

March 2021- National Problem Gambling Month

A note from the author—

Happy March NCP family and friends! Last year, at this time, I wrote a Coronavirus article. It is amazing how much we have gone through in one year. Now, many have us have gotten sick, or had family that have contracted COVID. Our lives, jobs, and families have continued to change drastically and a sense of “normalcy” has not quite returned. For some, mental illness has been on the rise. For others, poor coping mechanisms and dangerous vices have surfaced. This month, I wanted to address a topic that may be especially relevant this year, one year after the pandemic began... National Problem Gambling Month. This month, someone you know may need help. Maybe you need help. This month, I want you to check in on your friends and family... not everyone is okay.



What is Problem Gambling Awareness Month?

The U.S. highlighted the issue of gambling disorders with National Problem Gambling Awareness Month throughout the month of March.

A 2016 Oregon study estimates that over 83,000 Oregon adults (2.6%) have a gambling problem—that’s about one in every 38 adults (Moore, 2016). Problem gambling is a public health issue that costs approximately \$7 billion a year in social costs in the United States (National Council on Problem Gambling). Despite this, there are currently NO federal funds that support problem gambling services.

Local efforts to help highlight awareness include a middle school art search, school presentations and resources (contact Doug Gouge), and a free training for human services professionals. We are also seeking to highlight parent awareness around some common forms of video games that actually include gambling content.

We want people to know that help is still free and available for person with a gambling problems and their loved ones. Too often this addiction goes hidden and unrecognized. We want people to “have the conversation” about problem gambling, and know that gambling disorders are preventable and treatable.

Anyone concerned about their own gambling behavior, or that of a loved one, can get help by calling the statewide gambling help line, **1-877-MY-LIMIT (877-695-4648)**, or chat online at www.opgr.org.

Why March?

Every year basketball fans are excited to celebrate the collegiate basketball tournament series known as **March Madness**. During this time, the gambling public will spend approximately \$10 billion wagering on the outcomes of the games played. In response to this, March was selected as **Problem Gambling Awareness Month (PGAM)**.



What is Gambling?

Gambling is commonly defined as risking something of value, usually money, and on the outcome of an event decided at least partially by chance. Many adults who gamble will never have a problem, however, 2-4 percent of adults who gamble are at risk for developing a gambling disorder.

If your gambling behavior is negatively affecting your relationships, finances, or work life, you may want to consider taking a self-assessment. Washington State residents and their families who do not have insurance for problem gambling treatment may be eligible for free treatment.



What is Problem Gambling?

Problem Gambling is behavior that causes disruption in any major area of life, including: psychological, physical, social, or vocational. Symptoms of gambling addiction can range from mild to severe, just like any other progressive addiction. The most serious form of problem gambling is “pathological” or “compulsive” gambling.

Problem Gambling is a serious health issue that affects not only the gambler, but also the addict’s family, friends, employers, etc. According to some research studies, problem gamblers have a higher rate of suicide than people struggling with alcohol or drug addiction. Some symptoms of problem gambling that have the “ripple effect” on the gambler’s families and social circles include: lying, severe debt, borrowing, stealing, stress, broken relationships, depressions, aggression, and hidden debt that can cause loss of homes and bankruptcy.



How prevalent is gambling?

The prevalence of gambling today is woven into everyday life from weekly poker nights, to Internet games, to bingo parlors, to Sunday football, even the phrase "I bet you..." that is commonly used in our language. Gambling is occasional and fun for most adults, but for six to eight million Americans, it negatively affects finances, work, and family.

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 of 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.

Gambling is defined as any game or activity where you risk money or something of value on an outcome that is not guaranteed. Gambling is older than alcohol.

Archaeologists have discovered gambling games in the ruins of the ancient pyramids and Pompeii. In the early history of the United States, public lotteries financed the building of universities, churches and hospitals. Today, gambling is legal in all states except Utah and Hawaii.

"Gambling becomes a serious problem when you can't stop," says Keith Whyte, Executive Director of the National Council on Problem Gambling. "A problem gambler loses control and cannot stick to limits, even when gambling is causing serious financial, family, work or other problems." The American Psychiatric Association (APA) now classifies gambling disorder as persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behavior that disrupts personal, family or vocational pursuits.

Jeffrey Beck, Assistant Director for Clinical Services, Treatment & Research for the New Jersey Council on Compulsive Gambling, notes "Gambling is an addiction, but it is a treatable addiction. There are multiple resources across the country to provide support to gamblers and their families.

Can You Identify The Problem Gambler?

Gambling Can Become A Problem For Anyone.

HELPLINE
1-888-789-7777

How prevalent is gambling in the U.S.?

Approximately 85% of U.S. adults have gambled at least once in their lives; 60% in the past year. Some form of legalized gambling is available in 48 states plus the District of Columbia. The two without legalized gambling are Hawaii and Utah.

What are the signs of a gambling problem?

"Signs of a gambling problem include:

- Lying to loved ones about gambling activity
- Deterioration of work performance
- Trouble concentrating
- Missing deadlines and important responsibilities
- Worry about mounting debts and inability to pay them
- Using credit cards to acquire funds to gamble
- Bragging about or hiding gambling activity
- Lying about wins or losses

- Growing preoccupation with gambling
- A need to bet more money, more frequently
- Restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop
- “Chasing” after wins, resulting in greater losses
- Losing track of time while gambling
- Neglecting family members in order to gamble
- Loss of control in spite of mounting negative consequences

Do you have a problem?

You may have a problem with gambling if you ask yourself any of the following questions:

- Are you concerned about how the gambling of a loved one is affecting your life?
- Is the gambling of someone dear to you creating anxiety and worry?
- Are you having financial problems due to the gambling of a loved one or family member?
- Are you in financial turmoil or emotional distress and not sure why? Could gambling be the reason?
- Are you worried about the emotional health and/or financial security of a loved one who is gambling?



Who is at risk of becoming a problem gambler?

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.

What “causes” problem gambling?

The cause of a gambling problem is the individual’s inability to control the gambling. This may be due in part to a person’s genetic tendency to develop addiction, their ability to cope with normal life stress and even their social upbringing and moral attitudes

about gambling. The casino or lottery provides the opportunity for the person to gamble. It does not, in and of itself, create the problem any more than a liquor store would create an alcoholic.

What type of gambling most often leads to problem gambling?

Again, the cause of a gambling problem is the individual's inability to control the gambling. Therefore, any type of gambling can become problematic, just as an alcoholic can get drunk on any type of alcohol. But some types of gambling have different characteristics that may exacerbate gambling problems. While these factors are still poorly understood, anecdotal reports indicate that one risk factor may be a fast speed of play. In other words, the faster the wager to response time with a game, the more likely players may be to develop problems with a particular game.



How often do “problem gamblers” gamble?

The frequency of a person's gambling does not determine whether or not they have a gambling problem. Even though the problem gambler may only go on periodic gambling binges, the emotional and financial consequences will still be evident in the gambler's life, including the effects on the family.



Are problem gamblers often addicted to other things?

It is generally accepted that people with one addiction are more at risk to develop another. Some problem gamblers also find they have a problem with alcohol or drugs. This does not, however, mean that if you have a gambling problem you are guaranteed to become addicted to other things. Some problem gamblers never experience any other addiction because no other substance or activity gives them the same feeling as the gambling does. There also appears to be evidence of family patterns regarding dependency as many problem gamblers report one or both parents had a drinking and or gambling problem.



Do you have a gambling problem?

Gamblers Anonymous uses a list of 20 questions to help individuals determine whether or not they may have a gambling problem. A “YES” to at least seven of these questions may indicate that you are a compulsive gambler:

1. Did you ever lose time from work because of gambling?
2. Has gambling ever made your home life unhappy?
3. Did gambling affect your reputation?
4. Have you ever felt remorse after gambling?
5. Did you ever gamble to get money with which to pay debts or otherwise solve financial difficulties?
6. Did gambling cause a decrease in your ambition or efficiency?
7. After losing, did you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses?
8. After a win, did you have a strong urge to return and win more?
9. Did you often gamble until your last dollar was gone?
10. Did you ever borrow to finance your gambling?

11. Have you ever sold anything to finance gambling?
12. Were you reluctant to use “gambling money” for normal expenditures?
13. Did gambling make you careless of the welfare of yourself and your family?
14. Did you ever gamble longer than you had planned?
15. Have you ever gambled to escape worry or trouble?
16. Have you ever committed, or considered committing, an illegal act to finance gambling?
17. Did gambling cause you to have difficulty sleeping?
18. Do arguments, disappointments, or frustrations create within you an urge to gamble?
19. Did you ever have an urge to celebrate any good fortune by a few hours of gambling?
20. Have you ever considered self-destruction as a result of your gambling?



Are you living with a Compulsive Gambler?

Gam-Anon, a self-help organization working with the friends and families of Pathological Gamblers, uses a 20-questions guide to help answer this question. If you are living with a compulsive gambler, you will answer “YES” to at least six of the following questions:

1. Do you find yourself constantly bothered by bill collectors?
2. Is the person in question often away from home for long, unexplained periods of time?
3. Does this person ever lose time from work because of gambling?
4. Do you feel this person cannot be trusted with money?
5. Does the person in question faithfully promise to stop gambling- even beg and plead for another chance- yet gamble again and again?

6. Does this person ever gamble longer than he or she intended to, until the last dollar is gone?
7. Does this person immediately return to gambling to try to recover losses or win more?
8. Does this person ever gamble to get money to solve financial difficulties, or have unrealistic expectations that gambling will bring the family material comfort and wealth?
9. Does this person borrow money to gamble or pay gambling debts?
10. Has this person's reputation ever suffered because of gambling, even to the extent to committing illegal acts to finance gambling?
11. Have you come to the point of hiding money needed for living expenses, knowing if you did not that you and the rest of the family may go without food or clothing?
12. Do you search this person's clothing or go through his or her wallet when the opportunity presents itself, or otherwise check on his or her activities?
13. Do you hide the gambler's money?
14. Have you noticed a personality change in the gambler as his or her gambling progresses?
15. Does this person consistently lie to cover up gambling activities?
16. Does this person use guilt induction as a method of shifting responsibility for his or her gambling to you?
17. Do you anticipate this person's mood or try to control his or her life, seeking some stability in your own?
18. Does this person ever suffer from remorse or depression because of gambling- sometimes even to the point of self-destruction?
19. Has gambling ever threatened to break up the family unit?
20. Do you feel that your life with the gambler has become a nightmare?

THIS IS
WHO
GAMBLING
HURTS



Can children or teens develop a gambling problem?

A number of states allow children under 18 to gamble, and youth also participate in illegal forms of gambling, such as gambling on the Internet or betting on sports. Therefore, it is not surprising that research shows that a vast majority of kids have gambled before their 18th birthday, and that children may be more likely to develop problems related to gambling than adults. While debate continues on this issue, there appears to be a number of factors influencing this finding. Parental attitudes and behavior play a role. Age of exposure plays a part, in that adults who seek treatment for problem gambling report having started gambling at an early age. A number of adolescents reported a preoccupation with everything related to gambling prior to developing problems.



Do you need help? Gam-Anon may Help

Gam-Anon is a 12 Step self-help fellowship of men and women who have been affected by the gambling problem of another. We understand as perhaps few can. We are familiar with worry and sleepless nights and promises made only to be broken.

We may have become fearful and uncertain as to how to cope with the deterioration in our lives and our relationships, the financial problems, and the debts caused by the gambling. We know that living with the effects of another's gambling can often be too devastating to bear without help.

With the help of Gam-Anon, we find our way back to a normal way of thinking and living, whether or not our loved ones continue to gamble. We believe that a change in our attitudes is of boundless helps to us as well as to our gamblers.

Gam-Anon is not a religious organization or a counseling agency. It is not a treatment center nor is it allied with any organization offering such services. No dues or fees are required. Membership is voluntary, requiring only that one's own life has been affected by someone else's gambling problem.

Purposes of Gam-Anon

1. To welcome and give assistance and comfort to those affected by someone else's gambling problem.

2. To communicate Gam-Anon's understanding of compulsive gambling and its impact on our lives.
3. To share our experience, strength, and hope in coping with the gambling problem.
4. To use the Steps and Tools of the Gam-Anon program which nurture our spiritual and emotional growth and recovery.

A Message from Gam-Anon

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from a gambling problem.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling. There are no dues or fees for Gamblers Anonymous membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. Gamblers Anonymous is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. Our primary purpose is to stop gambling and to help other compulsive gamblers do the same.



Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real problem gamblers. No one likes to think they are different from their fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our gambling careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could gamble like other people. The idea that somehow, some day, we will control our gambling is the great obsession of every compulsive gambler. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of prison, insanity or death.

We learned we had to concede fully to our innermost selves that we are compulsive gamblers. This is the first step in our recovery. With reference to gambling, the delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed. We have lost the ability to control our gambling. We know that no real compulsive gambler ever regains

control. All of us felt at times we were regaining control, but such intervals - usually brief -were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced that gamblers of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period of time we get worse, never better. Therefore, in order to lead normal happy lives, we try to practice to the best of our ability, certain principles in our daily affairs.

The Delaware Council on Gambling Problems, Inc. (DCGP)

The DCGP offers a helpline, as well as additional resources, for gambling addicts. The 24/7 Helpline can be reached at 1-888-850-8888 and its primary purpose is to serve as an initial contact for people who have a compulsive/gambling problem or are affected by problem gambling. Often the caller is desperate or may be suicidal as a result of their compulsive/gambling problems or the affects of another's problem gambling. It is the DCGP practice that all callers are greeted with a live-voice.

The DCGP offers two major forms of help:

1. Information on the compulsive/gambling problem in the form of a literature pack
2. One-on-one counseling with a nationally certified gambling counselor

To accommodate callers who do not speak English or are more comfortable in their native language, the DCGP offers Language Line Services. The helpline provides an interpreter for a variety of languages to better assist the caller.

During regular office hours, Monday through Friday 9 AM to 5 PM, designated trained office staff members answer the Helpline. If indicated, they will prepare and mail a Literature Pack and offer the names of certified compulsive/problem gambling counselors to the caller.

When the office is closed, the Helpline is forwarded to the trained call taker telephones through a call forwarding system in accordance with a schedule that is mailed to them each month by the Helpline Director.



Call takers and office staff are required to take specialized training in call taking, crisis stabilization, emergency services, and the DCGP suicide prevention protocol. They are also required to sign a DCGP Volunteer Code of Ethics, and a Statement of Confidentiality.

The Helpline number is widely advertised and appears on all lottery tickets, including Power Ball, on all slot machines at the 3 Racinos, on ATM machines and receipts at the Racinos, billboards and bus-tails, daily racing program and in telephone books throughout Delaware. Besides helping callers obtain our services, all callers are encouraged to attend Gamblers Anonymous (GA) or Gam-Anon meetings in their area. Each literature packet contains various pamphlets, a GA meeting list, Gam-Anon material, and other materials to help educate the caller about compulsive/problem gambling and that it is a treatable disorder.

The callers are also provided with various referral services depending on their needs. Callers are offered treatment services for one-on-one sessions with a certified compulsive/problem gambling counselor. In addition, they are given the GA International Helpline number where they can call at any time and speak to a GA member in their area. GA provides a great long term support system for the compulsive/problem gambler and others affected by the gambling problem.

DCGP 24 hr./ 7 day a week Helpline and Referral services - Call anytime, from anywhere. The call is toll free and absolutely confidential.

Additional Resources for Gambling Addicts

If you or a loved one is struggling with problem gambling, hope and help is available anytime. The National Problem Gambling Helpline Network (1-800-522-4700) is accessible 24/7 and provides referral to help in your area. Calls are free and confidential.



References

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