

But I kept doing it.

A NATIONAL STUDY TO UNCOVER HELP-SEEKING BARRIERS
FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING

NCPG Conference / July 2026

ARGUS



WHO WE ARE

ARGUS



WHY WE'RE HERE

The Argus and Market Street Research teams have over a decade of experience developing social marketing campaigns on problem gambling in several states, as well as for the private sector.

Responsible Gaming Practices

38/48 STATES
+ INDUSTRY

Youth education
& prevention
Equity and community
engagement
Public awareness
and responsible gaming
Anti-stigma
campaigns

\$605^M

Problem Gambling Services

43/48 STATES

58%

of adults who gamble
online daily say that
they have intentionally
taken a break or limited
the amount of time they
spend gambling

20%

of adults with gambling
problems have sought
help for problems related
to their gambling

To better understand this gap – and what to do about it – Argus and Market Street Research collaborated on new primary research.

WHAT WE WANTED TO LEARN



How can we help people change their behavior to improve their relationship with gambling?

The Problem with Current Approaches

- Learning from those not engaged in the desired behavior
- Building on best guesses, not data
- Focusing on addressing information or access deficits
- Iterating on existing strategies

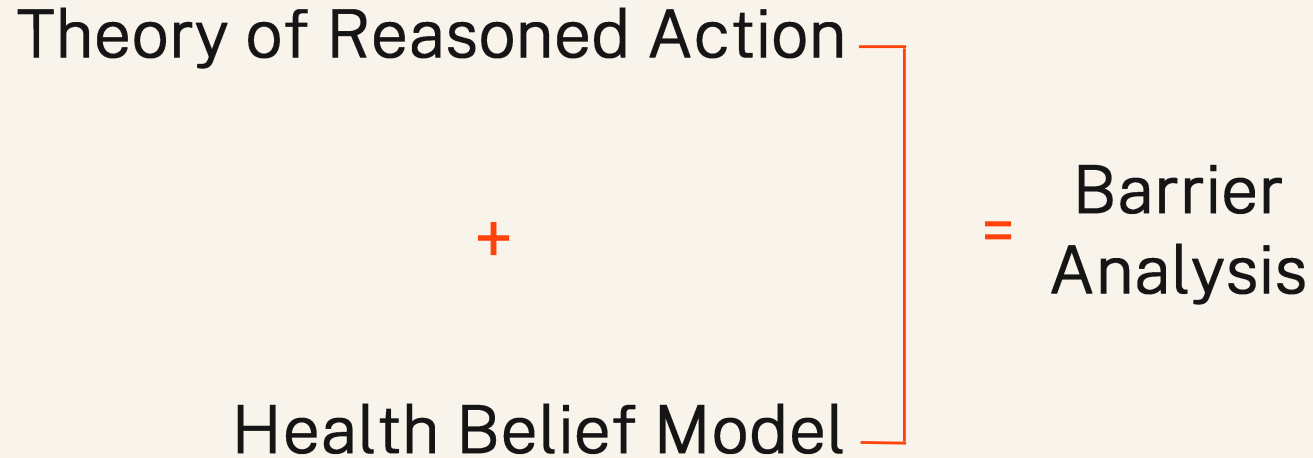
When you know the barriers
changing behavior is possible.

THE METHODOLOGY

We took a deeper approach to uncover the **true determinants** influencing gambling behavior.

Barrier Analysis:

A proven scientific research methodology that compares people who engage in a behavior (“doers”) from those who don’t (“non-doers”).



A Uniquely Robust Approach

- Learning from both doers and non-doers
- Systematically exploring behavioral determinants
- Focusing on significant gaps

PHASE 1

Qualitative
Exploration

PHASE 2

Quantitative
Assessment

Analysis & Synthesis

1. Analyze differences and identify **real drivers of action**
2. Translate complex psychology into **practical recommendations**
3. Provide recommendations for program **design, messaging, and policy**

Master Analysis gives
focus on deeper context
for what's driving
behavior.

Self-efficacy	Positive consequences	Negative consequences of acting	Susceptibility
Behavior	Knowledge	Motivation	Severity
Divine Will	Social Norms	Access	Cues to Action
Policy	Culture	Negative consequences of not acting	Fatality

THE STUDY

01

Framing

20 in-depth interviews

to identify and define the factors that impact behavior

- 10 on limit-setting
- 10 on help-seeking

02

Prioritizing

Survey of 439 people

to understand the prevalence of those impactful factors

- 233 on limit setting
- 206 on help seeking

03

Synthesizing

Advanced statistical analysis

to describe the divergence between doers and non-doers, where “mindful moments” happen and strategies can create meaningful change

DOERS

NON-DOER

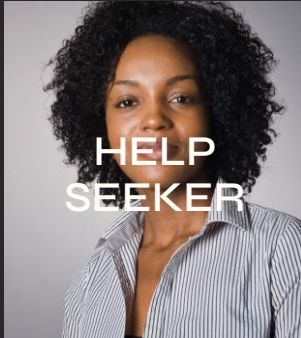
Limit
Setting

Help
Seeking

DOERS



Limit
Setting

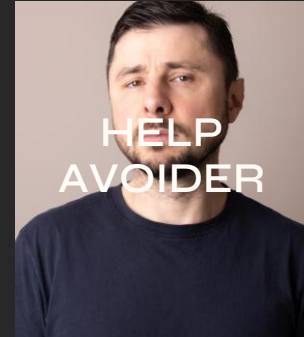


Help
Seeking

NON-DOER



HELP
AVOIDER



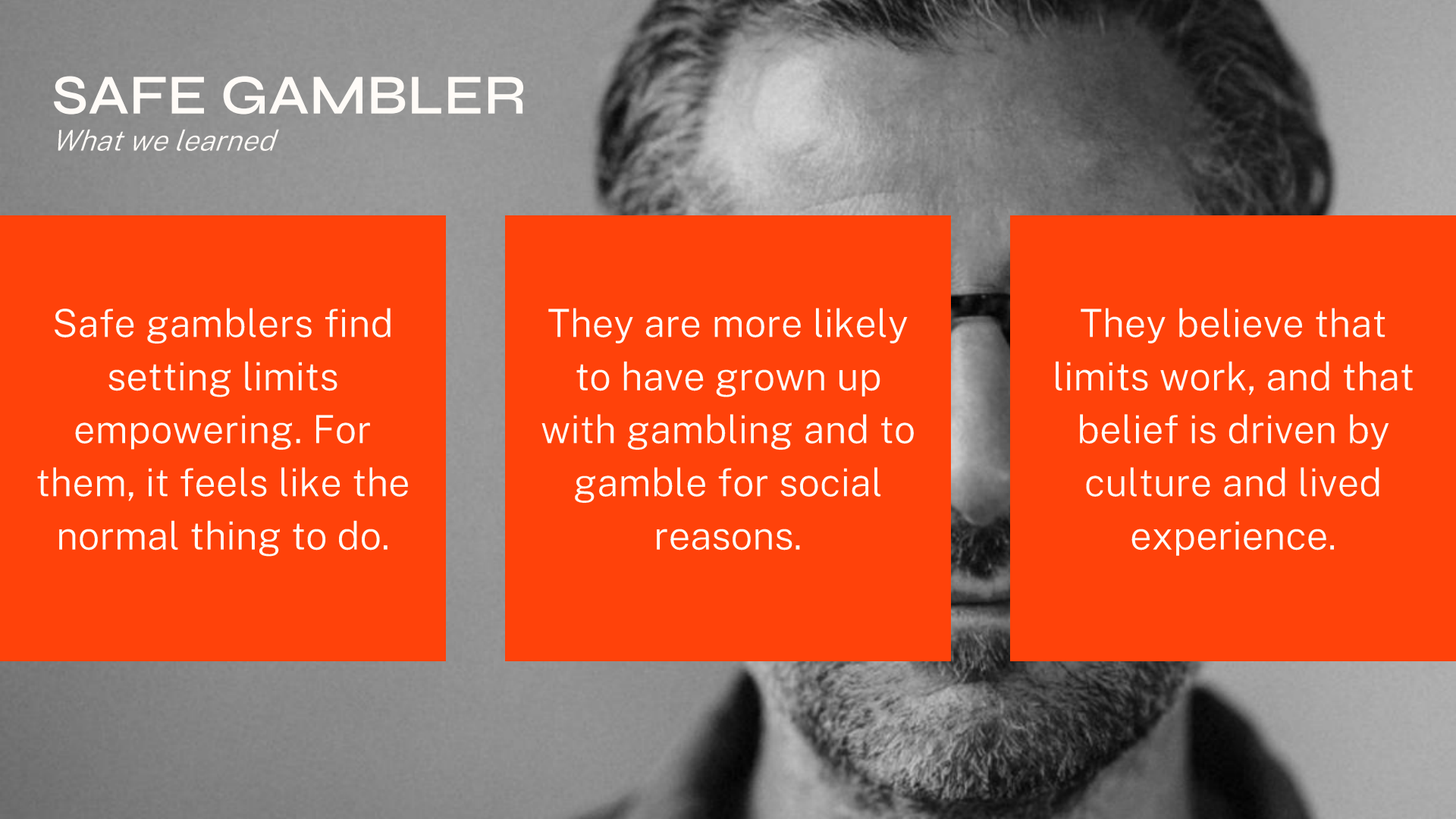
WHAT WE LEARNED

Our study found
significant
differences in
these behavioral
determinants

Self-efficacy	Positive consequences	Negative consequences of acting	Susceptibility
Behavior	Knowledge	Motivation	Severity
Divine Will	Social Norms	Access	Cues to Action
Policy	Culture	Negative consequences of not acting	Fatality

We focused in on
these specific
determinants

Self-efficacy	Positive consequences	Negative consequences of acting	Susceptibility
Behavior	Knowledge	Motivation	Severity
Divine Will	Social Norms	Access	Cues to Action
Policy	Culture	Negative consequences of not acting	Fatality



SAFE GAMBLER

What we learned

Safe gamblers find setting limits empowering. For them, it feels like the normal thing to do.

They are more likely to have grown up with gambling and to gamble for social reasons.

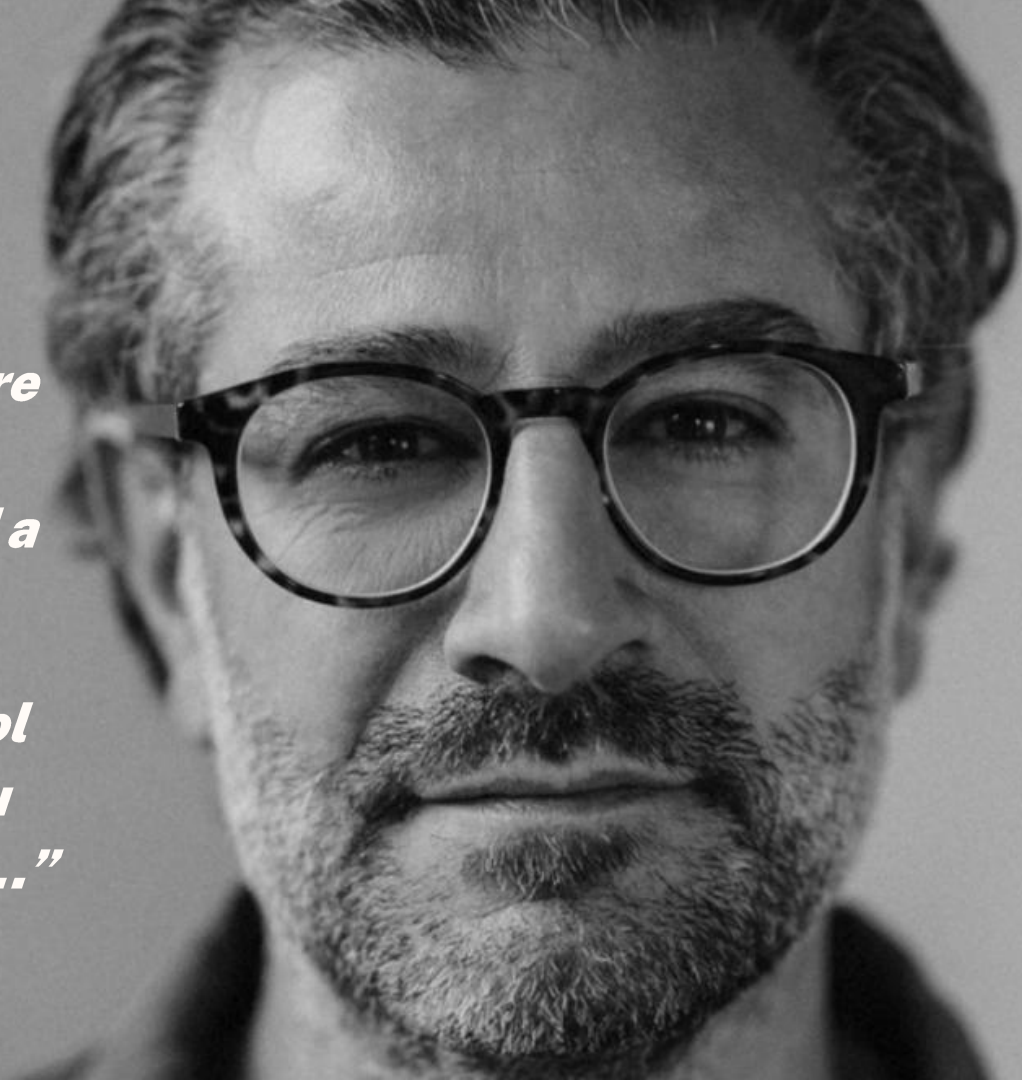
They believe that limits work, and that belief is driven by culture and lived experience.

SAFE GAMBLER

What we learned

***“ I had friends... who were
in debt all the time...
because they gambled a
lot.”***

***“
Trying to stay in control
and remember who you
are and where you are...”***



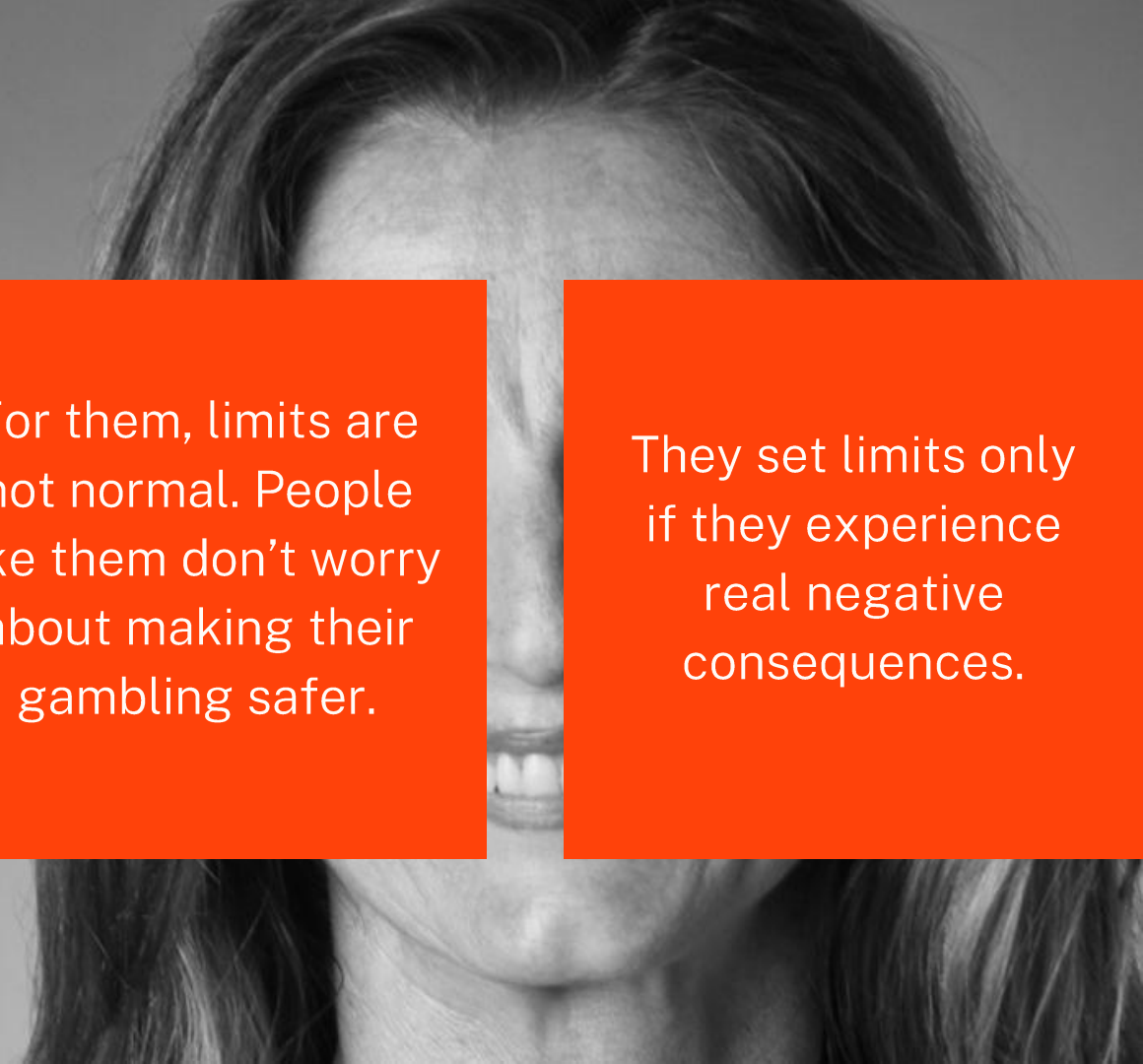
RISKY GAMBLER

What we learned

Risky gamblers worry that limits would take the fun out of gambling.

For them, limits are not normal. People like them don't worry about making their gambling safer.

They set limits only if they experience real negative consequences.



RISKY GAMBLER

What we learned

**“ I don’t like telling me
I can’t gamble”**

**“ [Leaving the debit card
at home] feels like an
amateur game”**

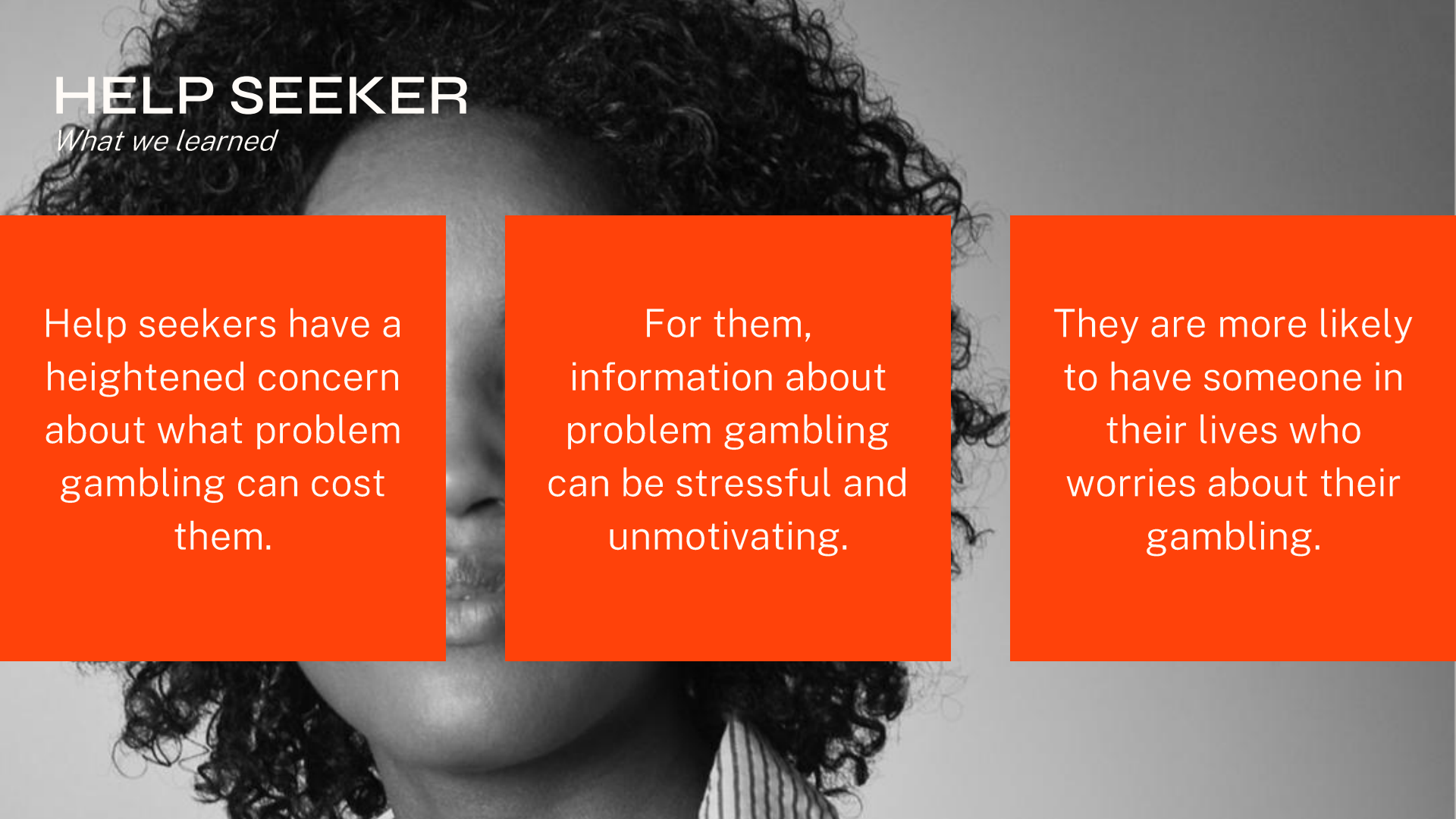




It's more fun when it's for fun



GAMBLING PROBLEM? CALL 1-800-GAMBLER, (800) 327-5050 or visit gamblinghelpnema.org (MA).
Call 877-8-HOPENY/text HOPENY (467369) (NY). Call 888-789-7777/visit ccpg.org (CT), or visit www.mdgambinghelp.org (MD).



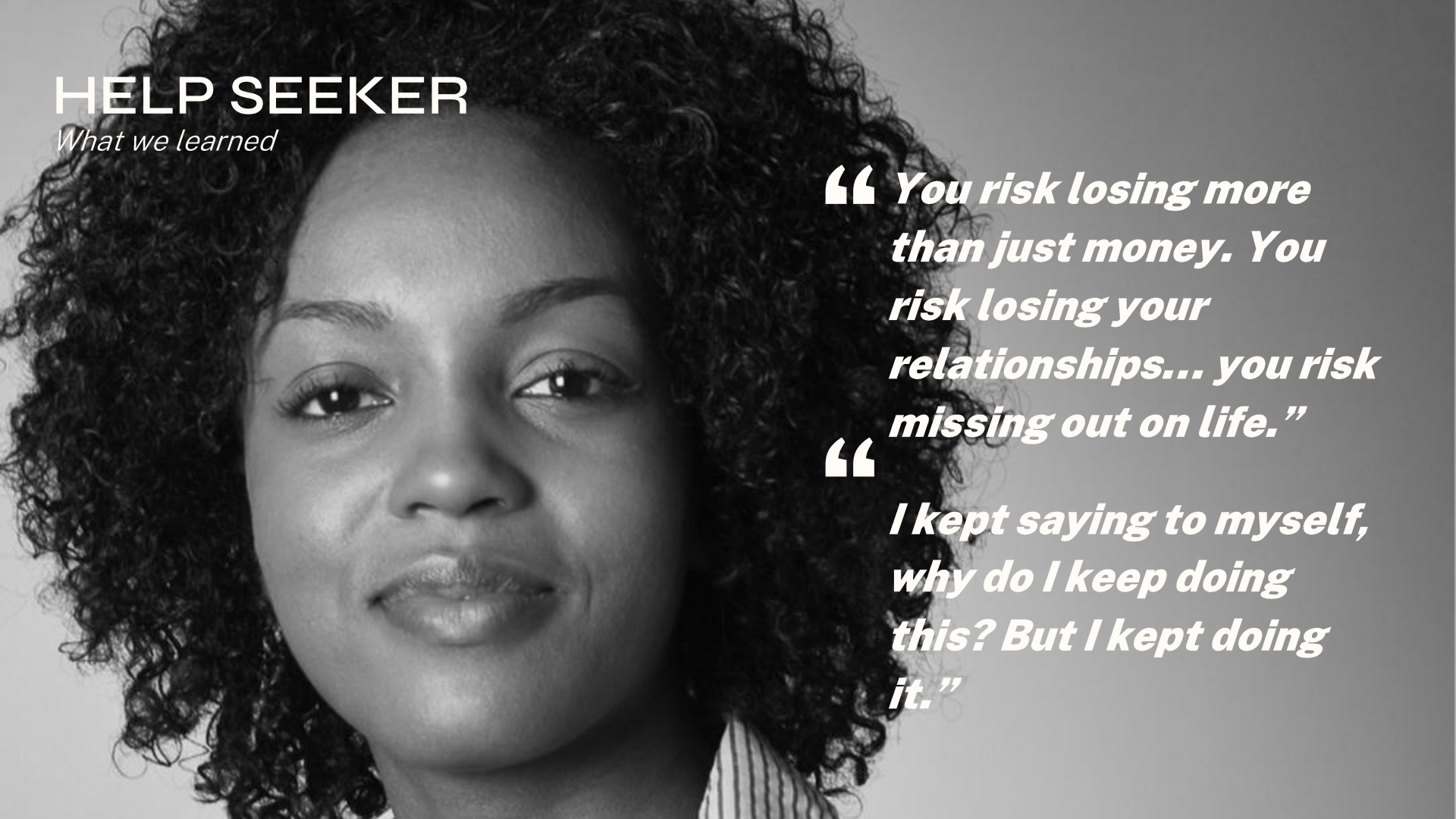
HELP SEEKER

What we learned

Help seekers have a heightened concern about what problem gambling can cost them.

For them, information about problem gambling can be stressful and un motivating.

They are more likely to have someone in their lives who worries about their gambling.



HELP SEEKER

What we learned

“ You risk losing more than just money. You risk losing your relationships... you risk missing out on life.”

“ I kept saying to myself, why do I keep doing this? But I kept doing it.”



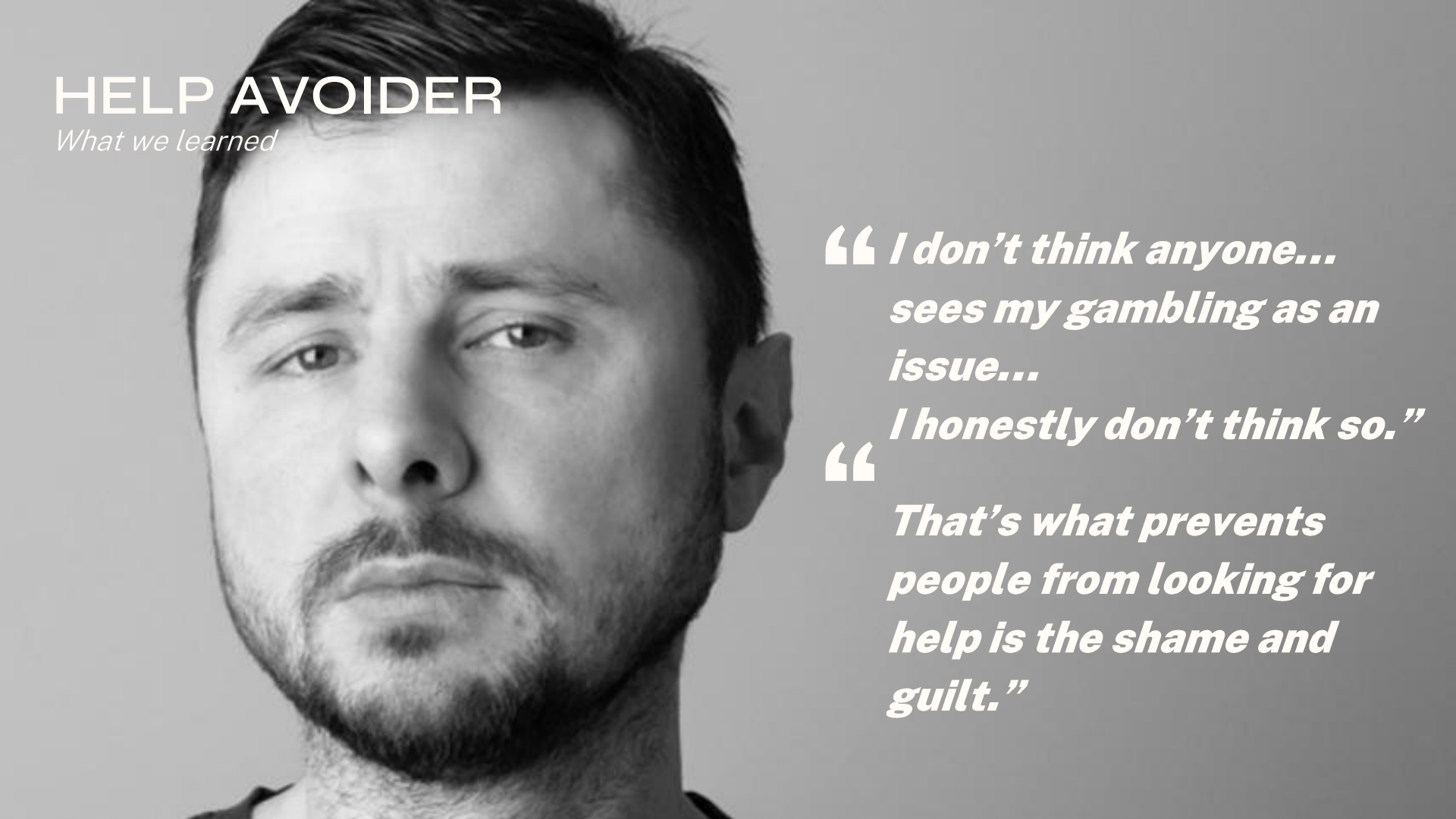
HELP AVOIDER

What we learned

Help avoiders are more likely to recognize the signs of a problem in themselves.

They'll wait longer to seek help. And, they're more likely to believe that problem gambling is a character defect.

They want people to understand what they're going through. They also desire connection.



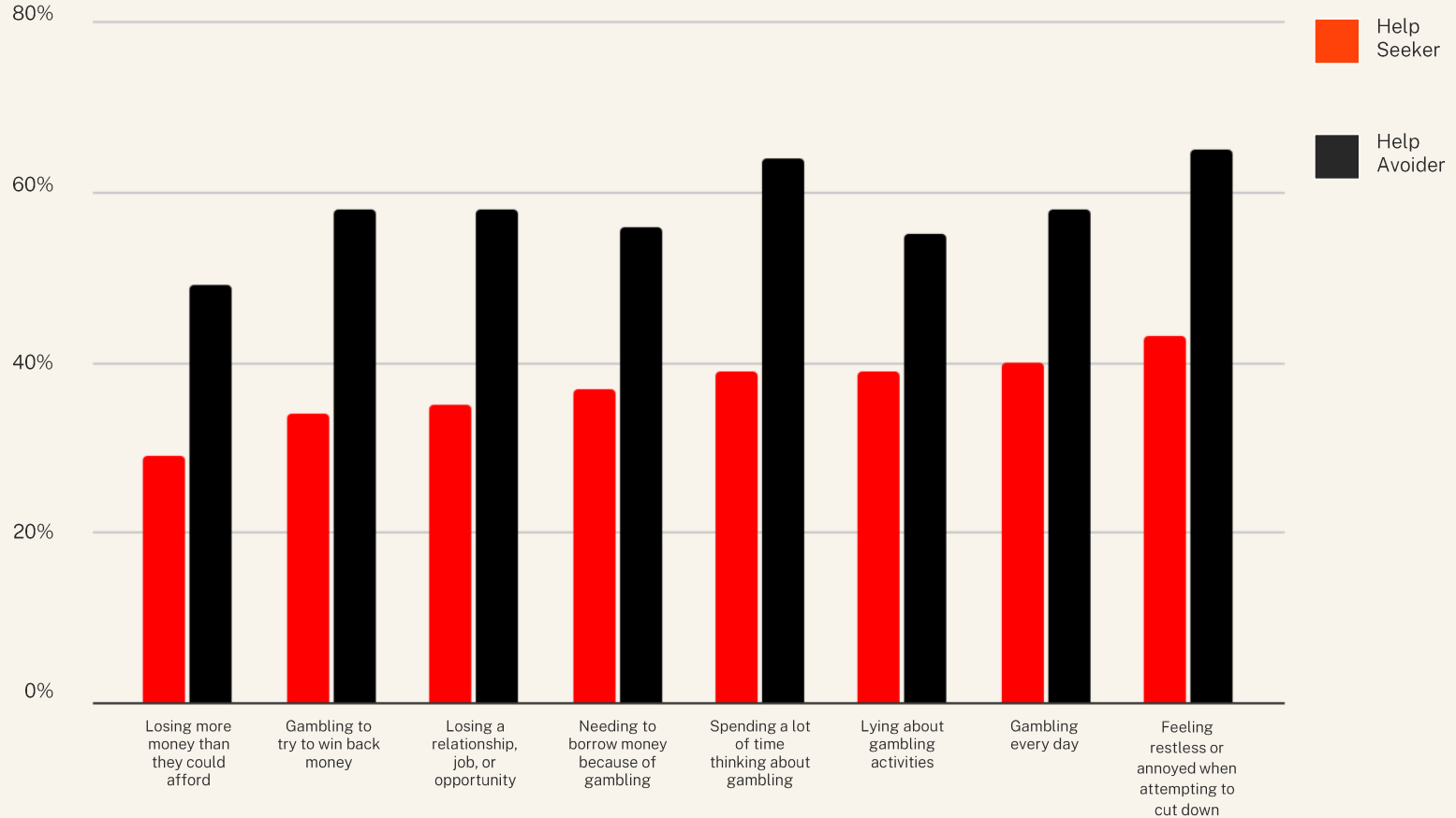
HELP AVOIDER

What we learned

***“ I don’t think anyone...
sees my gambling as an
issue...”***

***“ I honestly don’t think so.”
That’s what prevents
people from looking for
help is the shame and
guilt.”***

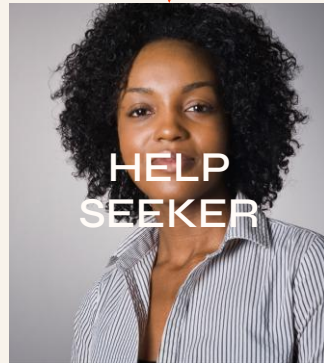
PERCEIVED SIGNS OF PROBLEM GAMBLING



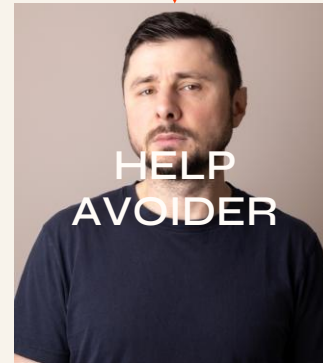
ONE MORE THING



COMPARE

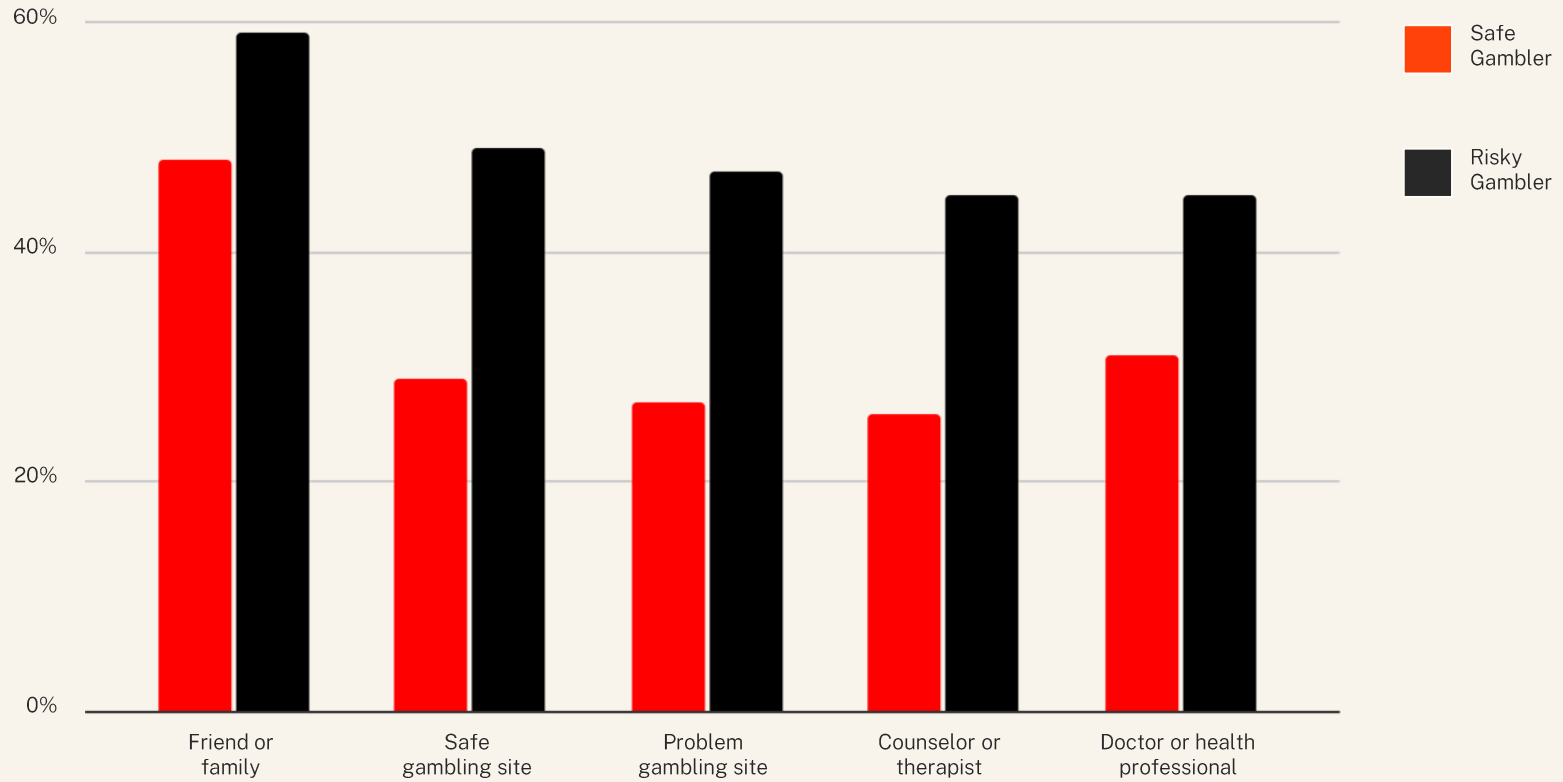


COMPARE



Among **safe gamblers** you will find both potential **help seekers** and **help avoiders**. But, overall, **safe gamblers wait longer to seek help than risky gamblers**. They ignore cues for seeking help. And they have a higher threshold for reaching out for support.

REACHING OUT FOR HELP



Why does that matter? Because when you're dealing with a gambling problem, the **longer you wait** to get help, **the more impact** on you and those you care about.



Meet George



George grew up around gambling. He placed his first bet at 15 – at the racetrack with his father.

From his family he learned how to be smart about gambling. Understand the odds. Play only what you can lose. Know when to walk away.

In fact, he has a cousin who lost it all. So he knows what a “degenerate gambler” looks like.

When online sports gambling started, he heard about responsible gaming and that made sense to him. You've got to stay in charge.

But lately he's been raising his limits, or even letting them slide. And when he loses a lot, he heads to the casino to catch up – which sometimes works, sometimes doesn't.



He's getting himself into a hole now. But for him, it's just a temporary setback. Because he knows who's in charge of his gambling. And that's him.

And he knows what a "degenerate gambler" looks like. *They* are the ones who need to get help for their problem. And if he knows one thing, it's that *that's not him*.



George just went from a *safe gambler* to a *help avoider*.
But he doesn't know it.

Our data suggests that if someone identifies as a *safe gambler*, it can be hard to dislodge that identity and make the leap to *problem gambler*.

As responsible gaming practices become more prevalent, developing campaigns and services that address people like George grows in urgency.

PUTTING IT INTO ACTION

01



02

03



DEPOSIT LIMITS



WAGER LIMITS

Gambling Problem? Call 1-800-GAMBLER.



04

Q & A



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