

Living with a Problem Gambler – techniques to help you cope

Patricia Jirovetz

ATRL, LPC, NCGC-1

Living with a Problem Gambler

- **Patricia Jirovetz**

- ATRL, LPC, NCGC-1

- **Respect Counseling Center**

- 302 State St. Suite B, Oshkosh, WI 54901

- 920-231-3418

- Fax 920-230-2208

- pjirovetz1@new.rr.com

- wi-problemgamblers.org

- WCPG 1-800-426-2535

Living with a Problem Gambler

"I used to be a heavy gambler. But now I just make mental bets. That's how I lost my mind."

- — *Steve Allen*

"Lottery: A tax on people who are bad at math."

- — *Unknown*

What is a problem gambler?

A problem gambler is anyone whose gambling is causing psychological, financial, emotional, marital, legal or other difficulties for themselves and the people around them.

Signs of Problem Gambling

- Gam-Anon 20 Question Guide
 - Household bills overdue. Your loved one suddenly wants to take over paying the bills.
 - Unaccounted-for cash advances from credit cards, maxed out credit cards, or an increase in the number of active credit card.
 - Your loved one is secretive or always short of money.
 - Your loved one is nearly broke one minute and showering you with gifts and living “high on the hog” the next moment.
 - You notice disappearance of cash from you wallet or the children’s money jars.
 - Your loved one has been missing work, going in late, or leaving early.
 - You’ve been denied credit.

Affects on Family-It's not your fault

- Coping with a family member's gambling behavior can be exhausting.
 - You have the right to feel safe – physically and emotionally.
 - You have the right to be financially secure.
- Your energy can best be used to help change your own situation rather than theirs.
 - You cannot force your family member to acknowledge that their gambling is a problem
 - You cannot force them to stop gambling.
 - The only person who can stop gambling is the gambler.
 - The gambling is the problem, not the person.
 - You are not to blame for their behavior.

Affects on Family-Your relationship with the Gambler

- Talk about your feelings carefully and openly.
 - Inform the gambler of the negative impact their gambling is having on you.

Don't try control the gamblers life.

Let the gambler know you want to help and am willing to support them.

Relate to them as an equal person.

Support them in their struggle

Don't take on their burden.

Allow them to take responsibility for their behaviors.

Do not lie or deceive for them.

Affects on Family- Steps to Avoid Financial Harm

People with a gambling problem have difficulty handling money when their gambling stops.

Protecting your family from financial harm may include:

- Seek professional help on how to protect your family's assets and income.

- DO NOT LEND THE GAMBLER MONEY**

- Do not pay the gambler's debts.

- Decide if you can manage the gambler's money.

- Get separate bank accounts and credit cards if necessary.

- Remove your name from joints accounts.

- Take control of the finances.

- Don't sign anything you don't understand.

Affects on Family-Who do you trust?

- To avoid feeling isolated and alone seek support from others.
 - Talk to other affected family members for support.
 - Talk to trusted people who will not judge you or the gambler.
 - GAMANON

Living with a Problem Gambler



Trust

Trust is like launching yourself into the air,
Hoping that your partner will catch you.....
but you'd better have a safety net too.
A good one.

-Living an Awesome Life
Sacha Chua

Affects on Family- Take care of yourself

- Maintain your friendships, continue with your interests and hobbies, and do things that you find enjoyable.
- Time with others can relieve your stress.
- For your well-being don't forget to eat healthy, regular exercise, and adequate rest.
- Coping with a loved one's problem gambling can be very distressing.
 - If you're overwhelmed with sadness, anxiety or anger, seek help from a professional.

Affects on Family- Your Relationship

- Emotions can be all over the place.
 - If taking action puts your safety or the safety of others at risk, you may need professional help.
 - Counseling can be a safer alternative for discussing problems if there is a communication breakdown between you and the gambler.

Affects on Family

- You have the right to feel safe, and emotionally and financially secure.
- Seek professional advice on how to protect your family's assets and income.
- Talk to trusted people who will not judge you or the person that gambles.
- Utilize counseling or self-help groups.

*"I need not know the entire journey
in order to take one step"*

- Corinna Bowers, 48 Self Esteem Activities for Women

Co-dependency

Co-dependent relationships are a type of dysfunctional helping relationship where one person supports or enables another person's addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement.

- Someone whose thinking and behavior are organized around another person, process or addiction. It requires one person to have, in this case, a gambling addiction and the second person to be psychologically dependent on that behavior.
- Often places a lower priority on their own needs, while being excessively preoccupied with the needs of others.

Co-dependency

Commonly cited symptoms of co-dependency are:

- Low Self-esteem.
- People-pleasing.
- Poor boundaries.
- Reactivity.
- Caretaking.
- Control.
- Dysfunctional communication.
- Obsessions.
- Dependency.
- Denial.
- Problems with intimacy.
- Painful emotions.

Co-dependency-Dysfunctional family

Dysfunctional families do not acknowledge that problems exist. Family members learn to repress emotions and disregard their own needs. They become “survivors.”

- Parenting is a role that requires a certain amount of self-sacrifice and giving a child's needs a high priority.
- In the dysfunctional families the child learns to become attuned to the parent's needs and feelings instead of the other way around.
- A parent who takes care of his/her own needs (emotional and physical) in a healthy way will be a better caretaker. A co-dependent parent may be less effective, or may even do harm to a child.
- There are many selfish, co-dependent parents who ignore or negate their children's feelings and needs, shaming them, which passes on co-dependency

Co-dependency-Dysfunctional family

- Co-dependents have low self-esteem and find it hard to be themselves.
- They have good intentions.
- These repeated rescue attempts allow the gambler to continue on a destructive course.

Co-dependency- Relationships

One person is abusive or in control or supports or enables another person's addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement.

Some co-dependents often find themselves in relationships where their primary role is that of rescuer, supporter, and confidante. These helper types are often dependent on the other person's poor functioning to satisfy their own emotional needs

Someone truly recovered from co-dependency would feel empowered and like an author of their life and actions rather than being at the mercy of outside forces

Co-dependency- Relationships

- The first step in changing unhealthy behavior is to understand it.
- Any caretaking behavior that allows or enables abuse to continue in the family needs to be recognized and stopped.
- Learn to say “no”, be loving yet tough, and learn to be self-reliant.
- The more you understand co-dependency the better you can cope with its effects.

Domestic Violence

- **Domestic Violence**
- A University of Nebraska Medical Center study concluded that problem gambling is as much a risk factor for domestic violence as alcohol abuse.
- Domestic violence murders in at least 11 states have been traced to gambling problems since 1996.
- Three years after casinos were legalized in Deadwood, South Dakota, felony crimes increased by 40 percent, child abuse increased 42 percent, and domestic violence and assaults rose 80 percent.

Family Problems

- **Increased Family Problems**
- According to a recent statistical release by the Arizona Office of Problem Gambling, 29 percent of calls for help came from married gamblers. 25 percent of gamblers seeking help for their addiction have minor children in their household.
- Gambling addiction by a spouse is often easier to hide than other addiction because of the lack of initial physical symptoms.
- A problem gambler can cause the same damage to his or her family's financial situation in just minutes that a substance abuser would take weeks or years to inflict.
- The spouses of gambling addicts experience emotions that mimic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The emotional health consequences can even put the gambler's spouse at risk for suicide.

Family Problems

- Pathologic gamblers are three times more likely to divorce than individuals who do not gamble.
- Children who have experienced the effects of problem gambling go through a time of “pervasive loss” when a parent’s gambling addiction emerges.
- Maternal gambling has been significantly associated with poor health and academic, psychosocial, and suicidal symptoms in children and adolescents.
- Over the past 17 years, there have been at least 100 instances of parents neglecting and abandoning their children to gamble.

Suicidality

“Suicide attempts among pathological gamblers are higher than for any of the addictions and second only to suicide attempts rates among individuals with major affective disorders, schizophrenia and a few major hereditary disorders.”

-Dr. Rachel A. Volberg, President of Gemini Research, LTD

Suicidality

The National Council on Problem Gambling, citing various studies, reports that one in five pathological gamblers attempts suicide, a rate higher than for any other addictive disorder. People who struggle with gambling problems may experience serious social, emotional, financial and health consequences. For many, coping with the negative emotions related to these issues, can become overwhelming. Feelings of shame, hopelessness and failure may seem too hard to bear. For some, suicide appears to be a solution to all of these problems.

Suicidality- What to do if a family member is suicidal

A family member may have thoughts of suicide if he or she:

- Changes behavior, appearance or mood
- Seems depressed, sad or withdrawn
- Gives away prized possessions
- Talks about suicide and says he or she has a plan
- Makes a will or talks about final wishes

Suicidality- What to do if a family member is suicidal

- If a family member has signs of feeling suicidal:
 - Stay calm and listen carefully
 - Let the person talk about his or her feelings
 - Accept what he or she says. Don't pass judgment or try to solve the problem
 - Ask if the person feels suicidal and has a plan
 - Remove any means of self-harm (example-firearms, medications)
 - Take all suicide threats seriously
 - Support the person in getting professional help (example – crisis center, counselor, doctor, emergency room or clergy)
 - Let your Doctor know what's going on.
 - Tell someone who can help
 - **Do not agree to keep the person's suicidal thoughts a secret!**

Suicidality

- One in five pathological gamblers will attempt suicide, while one in ten of their spouses will attempt suicide.
- In Gulfport, Mississippi, suicides increased by 213 percent (from 24 to 75) in the first two years after casinos arrived.
- In neighboring Biloxi, suicide attempts jumped by 1,000 percent (from 6 to 66) in the first year alone.
- A survey of nearly 200 Illinois Gamblers Anonymous members found that 66 percent had contemplated suicide, 79 percent had wanted to die, 45 percent had a definite plan to kill themselves, and 16 percent had actually attempted suicide.

Wellness -How do you take care of you?

Get your intense emotions out on paper and unstuck from being inside you.

- Reflect on interaction
- Process Emotions
- Be receptive to new ideas

Wellness- How do you take care of you?

A Paper Bag Gluebook will help you:

- Develop a positive attitude
- Strengthen your emotional wellness
- Develop an internal locus of control
- Maximize your Strengths
- Cultivate optimism

"One's character is determined not how she gets caught in the downpour of disappointment, but how she finds the hope to look for the rainbow."

— Colette Freedman

References:

- Lorne Korman, et. al., *Problem Gambling and Intimate Partner Violence*, 24 J. Gambling Studies 13, 20 (2008).
- Statistical Information and Studies, Arizona Office of Problem Gambling, www.problemgambling.az.gov/statistics.htm (last visited Sept. 24, 2013).
- By The Numbers – FY2010 OPG Treatment Services, Arizona Office of Problem Gambling, www.problemgambling.az.gov/profiledata/FY2010TreatmentData.pdf (last visited Sept. 24, 2013).
- © Center For Arizona Policy, Inc. azpolicy.org | info@azpolicy.org
- **Marriage & Family Harms of Gambling**
- *Id.* at 421.
- Philip Darbyshire, et al., *The Experience of Pervasive Loss: Children and Young People Living in a Family Where Parental Gambling Is a Problem*, 17 J. of Gambling Studies 23, 39 (2001).
- Philip Schluter, et al., *Maternal gambling associated with families' food, shelter, and safety needs: Findings from the Pacific Island Families Study*, Journal of Gambling Issues (Jan. 2007), available at <http://jgi.camh.net/doi/full/10.4309/jgi.2007.19.10>.
- Children Abandoned by Parents, CasinoWatch.org, http://casinowatch.org/children_gambling/children_abandoned_by_parents.html (last visited Sept. 24, 2013).

- Problemgambling.vic.gov.au
- Personal Financial Strategies for the loved Ones of Problem Gamblers, National Endowment for Financial Education, 2000
- Wikipedia
- Darlene Lancer, JD, MFT, Symptoms of Codependency
- Mental Health American, Co-Dependency, mentalhealthamerican.net
- Robert Custer and Harry Milt, "When Luck Runs Out: Help for Compulsive Gamblers and Their Families," (New York: Facts on File, 1985), pp. 231, 145.
- Attorney General J. Joseph Curran, Jr., "The House Never Loses and Maryland Cannot Win: Why Casino Gaming Is a Bad Idea," Report on the Impact of Casino Gaming on Crime, 16 October 1995, p. 7.
- Henry R. Lesieur and Christopher W. Anderson, "Results of a 1995 Survey of Gamblers Anonymous Members in Illinois (N=184)," Illinois Council on Problem and Compulsive Gambling, 14 June 1995.
- D.V. Petula Dvorak, "Marrero Man Kills Wife, Self," New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 8, 1998, p. A1; Benita Williams, "Woman Sentenced in Slaying," Kansas City Star, December 21, 1999, p. B2; Dave Racher, "Landscape Held in Wife's Slaying," Philadelphia Daily News, July 11, 1998; Hector Castro, "Savage Killing of 3 Still a Mystery," (Tacoma, Wash.) News Tribune, June 14, 1999, p. A1; Carson Walker, "Cepek Killed in Her Apartment, Police Believe," (Sioux Falls, S.D.) Argus Leader, January 30, 1997; Mark Horvit, "Anecdotes Link Video Poker with Crimes," Charlotte Observer, October 3, 1999; Jack Gruber, "Gambling Help Comes Slowly," Detroit News, October 3, 1997, p. C1; Ed Hayward, "Gambling Habit Eyed As Motive," Boston Herald, October 21, 1997, p. 7; W. Melillo and B. Masters, "Lone Survivor of Father's Shooting Dies," Washington Post, August 6, 1998, p. A1; Associated Press, "Woman Blames Gambling Debts in Double Murder," September 10, 1999; "Ohio Man Guilty of Bomb Murder," Associated Press, February 5, 1997.