

PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING

*A Mental Health Educational Series brought to you by:
Innovative Psychological Consultants*

Description

Problem gambling is an urge to gamble despite experiencing negative consequences or continuing to gamble despite a desire to stop. An estimated 15 million Americans have problem gambling with more than 3 million of them having severe problematic gambling. Problem gambling is not a bad habit or moral weakness, but a serious condition that is treatable. Although it is commonly referred to as gambling addiction, it is actually categorized as an impulse control disorder. However, like chemical addictions it is a progressive and chronic condition. Problem gambling tends to strain relationships, affect one's ability to fulfill responsibilities at work, home, or school, and can lead to financial catastrophe. It can lead people to do things they never thought themselves capable of such as borrowing or stealing money from partners, employers, and even their children.

Symptoms & Features

Pathological Gambling Disorder is a persistent and recurring maladaptive gambling pattern as evidenced by five or more of the following symptoms: 1) a mental preoccupation with gambling, 2) a need to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement or effect, 3) repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut down, or quit gambling, 4) restless and irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling, 5) gambles as a way of escaping problems or alleviating depressed feelings, 6) after losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (chasing losses), 7) lies to family and others to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling, 8) has committed illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft, or embezzlement to finance gambling, 9) has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of gambling, 10) relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.

Problematic gambling does not discriminate. It affects men and women of any age, race, or religion. Those with problem gambling are also prone to having issues with drinking, drugs, and depression. Warning signs of problem gambling include: denying there is a problem, lying about where money is going, borrowing money to pay off debts, taking time off work to gamble, or losing touch with friends. You might have a problem with gambling if you feel the need to be secretive about your gambling, can't control your gambling (spend more than intended or stay longer than intended), gamble even when you don't have money, or family and friends have told you they are worried about your gambling.

Treatment

Pathological gambling is typically treated with abstinence based treatment programs. People are either directed to in-patient (28 days typically) or out-patient (60 hours occurring 3-4X weekly for 4-5 weeks) gambling programs. Treatment occurs in a group therapy format with focus on breaking through denial of one's problem, education around pathological gambling, and providing people with tools to remain abstinent. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is often used to identify and challenge distorted thinking and beliefs around gambling. There are also some medicinal treatment aids that are occasionally used such as antidepressants, mood stabilizers, or anti-craving or opiate blockers such as naltrexone or nalmefene.

What Can I Do To Help Myself

If you think you may have a gambling problem, you can get an evaluation at I.P.C. In addition, you can read about problematic gambling and its treatment. You can also check out community resources such as Gamblers Anonymous (GA) for assistance in remaining abstinent. There are also online peer support groups for gambling problems that provide greater anonymity.