

Community Concerns

Dealing With A Gambling Problem

WHAT IS COMPULSIVE GAMBLING?

Compulsive Gambling is a progressive disorder causing a psychologically uncontrollable preoccupation and urge to gamble. Individuals eventually lose the ability to control the impulse to gamble. This results in excessive gambling which can compromise disrupt or damage personal, family or employment pursuits. It is recognized by the American Psychiatric Association as an Impulse Control Disorder.

PROBLEM GAMBLING WARNING SIGNS:

- Increasing the frequency and the amount of money gambled.
- Spending an excessive amount of time gambling at the expense of job or family time.
- Being pre-occupied with gambling or with obtaining money with which to gamble.
- Gambling creates a special and intense pleasure, an aroused sense of being in “action”.
- Continuing to gamble despite negative consequences such as large losses, or work or family problems caused by gambling.
- Gambling as a means to cope with loneliness, anger, stress, depression, etc.
- “Chasing” or the urgent need to keep gambling often with larger bets – or the taking of greater risks in order to make up for a loss or series of losses.
- Borrowing money to gamble, taking out secret loans, or maximizing credit cards.
- Bragging about wins but not talking about losses.
- Frequent mood swings, higher when winning, lower when losing.
- Gambling for longer periods of time or more money than originally planned.
- Secretive behavior such as hiding lottery tickets and betting slips, having mail, bills, etc., sent to work, a P.O. Box or other address.

If you or someone you know might have a problem, call 1-800-GAMBLE-5

Lie-Bet: 2-Question Screening Tool (Johnson et al., 1988)

These two questions aid in identifying gambling problems. No single question is adequate in capturing the majority of those experiencing gambling problems. Answering “yes” to one or both of these questions is suggestive of a problem deserving further assessment.

1. Have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money?
2. Have you ever had to lie to people important to you about how much you gamble?

Phases of Gambling

Winning Phase

1. Wins more than loses
2. Gambling NOT creating financial burden
3. May have big win/increases amounts of bets
4. Increased time and energy spent gambling
5. Distinction from social gambling; sometimes slow, others rapid onset—winning is linked to self-esteem—preoccupied with gambling, affects social and work life as other activities become secondary to gambling
6. Physiologically: extreme excitement, rapid heartbeat, nausea, queasiness (may actually vomit)
7. Identification as a gambler—Landmark

Losing Phase

1. Prolonged losing episodes
2. Begins legal borrowing to cover losses or to obtain more gambling money
3. Begins chasing losses; abandons strategies; tries to win back all at once; lies to conceal extent of losses
4. Runs out of all usual sources from which to obtain money; may switch to illegal sources of borrowing

Desperation Phase

1. Crossing the line: Commits acts never thought would commit to continue gambling (cover losses) - bad checks, taking money from family, behind on rent/bills
2. Increased depression/anxiety (emotional roller coaster)
3. Ego-dystonic: Repeated acts that violate one’s logic, values, commitment, or sense of what one thought one would never do
4. At beginning: says one time occurrence (rationalizes); when reoccurs continues to keep track or score; by end no longer keeping track
5. Suicidal thoughts or attempts may occur

Hopelessness Phase

1. Continues to gamble with increasing sense of hopelessness and despair
2. Increased isolation and loss of remaining support systems
3. Feels burned out
4. Realizes one won’t ever win (or win back losses, yet continues to gamble—can’t stop)