighters

www.iaff.org/behavioral-health/

in the know

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FIREFIGHTERS AND GAMBLING

Don't Risk Your Future

Gambling and Relationships

The cost of gambling goes beyond your finances. It can, and very often does, take a major toll on your most important relationships for a variety of reasons:

- **Financial strain:** Gambling can drain shared financial resources, leading to debt, inability to pay bills, or loss of savings.
- **Trust issues:** Problem gamblers often lie about their gambling activities or hide financial losses.
- **Emotional distance:** The gambler may become preoccupied with gambling, leading to emotional withdrawal from their partner.
- **Mood swings and irritability:** The ups and downs of gambling can cause volatile emotions in the gambler. Partners may find it difficult to cope with these unpredictable mood changes.

- **Neglect of responsibilities:** Problem gamblers may neglect household duties, child care, or work responsibilities.
- **Conflict:** Arguments about gambling and its consequences can become frequent and intense. This ongoing conflict can erode the relationship.
- **Co-dependency:** Partners might enable the gambling behavior by covering up for the gambler or bailing them out of financial troubles.
- **Emotional and physical health issues:** The stress of dealing with a partner's gambling problem can lead to anxiety, depression, and physical health problems for both parties.
- **Loss of intimacy:** The secrecy, stress, and emotional distance associated with problem gambling can significantly reduce intimacy in the relationship.
- **Legal issues:** In severe cases, gambling-related legal problems (e.g., theft to fund gambling) can put additional strain on the relationship.

Open communication is crucial. Both partners need to discuss the issue honestly and without judgment. Remember, while gambling can severely strain a relationship, many couples have successfully overcome this challenge with proper support and commitment to change.

How to Help Yourself and Others

Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. As firefighters, you dedicate your lives to helping others – it's okay to ask for help when you need it, too. If you're concerned about a colleague, approach them with compassion and offer support.

Encourage them to seek professional help and use the resources available to them. With the right support and commitment, recovery from gambling addiction is possible.

Here are some steps to overcoming a gambling problem:

- **Acknowledge the problem:** The first step is admitting that gambling has become an issue in your life.
- **Seek professional help:** Consult with a mental health professional or gambling addiction specialist.
- **Join support groups:** Attend Gamblers Anonymous meetings or other support groups for individuals with gambling problems.
- **Identify triggers:** Recognize situations, emotions, or thoughts that trigger the urge to gamble, and develop strategies to cope with them.
- **Practice financial responsibility:** Temporarily give control of your finances to a trusted family member or friend.
- **Find alternative activities:** Replace gambling with healthy activities that provide similar excitement or relaxation.
- **Strengthen support systems:** Lean on family, friends, and colleagues for emotional support during recovery.
- **Set realistic goals:** Establish short-term and long-term goals for recovery and celebrate small victories.
- **Practice self-care:** Prioritize your physical and mental well-being through exercise, proper nutrition, and stress-management techniques.

