



## NATIONAL PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS MONTH

[www.npgam.org](http://www.npgam.org)

### NPGAM DISCUSSION GUIDE

March is National Problem Gambling Awareness Month! The purpose of this event is to encourage healthcare providers to screen their clients for gambling problems and to raise public awareness of problem gambling issues.

### WHY IS NPGAM 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 massive popularity of the NCAA “March Madness” Basketball Tournament. Between 8 and 12 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 why they developed a problem, what gambling addiction is or where to get help.

### HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

NPGAM is a grassroots campaign. We have provided weekly themes and questions for individuals and organizations to use in their communities. The materials referenced in the text and posted on [www.npgam.org](http://www.npgam.org) are available free of charge. We encourage you to utilize these materials and others to meet the general goals of NPGAM. For example, state affiliates of NCPG hold conferences, conduct trainings, issue press releases and PSAs, make media appearances, and seek state proclamations from their governor. A wide variety of healthcare providers add brief gambling screens into their assessments. Gambling operators provide informational displays and conduct responsible gaming trainings with staff. There is no limit to the opportunities.

Most importantly, the campaign is designed for you to come up with creative efforts that can impact your community. Share your efforts with us on the **Problem Gambling Awareness Month** Facebook page, Tweet the hashtag “#npgam”, or by contacting Jocelyn Wilcox at [jocelynw@ncpgambling.org](mailto:jocelynw@ncpgambling.org).

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### WEEK 1: 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 causes a disruption in any major area of life: psychological, physical, social, vocational, health, spiritual or emotional.
- 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.

#### ***Is problem gambling an addiction?***

- The DSM-5 classifies gambling disorder as a persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behavior that leads to significant problems.
- Problem gambling has been classified as an addiction, based upon scientific research that shows similarities to the causes and consequences of alcohol and drug problems.

## WEEK 1: GENERAL OVERVIEW CONTINUED

### **What are the signs of a gambling problem?**

Behavioral signs and symptoms include the following:

- Deterioration of work performance
- Problems in concentration
- Missing deadlines and important activities
- Frequently borrowing money
- Gambling to escape boredom, pain or loneliness
- Lying to loved ones about gambling
- Trying to win back money lost

Problem gambling is referred to as a “hidden addiction”—there is no physical test that indicates the negative affects of 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 and veterans.

## WEEK 2: IMPACT OF PROBLEM GAMBLING

### **What 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 6–8 million Americans (2–3% of population).
- Anyone who gambles can develop problems, if not aware of the risks.
- Gambling is more readily available now than at any other time in U.S. history: 48 states allow some form of gambling.

### **How does problem gambling impact me?**

- It is estimated that 8–10 people are affected by an loved one’s gambling problem.
- If you gamble, it is important to recognize that a once fun and recreational activity can become a serious issue.
- Your awareness may help a loved one seek help.
- Problem gambling is a public health issue impacting relationships, families, businesses and communities.

### **What are the consequences of a gambling addiction?**

- Health issues including suicide, co-occurring disorders, domestic violence, and work issues.
- Children of problem gamblers show higher rates of gambling disorder and higher levels of tobacco, alcohol, drug use and overeating.
- May ruin relationships and families.
- May cause financial devastation.
- May result in depression and other mental health concerns.

## WEEK 3: RESPONSIBLE GAMING

### **What does it mean to gamble responsibly?**

- Set a time limit and stick to it.
- Set a money limit and stick to it.
- Gamble only to have fun.
- Don’t gamble when you are lonely or upset.
- Don’t gamble to win back a loss.
- Don’t gamble to chase a win.
- Expect to lose—not win.
- Treat gambling like a leisure activity—don’t gamble with money that is designated for other obligations.
- Balance gambling with other life activities.

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

- Preoccupation with gambling.
- Gambling to escape boredom, pain or loneliness.
- Loss of interest in other activities.
- Argumentative and defensive about gambling behavior.
- Unexplained absences for long periods of time.
- Need to increase bet to maintain thrill.
- Lies to loved ones about gambling behavior.
- Going without basic needs in order to gamble.
- Borrowing money to gamble.
- Irritable and angry when trying to cut back.

## WEEK 4: RECOVERY

### ***What is a Helpline and what does it do?***

- Most states have established confidential, toll-free Helplines to assist problem gamblers and their families obtain information about counseling, Gamblers Anonymous and other supportive resources.
- Gives a caller an opportunity to share what is on their mind and be heard by someone who cares and listens in a non-judgmental fashion.
- Provides assistance, information and referrals.

### ***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 for living a happy and productive life without gambling.
- Benefits include identification (understanding you are not alone), acceptance (unconditional support), pressure relief (an approach to financial issues through disclosure, budgeting and planning), 12 steps (a spiritual guide to life) and peer support.
- Gamblers Anonymous is based on 12 guiding principles and 12 steps of recovery.

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

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

### ***What resources are available?***

- Gamblers Anonymous—[www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)
- Gam-Anon—[www.gamanon.org](http://www.gamanon.org)
- National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG)—[www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)
- On the NCPG website ([www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)), you can locate a problem gambling council and gambling support groups in your state.
- Call the Helpline (1-800-522-4700)



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