

SAMARITANS

Reducing the risk of gambling related suicide

**Practical guidance for
gambling operators**

Introduction

Suicide is a major public health issue and around 6,000 people in the UK take their own life every year. However, suicide is not inevitable, it is preventable. In the gambling environment many people play safely, but gambling can expose anyone to harms that contribute to the risk of suicide. There is a clear association between gambling-related harms and suicide. All gambling operators must take this seriously and take action which could save lives.

Samaritans' vision is that fewer people die by suicide. Our approach to suicide prevention is drawn from decades of research and experience. This guidance has been developed through consultation with operators, the regulator, support services and people who have directly experienced gambling-related harms, including those bereaved by suicide and those who have experienced suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Who is this guidance for?

This practical guidance is relevant for all gambling industry operators. Operating procedures may differ between land based and online environments, and some sections will be more relevant to certain operators, but there will be useful actions that everyone can take.

To promote excellence in suicide prevention, industry should embed the practical recommendations we outline in innovative ways and strive for continual improvements, whilst ensuring all commitments are being met under the regulatory framework.



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1. Understand the risk and impact of suicide

All operators should take proactive steps to ensure they understand gambling-related harms and the link between gambling and suicidal behaviour. Suicidal behaviour can include self-harm, having a plan to take your own life and suicide attempts. Gambling-related harms are the negative impacts from gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and society. For every customer directly experiencing gambling-related harms, at least six other people will be negatively affected. Gambling-related harms have many forms and evidence increasingly shows that they contribute to suicidal behaviour and a loss of life by suicide. Harm to an individual includes but is not limited to:

- Isolation and loneliness
- Shame
- Distress
- Hopelessness
- Relationship breakdown
- Domestic violence
- Loss of education
- Substance misuse
- Anger
- Depression
- Loss of employment
- Crime
- Unmanageable debt
- Self-harm

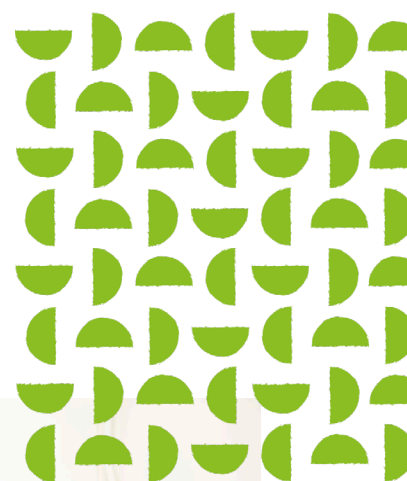
These factors can contribute to a person feeling suicidal and for some, it may result in them taking their own lives, devastating families and communities. The gambling industry must understand the potential risk of suicide in order to try and prevent it. Operators have an obligation to protect vulnerable people.

The most recent Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) to include gambling revealed that people experiencing gambling-related harms were five times more likely to have suicidal thoughts than other customers. One in twenty had attempted suicide. More recent evidence shows different groups transition in and out of harmful levels of gambling every year and are likely to experience a lower life expectancy. Understanding the association between gambling-related harms and suicide is critical for industry to:

- Identify specific risks associated with different gambling environments, products and services.
- Learn how best to reduce these risks, including through excellent customer service interaction, and safer product design and marketing.
- Build a robust suicide prevention strategy able to adapt within an evolving industry.



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2. Have a robust suicide prevention policy to help safeguard customers and staff

All operators should develop and implement clear policies to help prevent suicide. Operators can be proactive in limiting the harms that can contribute to the risk of suicide. Operators should be transparent about their policies and make them available to other operators and industry stakeholders to encourage consistent best practice.

Policies should:

Be clear on the links between gambling-related harms and suicidal behaviour

- Gambling-related harms are the negative impacts from gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and society.
- Suicide is complex and people can experience a range of feelings and behaviours related to suicide, from having thoughts about taking their own lives, to making a plan, to actually attempting suicide.
- Gambling-related harms interact with wider life circumstances and risk factors that increase a customer's vulnerability and risk of suicide.

Establish clear accountability for suicide prevention

- Every operator should have a named member of the senior leadership team with responsibility for reducing the risk of suicide.

Prioritise suicide prevention in customer interactions

- Operators might not be aware of or see external factors affecting a customer. The reasons for suicide are complex so it is essential to be cautious and considerate in all customer interactions.

Define and display the mechanisms operators use to reduce the risk of gambling-related harms and suicide

- Promote contact and signposting support for staff and customers that raises awareness of suicide prevention in the gambling environment.
- Provide suicide prevention training and support for all staff. **Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans** is available for all operators.
- Undertake gambling-related harms risk assessments for all products, marketing and services.

Establish transparency in suicide prevention strategy

- Share suicide prevention strategies that include product and marketing safety assessments with wider industry to promote consistent best practice.

Policies should be informed and developed in consultation with subject matter experts. Experts may help to ensure operators recognise the input of people who have experienced gambling-related harms and suicide. Policies should be regularly reviewed and reflect the latest evidence and data in suicide prevention.

3. Challenge stigma around suicidal behaviour to break down barriers to difficult conversations

Breaking the stigma around suicide and gambling-related harms is crucial for any prevention strategy to be successful. Stigma involves negative attitudes or discrimination against an individual or group of people based on a distinguishing characteristic, such as experiencing suicidal thoughts. Not feeling able to discuss suicide and gambling-related harms may intensify issues. Staff may find it hard to break down barriers to difficult conversations and customers who have had suicidal thoughts have talked about the impact this fear of speaking openly has on their own wellbeing.

This stigma extends to others affected, including friends and family. Many feel industry messaging, for example 'problem gambling', blames the individual and places protection and prevention responsibility solely on the customer. Customers experiencing suicidal thoughts will often hide their struggles as a result. Family and friends may be unaware or won't know how to talk about gambling-related harms and suicide for fear of being judged or discriminated against. All the while distressed customers may continue to gamble at harmful levels, increasing the risk of suicide without operator knowledge.

To reduce stigma, operators should:

Ensure senior leaders normalise conversations to build operator confidence at all levels

Beginning with the CEO, senior leaders should talk openly about suicide and gambling-related harms and avoid the term 'problem gambler'. Talking about suicide and gambling-related harms will help leaders and staff talk openly and with confidence. This can encourage open discussions amongst staff and managers which can be used to help influence harm prevention. We do not expect operators to be experts in suicide prevention. Participating in **Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans** for the gambling industry will ensure leaders and staff can talk openly and with confidence.

Share everything learnt from open discussion with the wider gambling environment

Operators should make their learning available so that others working in the gambling environment can learn from it. Sharing knowledge will help to create consistency in suicide prevention throughout the gambling environment. It will also encourage customer confidence in the industry's commitment to safer gambling.

Be open and communicate suicide prevention strategy with customers

Communicating a suicide prevention strategy will help de-stigmatise conversations around suicide within the wider gambling environment. This will provide reassurance to staff and customers and encourage proactive interventions to support safer gambling. To help safely communicate the topic of suicide, operators should consult **Samaritans' Media Guidelines**.

4. Raise awareness of suicide risk in the gambling environment

Operators and other industry stakeholders should:

Raise awareness with the help of staff, customers, and those with lived experience of suicide

Personal stories from those with experience of gambling-related harms, suicidal thoughts or who have been bereaved by suicide can be extremely powerful in helping operators understand the risks of gambling and suicide. They can also help raise awareness in a way that customers can relate and respond to.

Establish clear signposting information and available support for customers

Signposting should be highly visible and easily differentiated from gambling products and promotions. There is free, non-judgemental support available for customers, which you can signpost them to, day or night, 365 days a year. Anyone struggling to cope or who is feeling suicidal can call Samaritans on 116 123. Anyone requiring practical advice or treatment on any gambling-related issues can contact the National Gambling Helpline on 0808 8020 133.

Normalise harm and suicide prevention measures during all customer onboarding

Prevention information and support should be communicated to customers during the sign up process and throughout the customer journey. Customers should come to expect support interactions as a normal part of the gambling environment. Players should expect updates, interactions with staff, and information and support at regular intervals during their play time.

Recognise and communicate the additional risks customers are exposed to with 24/7 gambling

The 24/7 availability of gambling exposes players to increased risks of experiencing gambling-related harms and/or suicide. Operators must recognise these risks and communicate them clearly amongst customers and staff to support proactive interactions and timely interventions.



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5. Provide suicide prevention training and robust support measures for all gambling industry staff

All operators must ensure that staff are trained to a level where they feel supported in identifying and reporting customer behaviour that indicates a risk of suicidal thoughts. Training should give staff the confidence to offer in the moment emotional support to any customer in crisis, and signpost or transfer customers safely and effectively to further support. Training is especially important for all customer facing staff.

Training and support measures should include:

Awareness raising through e-Learning for all staff

As a minimum all gambling industry staff in a customer facing role should complete **Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans**. This training is to raise awareness, build knowledge, normalise conversations around suicide prevention and develop staff confidence when dealing with distressed customers.

Face-to-face training to develop skills

For those in the gambling industry that need a more in-depth level of training, such as supervisors, managers, safeguarding leads, safer gambling teams and mental health champions; GamCare and Samaritans have developed a face-to-face course. This next stage of training builds on the e-Learning by providing relevant scenarios, offering staff the opportunity to practise with colleagues and receive feedback to help build confidence and develop skills.

Consistent actions to prioritise suicide prevention

Operators should ensure that operational and commercial targets do not undermine a consistent approach to safer gambling. Customer service must prioritise customer well-being over sales targets, and processes should be in place to support and reflect this. Suicide prevention should be added to safer gambling key performance indicators.



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Self-care and providing appropriate support measures for staff wellbeing

Operators must provide appropriate support measures to assist frontline staff following a challenging situation or conversation. Operators should promote all support contacts and measures, making them accessible for all staff to use at any point. Support measures include:

- Information resources that empower staff to look after their own wellbeing.
- In-house support from professionals or volunteers who have specialist training in responding to suicidal behaviour. This support should be accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) – employer funded external providers capable of offering 24-hour access to free and confidential counselling and advice services.
- Emotional health training and guidance.
- Internal company support that encourages staff to speak openly to managers about their interactions and interventions with vulnerable customers.
- Additional break periods.

Additional support measures can include:

- Helplines and services that specialise in suicide prevention support (eg, Anyone struggling to cope or who is feeling suicidal can call Samaritans on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org).
- Trained Mental Health First Aiders within staff teams.
- Occupational Health Services.

To learn more about Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans for the gambling industry please contact Industry Services at GamCare:

Web

safergamblingstandard.org.uk/training-and-resources

Email

industryservices@gamcare.org.uk

Phone

+44 (0) 20 7801 7012
(Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

6. Make better use of customer data to help prevent suicide

Operators should better use customer data to support suicide prevention.

Take more robust action when gambling-related harms and/or risk of suicide is detected

Data alone cannot capture the risks but play time, deposit amounts, popularity of specific products, are all indicators that can be used to inform detection and help guide proactive interventions. Remember: anyone can suffer from gambling-related harms and anyone can be vulnerable to suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Help other operators in detecting gambling-related harms that can lead to suicide

Customers often move from operator to operator. Sharing customer data that indicates harmful patterns of play can help reduce the risk of gambling-related harms and suicide. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is clear that they see no risk in operators sharing data that helps protect vulnerable players.

Consider the role that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools can play

AI algorithms can be used to help normalise support interventions during customer onboarding and throughout the customer journey. AI can share information with colleagues in the harm prevention team. Operators might also consider using a mental health chatbot to increase customer interactions around mental health, whilst ensuring anyone who is struggling has contact with a human operator.

Reach out to sectors that use customer data to help inform their safeguarding and harm prevention approach

High street banks use customer data to better protect and empower customers struggling to cope with their finances. Some operators and apps, like GamStop, do collaborate with banks, but all operators should work more closely with the banking sector to better correlate customer data and use it to increase protections.

Debt advisors work with some of the most vulnerable people in society, including those who report suicidal thoughts and gambling-related harms. Debt advisors have established some harm prevention strategies that operators could learn from in preventing suicide and foster a safer gambling environment.

Operators should also consider which other sectors may be useful to approach and reach out accordingly.

7. Communicate sensitively with customers in distress taking a proactive and personalised approach

When communicating with customers who may be experiencing suicidal feelings, thoughts and behaviours, it's important to use safe and respectful approaches as the individual could be experiencing high levels of distress. Try and put yourself in the customer's shoes. How might you feel in their situation? How might you want someone to approach and talk with you?

It may not always be possible to recognise how vulnerable an individual is. Therefore it is important that all customer facing roles have appropriate training.

Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans can support this.

Operators should:

Place proactive customer friendly support services at the heart of the gambling environment

Customers experiencing suicidal thoughts may not talk openly. They may feel ashamed and embarrassed and become isolated as they try to deal with these issues alone. Gambling-related harms and suicidal thoughts can change over time, sometimes quickly. A customer might appear fine one day and be in distress the next. They may not approach operator staff for help.

Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans can help operators feel more confident in embedding supportive conversations as another part of the customer experience. This will break down barriers to conversation, and better support those experiencing gambling-related harms and/or suicidal thoughts.

Always take an expression of suicidal intent seriously

Customers who express an intent to take their own life should always be taken seriously. Take the time to listen and imagine how the customer might be feeling without judging them. Communicating suicidal thoughts is a sign of severe emotional distress. Be ready to listen and provide the appropriate support.

Be proactive in helping customers who may be in crisis

Customers experiencing gambling-related harms and suicidal thoughts want operators to be more proactive in reaching out. Suicide is preventable and **Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans** can help staff have conversations with customers and direct them to the correct support. Asking a customer if they are experiencing suicidal thoughts or have a plan to take their own life is OK. There is no evidence to suggest that talking about suicide causes it to happen. In fact evidence shows that talking about suicide helps to prevent it.

8. Operators should better use their expertise in product design, marketing and communications to prevent suicide and gambling-related harms

Products, marketing and associated promotions can be extremely influential. Operators possess the expertise to create and adapt marketing communications to prioritise harm prevention. This should be integrated into all marketing and promotional material and not be undermined by sales inducements. All messaging should continually evolve to support industry goals to prevent suicide. Remember: anyone can experience gambling-related harms and suicidal thoughts.

Operators should:

Design products and services that help prevent gambling-related harms and suicide

All products and services should be designed to help customers enjoy their play time without compromising customer safety. Operators should use their expertise in product design to proactively prevent gambling-related harms and suicide.

Use their marketing expertise to ensure communications are guided by harm prevention

Operators should ethically draw on the expertise of individuals who have experienced or been affected by gambling-related harms and/or suicide to create marketing materials that prioritise harm prevention and foster a safer gambling environment.

All marketing communications should include information on where customers can get help. This should explicitly include information on mental health, with signposts to support services, including those that provide support 24 hours a day. Messaging included within existing marketing communications must not be hidden behind or beneath other promotional text. Messaging must draw the eye in the same way any promotional marketing does. The moment a new customer joins the playing environment is the ideal time to normalise and integrate all support communications and interventions. Operators must also ensure they terminate all marketing communications with any customer that has self-excluded to fulfil their regulatory commitments.



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Conclusion

The gambling industry has a responsibility to help prevent suicide. Adopting an integrated approach that puts customer welfare at the heart of the gambling environment can help make gambling a safer activity for customers to engage in. By implementing the recommendations we have outlined, operators can create safer spaces and foster best practice in the gambling environment, allowing customers to enjoy their time with reassurance. To promote excellence in suicide prevention, it is crucial that all operators endeavour to implement these recommendations and continually review and improve their practices.

Operators can find out more about
Suicide awareness and prevention training
developed by GamCare and Samaritans at:

Web

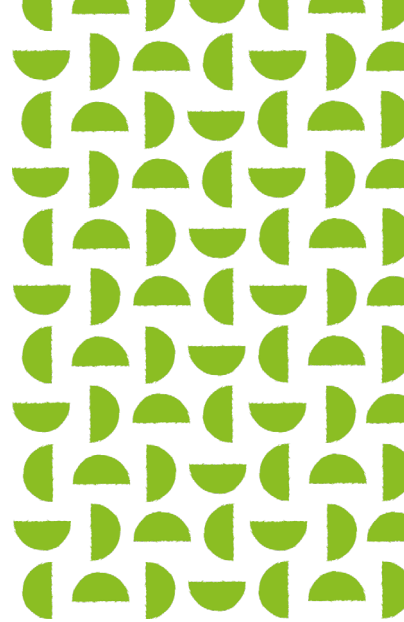
safergamblingstandard.org.uk/training-and-resources

Email

industryservices@gamcare.org.uk

Phone

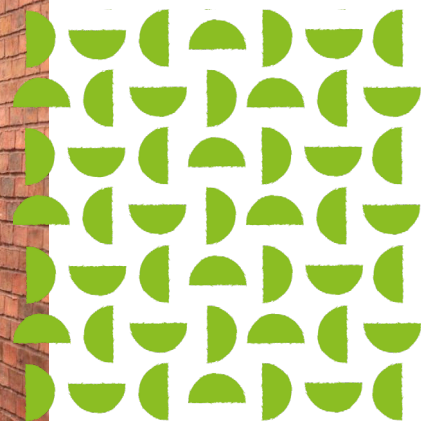
+44 (0) 20 7801 7012
(Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)



Suicide: The facts

- Suicide is a complex and significant public health and social inequality issue, with more than 6,000 people across the UK taking their own lives each year. Tens of thousands more attempt suicide.
- There isn't a simple checklist operators can use to detect suicidal behaviour so adopting an integrated precautionary approach across industry is recommended. Operators must remember that suicides are preventable with timely, evidence-based interventions.
- Suicide is more common among some groups than others. For example, it is more likely among men than women, and in particular men in their 40s and 50s from a lower socio-economic group.
- Suicide is complex and most of the time there isn't one event or factor that leads someone to take their own life. It is usually a combination of lots of different factors interacting with each other to increase risk. A combination of individual, community, and societal factors contribute to the risk of suicide.
- Only a third of people who die by suicide have been in contact with specialist mental health services in the year before their death.
- More than 1 in 20 people make a suicide attempt at some point in their lives. While previous suicide attempts is a risk factor for dying by suicide at a later point, research shows that only a small proportion of those who attempt suicide and survive will go on to die by suicide at a later date.
- Self-harm is a sign of serious emotional distress and, while most people who self-harm will not go on to take their own life, it is a risk factor for future suicide.
- Some people considering suicide may hint at or even disclose to friends or relatives that they intend to take their own lives. Other people who are feeling suicidal might not mention it at all or give any indication of their intention. There is no evidence to suggest that asking someone if they are OK will make them feel worse. Talking can help.

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Customer support signposting suggestions

Samaritans

Anyone struggling to cope or who is feeling suicidal can call Samaritans free any time, from any phone, on 116 123.

Email: jo@samaritans.org
(24 hour response time).

GamCare

Information, advice and support for anyone affected by gambling-related harms. National Gambling Helpline: Freephone 0808 8020 133 Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

National Gambling Helpline

Information, advice, support and access to treatment provided by the National Gambling Treatment Service for anyone affected by gambling harms.

Call free on 0808 8020 133, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year or visit begambleaware.org

Gamblers Anonymous

Fellowship of men and women to support each other with gambling addiction

Information line: 0330 094 0322

Email: info@gamblersanonymous.org.uk

StepChange

Debt Charity – Managing debts and support.

Call 0800 138 1111 Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 8am to 4pm

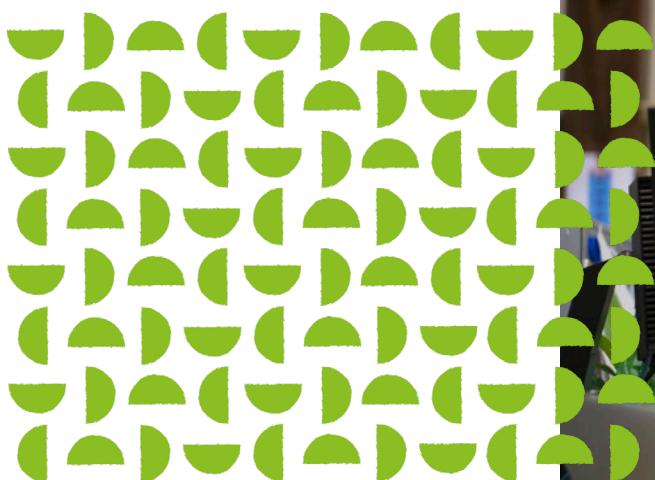
Online Debt Advice.

Mind

Information on mental health issues and support.

Call 0300 123 3393 Open 9-6 Mon-Fri

Email: info@mind.org.uk



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Glossary of common terms

Gambling-related harms: Generally defined as 'the adverse financial, personal and social consequences to gamblers, their families and wider social networks that can be caused by gambling'. Essentially, any harm that is caused to a person or someone close to them by their gambling behaviour.

Problem gambling: Problem gambling is gambling which compromises, disrupts or damages family, employment, personal or recreational pursuits. This typically manifests over a spectrum from moderate to severe. We recommend not using this term as it blames the individual and places protection and prevention responsibility solely on the customer. This can make the customer feel judged. Rather, you can refer to:

- A gambler
- Someone with a gambling problem
- Someone harmed by gambling
- Someone affected by gambling harms

Safer gambling tools: Tools used by gambling businesses to encourage safer play, as well as to help customers control or limit their gambling. Examples include measures to let players know how much time and money they have spent so far, as well as the option to set a time or money limit for themselves (known as limit setting) or to take a time out. Pop-up messages and session reminders are also useful safer gambling tools, as well as self-exclusion.

Suicide: The act of intentionally ending one's own life. Phrases to use include 'die by suicide', 'taking their own life'. Avoid the term 'commit suicide'.

Suicidal/Suicidal thoughts: Thinking about, considering, or planning to take one's own life. Suicidal thoughts are not uncommon, with one in five adults experiencing them at some point in their lives.

Suicidality: Suicidal thoughts (including plans) and suicide attempts.

Vulnerable customers: Customers who are formally or informally regarded as being particularly at risk of negative gambling experiences. Typically related to a characteristic that would indicate someone may be vulnerable eg, poor mental health, bankruptcy.

Mental health: How we think and feel. Everyone has mental health in the same way we all have physical health. Good mental health may mean feeling able to cope and thrive in day-to-day life. Poor mental health may mean feeling anxious or stressed and struggling to cope.

Acknowledgments

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- Bet365
- BetKnowMore
- Epic Risk Management
- GambleAware
- Gambling Commission
– Project funder
- GamCare
- Kindred
- PGSolutions Group
- Playtech
- Rank Group

SAMARITANS

Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans

Operators can find out more about Suicide awareness and prevention training developed by GamCare and Samaritans at:

Web
[safergamblingstandard.org.uk/
training-and-resources](https://safergamblingstandard.org.uk/training-and-resources)

Email
industryservices@gamcare.org.uk

Phone
+44 (0) 20 7801 7012
(Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

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