



Are You a Compulsive Gambler?



Recognizing the Syndrome

There are specific behavior patterns associated with compulsive gambling. Gamblers who recognize these patterns can cope with their addiction and recover a life free of gambling. Recovery programs providing help, guidance and healing are available.

An Addictive Disorder

Compulsive gambling is an addictive disorder. Experts speak of it as a “disorder of impulse-control.” Compulsive gamblers are unable to control their chronic gambling. An emotional dependency exists. Such gamblers are impulsive, obsessive and irrational. They will gamble against all odds. For a compulsive gambler, to roll the dice, pick a number or play a hand becomes more important than family, home or work.

Not all people who gamble are addicted. There are some characteristic behaviors that may help you recognize when gambling has become compulsive. Do you:

- ❖ spend a lot of time gambling or thinking about it?
- ❖ increase your bets to “catch up”?
- ❖ boast about your winnings?
- ❖ gamble to feel good?
- ❖ have frequent or unexplained absences?

- ❖ experience mood swings—high when winning, low when losing?
- ❖ keep hidden funds or take out secret “loans” from family bank accounts?

The Addiction Process

People who are becoming compulsive gamblers go through three phases of addiction: winning, losing and, finally, desperation.

The Winning Phase

Gamblers win, lose, and break even—often. In this phase, the winning and losing seems an adventure. Gamblers get their “thrills.” Excitement predominates. Worries disappear.

The Losing Phase

Gamblers begin losing more than they win. Self esteem ebbs. The gambler may borrow money to “get even.” More time is spent gambling to recover losses and repay loans. A roller coaster ride begins: The stakes and the takes increase; but the losses come faster, and the ride down is a fearsome thing.

The Desperation Phase

Gambling becomes a full-time obsession. Life centers around “getting even” and paying off debts, often with borrowed or stolen money. Lies and secret loans abound. Still greater risks are taken. Depression becomes chronic.

A Family Affair

Compulsive gambling harms marriages and family life. The gambler’s obsession steals time and attention away from the gambler’s spouse and children. Feeling abandoned, his or her loved ones experience problems of self-worth and suffer bouts of depression. The family unit can unravel.

As the disease progresses, the gambler’s work life also suffers. Work, it seems, begins to interfere with gambling. The gambler is often late to work, takes long lunches, uses the phone excessively or reads sports literature while working. All these are characteristic of the compulsive gambler. All are symptoms of the gambler’s compulsive, uncontrolled pursuit of the big gamble.

There Is Help

If you think your gambling has gotten out of control, you’ve already taken the first step toward recovery—you’ve recognized the problem. Your company’s employee assistance program may refer you to a professional counselor. Or you may choose, as many have, to find help through Gamblers Anonymous. Gamblers Anonymous is a self-help organization offering a 12-step recovery program similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. Check the white pages for a chapter near you.