Dear Alice,

Do you know of any sites that deal with gambling addictions? My boyfriend's mother is very addicted and needs serious help. She just recently refinanced the house that we are to live in when we're married. I'm scared one day we'll come home and everything will be gone. If you can give me some info that can help that would be great. Or if you know some sites, it would help, too.

Sincerely,

LA

Answer

Dear LA,

Kudos to you for reaching out about your concern for your partner's mother! Many people are able to enjoy gambling once in a while, without harmful side effects. However, when the hobby becomes compulsive — feeling the urge to gamble regardless of negative consequences — it's best to seek help from a mental health professional. Compulsive gambling can affect relationships, finances, career, physical health, and mental health. Some of the common treatments to help compulsive gamblers recover include therapy, medication, support groups, or a combination of these methods. Just as your partner's mother may need help if she decides to stop gambling, it can be helpful for you and your partner to seek out help during this time to protect yourselves emotionally and financially. Read on for more information about compulsive gambling, as well as some steps that you and your partner can take to help yourselves during this time.

There's no one specific population of people who are more likely to engage in compulsive gambling, though some factors increase the risk of this behavior. These factors include: having other mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder; starting gambling at a young age; being surrounded by others who experience compulsive gambling; having a competitive or impulsive personality; and taking medications for Parkinson's disease and restless leg syndrome.
Some symptoms of compulsive gambling include:

- Thinking about gambling all the time
- Feeling like gambling isn't thrilling or fun without increasing the amount of money each time
- Lack of success or feelings of irritability, in ending or decreasing gambling
- Attempting to get rid of other negative feelings or "escape" through gambling
- Gambling to make up for money lost previously
- Hiding the habit from loved ones or straining relationships with others
- Taking illegal actions, such as theft, or needing to borrow money from others to make up for gambling losses

List adapted from Mayo Clinic [2].

Those who gamble compulsively may find that seeking help is difficult without the support of family and friends. You can assist in this process for your partner's mother by offering some resources for support and treatment. The National Council on Problem Gambling [3] provides some resources, such as a hotline, various screening tools, and tools to find a treatment facility or mental health professional who can help. Additionally, there are many programs available to both gamblers and their family and friends. People close to compulsive gamblers may also benefit from seeking assistance from a mental health professional in coping with their loved one's addiction.

While it's great that you want to help your partner's mother, you may also want to think about how you can take care of yourself during this time. It's key to remember that while you can provide resources to her on how to quit gambling and seek help, only she can make that decision for herself. Be sure to take care of your own emotional needs, and also look into how you can protect yourself financially. You may find it beneficial to seek assistance from a mental health professional in order to cope with her compulsive gambling. If you haven't already, you may want to let her know how her gambling is affecting you and the emotional toll that it's taking on your and your partner. You can share your concerns with her about how it'll affect you all in the present as well as the financial implications it'll have for the future. You can also offer your own support to help her quit gambling. If she's open to support, you and your partner could offer to assist her with finances and manage the living expenses to ensure some stability. Regardless of her interest in support, you can communicate some financial boundaries in your relationship and in what ways you will or won't help her in order to protect both of your finances and living situation. You may also want to work with your partner to figure out your own finances and make preparations in case the living situation you were planning on doesn't pan out.

If you have additional questions about these kinds of behaviors, be sure to check out the Obsessive & Compulsive Behaviors [4] section in the Go Ask Alice! archives. Best of luck getting help for your partner's mother.

Take care,

Alice!
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Emotional Health [5]
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Types of therapists [9]
Social support [10]
Help! I think I have a TV show obsession! [11]
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Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [13]
Mental Health Services (CUIMC) [14]
Addiction Information & Management Strategies (AIMS) (CUIMC) [15]
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