



Problem Gambling

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS PROBLEM GAMBLING?

Problem gambling—or gambling addiction—includes all gambling behavior patterns that compromise, disrupt or damage personal, family or vocational pursuits. The essential features are increasing preoccupation with gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop, “chasing” losses, and loss of control manifested by continuation of the gambling behavior in spite of mounting, serious, negative consequences. In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family, or even suicide.

ISN'T PROBLEM GAMBLING JUST A FINANCIAL PROBLEM?

No. Problem gambling is an emotional problem that has financial consequences. If you pay all of a problem gambler’s debts, the person will still be a problem gambler. The real problem is that they have an uncontrollable obsession with gambling.

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE BECOME PROBLEM GAMBLERS?

Anyone who gambles can develop problems if they are not aware of the risks and do not gamble responsibly. When gambling behavior interferes with finances, relationships and the workplace, a serious problem already exists.

HOW CAN A PERSON BE ADDICTED TO SOMETHING THAT ISN'T A SUBSTANCE?

Although no substance is ingested, the problem gambler gets the same effect from gambling as someone else might get from taking a tranquilizer or having a drink. The gambling alters the person’s mood and the gambler keeps repeating the behavior attempting to achieve that same effect. But just as tolerance develops to drugs or alcohol, the gambler finds that it takes more and more of the gambling experience to achieve the same emotional effect as before. This creates an increased craving for the activity and the gambler finds they have less and less ability to resist as the craving grows in intensity and frequency.

HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU HAVE TO LOSE BEFORE GAMBLING BECOMES A PROBLEM?

The amount of money lost or won does not determine when gambling becomes a problem. Gambling becomes a problem when it causes a negative impact on any area of the individual’s life.

HOW WIDESPREAD IS PROBLEM GAMBLING IN THE U.S.?

2 million (1%) of U.S. adults are estimated to meet criteria for pathological gambling in a given year. Another 4-6 million (2-3%) would be considered problem gamblers; that is, they do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling but meet one or more of the criteria and are experiencing problems due to their gambling behavior. Research also indicates that most adults who choose to gamble are able to do responsibly.