

Gambling Addictions

Gambling addictions became very personal to me in 2002 when I completed specialized training and began counseling those with gambling problems. My very first client attempted suicide and ended up in the ICU. Fortunately the client survived and is doing great now. I've had to locate food and basic resources for others that have gambled up everything. I've counseled many others who have admitted "borrowing money without permission-stealing." They planned to repay the debt the next day when they won. Gamblers NEVER talk about their losses - only the wins. I've known of a few others to lose their homes and file bankruptcy. Many have gone to gamble with the intention of only spending twenty dollars and to find that they've spent hundreds. I've seen the desperate tears of many that just cannot believe what they have spent or the number of bad checks which they have written. They seem to zone out and lose control of their full mental capacities only to wake up when they have huge losses or are denied another transaction by the ATM. Gambling impacts the body chemistry and creates a high of sorts.

To the average person looking at symptoms of this disease the behaviors make no logical sense. Prior to training it didn't make any sense to me either. Why would anybody gamble away their entire pay check? What could somebody be thinking when they went to multiple cash advance sites to get money just to gamble it away? How could someone go back to where they had lost lots of money the night before only to throw more money away in an attempt to get it back-chase their losses? Why would someone with no previous criminal record commit an illegal act to finance their gambling? How could they be so preoccupied with gambling that they jeopardize a job, education, or a relationship because of gambling? Why would they need to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement? How could they become so preoccupied with reliving past gambling experiences or planning future ventures that are consuming much of their lives? How could they lie so much? Why did they expect others to bail them out of desperate financial situations which they created themselves? How come they just can't quit or control their gambling when they say that they will?

If many of these questions describe you or a loved one, an assessment for a gambling addiction is in order. Free assessments are offered throughout WV by calling 1-800 GAMBLER. Additional help may be found by contacting the National Council on Problem Gambling, ncpg@ncpgambler.org. Support groups such as Gambler's Anonymous or Celebrate Recovery can offer encouragement from others who have been overtaken by this addiction and found a way of escape. Many have found speaking with clergy and individual counseling helpful since it

may give insight into the roots of their addiction and the misconceptions they believe. Medication combined with therapy has been found to have merit.

Gambling addictions sometimes go undiagnosed by health professionals. They can be the underlying cause of depression, anxiety, peptic ulcer disease, migraines, difficulty sleeping, high blood pressure, or other stress related symptoms. The National Council on Problem Gambling estimates that 6-9 million American adults suffer from gambling problems any given year. The prevalence of Pathological gambling may be as high as 1%-3% of the adult population. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, "DSM" relates that 20% of those in treatment for pathological gambling are reported to have attempted suicide.

Gambling addiction specialists recommend that all medical professionals add the two question "lie/bet screen" to their patient intakes to help identify this problem...

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 gambled?

Counseling and support for the gambler's family is also important. Problem gamblers can unintentionally destroy the family finances. Loved ones need extra support and knowledge to deal with this addiction. This addiction can be like a virus which impacts everyone in the household. Tough love is the answer. It is usually suggested that the gambler voluntarily give up control of the finances until they have established clean time. Finances should be monitored regularly through free credit reports. To a problem gambler MONEY is the drug, just as alcohol is the drug for an alcoholic. Pathological gamblers cannot return to recreational gambling, just as someone in recovery for alcohol addiction can no longer socially drink.

With this addiction it is important to watch for relapse just as you would monitor for the return of a cancer that is in remission. Monitoring should be done in a firm, loving, and respectful manner. Your loved one never expected to become a problem gambler. Remember-It is important for you and your loved one to have hope.

With God all things are possible.