

WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

Financial Consequences

Richard, a successful, 45-year old corporate executive, began gambling to deal with boredom and loneliness after his marriage ended abruptly in divorce. His healthy financial condition enabled him to gamble for many years with seemingly little consequence. Over time, however, the money ran out, the credit ran up, the house went into foreclosure and his depression accelerated. His financial, emotional and physical health deteriorated along with his work performance. After losing everything he had worked over 20 years to earn, the company decided to let him go but provided him with a substantial severance pay which he quickly lost through continued gambling. (*Not his real name)*

Financial issues are often the first outward sign of a gambling problem. When gambling becomes uncontrollable, the problem gambler will spend even more money, attempting and usually failing, to win back their losses. Here are some of the financial consequences that may occur:

- Overdue bills
- Maxed out credit cards / Denial of credit
- Always short of money, despite adequate income
- Cannot provide for basic needs (food, clothing, shelter)
- Relies on borrowing money from friends, family or coworkers
- Develops a pattern of extremely high-risk investing or frequent trading
- Money is pulled from home equity, savings, investment or retirement accounts
- Household and personal items are pawned or sold for cash
- Frequent, multiple payday loans or cash-advances
- Property is repossessed
- Home is in foreclosure

Many problem gamblers believe that money is both the cause of, and the solution to their problems, so they continue to gamble in spite of the losses, believing they can fix all the problems with just one more 'big win'. Sadly, there can never be a big enough 'win' to solve the problem of the addiction, because it is an emotional illness, not a financial one.

For this reason, the real solution is for the gambler to deal with their addiction, not just the money problems it creates. Treatment and support resources can help the gambler stop gambling, and with abstinence from gambling, the stress from financial pressures will begin to be relieved. Long term solutions will require hard work, debt repayment and careful planning but the finances of a problem gambler and their family can recover over time.

*Source: www.WhenTheFunStops.org (Reprinted with permission)





March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month! The purpose of this event is to raise awareness about problem gambling and promote the availability of treatment.

Why is Problem Gambling Awareness Month Important?

Most adults gamble, and therefore would benefit from programs to prevent gambling addiction. March has become one of the biggest gambling occasions because of the popularity of the NCAA “March Madness” Basketball Tournament. Between six and nine million people meet criteria for gambling problems, yet only a fraction seek help. We believe many who suffer in silence do so because they don’t know they developed a problem, what gambling addiction is, or where to get help.

Have the Conversation about Problem Gambling

Problem Gambling is a public health issue affecting all aspects of physical, social, and mental health. It can affect families, work performance and general well-being. It is important to know the signs of a gambling problem, that treatment is available, and that it works. Use this document to learn about problem gambling, how to recognize the signs of gambling addiction and where to go for help.

March is a great time to Have the Conversation about Problem Gambling.

Problem Gambling – General Overview

What is gambling? What is problem gambling?

- Gambling is defined as risking something of value on an unknown outcome that depends on chance or skill.
- Gambling becomes a problem when it affects any major area of life.
- Problem gambling is characterized by the inability to resist the impulse to gamble, even when there are negative consequences.
- Loss of control is at the heart of problem gambling.
- The DSM-5 classifies gambling disorder as a behavioral addiction. It is similar to substance-related disorders in many ways.

How do I know if a loved one has a gambling problem?

Problem gambling is known as a hidden addiction. There is no physical test that indicates gambling behavior, but there are some signs to look for:

- Frequently borrowing money to gamble.
- Gambling to escape boredom, pain or loneliness.
- Lying to loved ones about gambling.
- Trying to win back money lost.
- Preoccupation with gambling.

Who is at risk for a gambling problem?

- Problem gambling does not discriminate based on age, gender, religion, social status or education. Anyone can develop a gambling problem.
- Gambling problems may develop with any form of gambling activity.
- Groups at high risk include seniors, adolescents, college students, athletes, veterans, and racial and ethnic minorities, including Asian-Americans.

Impact of Problem Gambling

Why do I need to know about problem gambling?

- Although most people gamble for fun and recreation, some can develop a problem that can lead to severe negative consequences.
- Gambling addiction affects 6-9 million Americans (2-3% of population).
- Anyone who gambles can develop problems if not aware of the risks.
- Gambling is more readily available in the U.S. than at any point in our history; 48 states allow some form of gambling.

How does problem gambling impact me?

- It is estimated that 8-10 people are affected by one individual's gambling problem.
- If you gamble it is important to recognize that what was once fun and recreation can become a serious issue.
- Your awareness may help a loved one seek the necessary help.
- Problem gambling is a public health issue that impacts relationships, families, businesses and communities.

What are the consequences of a gambling addiction?

- If untreated, gambling addiction can lead to serious health issues including suicide, co-occurring disorders, domestic violence, and work issues.
- Children of a person with a gambling problem show higher rates of gambling disorder and higher levels of tobacco, alcohol, drug use and overeating than children of people without gambling problems.
- It can ruin relationships and families.
- It can cause financial devastation.
- It can result in depression and other mental health concerns.

Help and Hope

What is a Helpline and what does it do?

- Most states have established confidential toll-free helplines to help problem gamblers and their families obtain information about counseling, Gamblers Anonymous and other supportive resources.
- A helpline gives a caller an opportunity to share what is on his mind and be heard by someone who cares and can listen in a non-judgemental fashion.
- A helpline provides assistance, information and referrals.

How can a trained counselor help someone with a gambling problem?

- Certified professionals are trained to understand and treat the unique circumstances and experiences of problem gamblers.
- A counselor can help the gambler sort out options when coping with difficulties.
- A professional can offer hope and present evidence that change is possible.
- A counselor's office is a safe place for discussion of uncomfortable thoughts such as suicide.
- A counselor is aware of specialized levels of treatment and offer native therapies.

What is Gamblers Anonymous and why is it beneficial?

- Gamblers Anonymous is a confidential fellowship of men and women from diverse social, economic, racial and religious backgrounds, who meet to share their experiences, strength and hope as it relates to stopping gambling and living a happy and productive life.
- Gamblers Anonymous is based on 12 guiding principles and 12 steps of recovery.

What resources are available?

- Call the Wisconsin Council on Problem Gambling Helpline (1-800-GAMBLE-5)
- Gamblers Anonymous – www.gamblersanonymous.org
- Gam-Anon – www.gamanon.org

How do I have the conversation with a loved one?

Talking with someone you know about a potential gambling problem can be difficult. Remember, you can't stop the person from playing; only he or she can make the decision to stop. Choose the right moment, speak in a caring and understanding tone and hear what he or she is saying. To start the conversation:

- Tell him you care about him and you're concerned about how he is acting.
- Tell her exactly what she has done that concerns you.
- Tell him how his behavior is affecting other people. Be specific.
- Be clear about what you expect from her ("I want you to talk to someone about your gambling.") and what she can expect from you ("I won't cover for you anymore.").
- After you've told him what you've seen and how you feel, allow him to respond. Listen with a non-judgemental attitude.
- Let her know you are willing to help, but don't try to counsel her yourself.
- Give her information, not advice.
- Encourage him to call the toll-free helpline (1-800-GAMBLE-5). For more information about Problem Gambling Awareness Month visit: www.npgam.org