

Community Concerns

Dealing With A Gambling Problem

(NAPS)-People with a gambling problem can find help-regardless of how long they have been gambling or how many financial or legal problems their addiction has caused. The National Council on Problem Gambling, which offers a 24-hour problem gambling helpline, says one of the first steps is to recognize the signs of problem gambling. They include:

- Gambling for more time and/or more money than intended.
- Gambling more to try to win back what you've lost.
- Lying to loved ones about the amount of time or money spent gambling.

Gambling can be considered problematic when it causes a disruption in any major area of a person's life.

Finding Help

A gambling Helpline proved invaluable for Jane Skavinsky, a grandmother whose gambling problem began with simple bingo games, spiraled out of control and ended with her spending her 50th birthday in prison.

"My gambling addiction led to my losing focus on anything that didn't have to do with bingo. Soon I was spending my whole paycheck on it," Skavinsky explains.

Eventually, Skavinsky began embezzling money from her office to help fund her habit. She was sentenced to a year in jail for stealing a quarter of a million dollars.

"It was only after months of mental anguish that I called the Helpline. I did not realize that my gambling was the root of all my problems," she explains. Through its referral to treatment and self-help groups, the Helpline helped Skavinsky begin to recover. Today, she works to spread the word about problem gambling and helps others beat their addiction.

"A problem gambler doesn't need to wait to 'hit bottom' before asking for help," says Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling. "And because so many addicted gamblers are in denial and will never call, we offer our services to the nongamblers as well. When their problem is your problem, you can call the Helpline to learn what help is available."

If you or someone you know might have a problem, call

1-800-GAMBLE-5

Lie-Bet: 2-Question Screening Tool

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?

VA, R. Nora, MD [The Wager](#)

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. Continued gambling with increasing sense of hopelessness and despair
2. Increasing isolation and loss of remaining support systems
3. Feel burned out
4. Realizes one won't ever win (or win back losses, yet continues gambling—can't stop)