

Parents' Guide to Addiction

Supporting a child or adult child with gaming, gambling or compulsive behaviour

Parents can feel powerless when a child or adult child becomes absorbed in gaming, gambling, spending, pornography, social media or another compulsive behaviour. Conflict can quickly become focused on taking devices away or demanding promises. This guide offers a calmer framework: understand the need, reduce harm, set boundaries and keep connection where it is safe to do so.

Look at function and impact

Ask what the behaviour provides and what it is displacing. Consider sleep, school or work, food, hygiene, friendships, movement, finances, mood and family connection rather than judging one number of hours in isolation.

Gaming and digital behaviour

For younger people, predictable routines often work better than sudden punishment: protected sleep, meals, education, movement and agreed screen periods. Take an interest in what they enjoy about gaming as well as what worries you.

Gambling and money

Treat access to gambling and unexplained debt seriously. Protect household finances and seek specialist gambling support. With adult children, avoid repeatedly paying gambling debts without a wider recovery plan.

Pornography and sexual content

Keep conversations age-appropriate, calm and non-shaming. For minors, safeguarding and online safety are important. For adults, focus on loss of control, impact, consent, secrecy and wellbeing rather than moral judgement.

Boundaries with adult children

You can decide what happens in your home and what you fund. Be specific and consistent. Boundaries are easier to understand when they describe your action rather than trying to control another adult.

Connection alongside change

Notice strengths and moments of engagement outside the addiction. Recovery needs somewhere to go: relationships, interests, meaningful activity, treatment and a sense of identity beyond the problem.

A practical support plan

You cannot do recovery for somebody else, but you can decide how you will respond.

What I am most worried about	
What is within my control	
What is not within my control	
My financial / home boundaries	
Who I can speak to	
What I will do in a crisis	
One thing I need for myself	

Books that may help

Beyond Addiction

Jeffrey Foote et al.

A compassionate guide for families wanting to encourage change.

Changing for Good

James Prochaska, John Norcross & Carlo DiClemente

Helpful for understanding readiness and resistance.

Reset Your Child's Brain

Victoria Dunckley

Discusses screen-related difficulties; some claims are debated, so use selectively alongside mainstream clinical guidance rather than as a sole treatment plan.

Help and information

GP / NHS	Ask for help where behaviour is significantly affecting mental health or functioning.
Adfam	Support for families affected by addiction, including gambling.
SMART Family & Friends	Peer and practical family support.
NHS gambling services	Specialist help for gambling harm and affected family members.
School / safeguarding team	For a child or teenager, involve appropriate professionals when safety, exploitation or serious functioning is affected.

If there is immediate danger, serious violence, collapse, suspected overdose, seizure, severe breathing difficulty or an acute mental-health crisis, seek urgent help. In the UK, call 999 when life is at risk.

Support Hub educational resource — not a replacement for individual medical, safeguarding, legal or emergency advice.