

Frequently Asked Questions

Problem Gambling



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 symptoms include:

- increasing preoccupation with gambling
- a need to bet more money more frequently
- “chasing” losses (betting even more to try to recoup previous losses)
- restlessness/irritability when trying to stop
- loss of control manifested by continuation of gambling despite mounting, serious, negative consequences
- in extreme cases, problem gambling can cause bankruptcy, legal problems, losing your job or family, and thinking about suicide.

ISN'T PROBLEM GAMBLING JUST A FINANCIAL PROBLEM?

No. Problem gambling is an emotional problem that has financial consequences. If you pay all the debts of a person affected by problem gambling, the person still has a gambling problem or gambling disorder. The real issue is that they have an uncontrollable obsession with gambling.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING?

Anyone who gambles can develop problems. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the risks and to gamble in a responsible way, if you choose to gamble. 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, someone with a gambling problem gets the same effect from gambling as one might get from taking a drug or drinking alcohol. But just as tolerance develops to drugs or alcohol, a person with gambling problems finds that it takes more and more of the gambling experience to achieve the same effect as before. This creates an increased urge for the activity and the person finds that 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 AN ISSUE?

The amount of money lost or won does not determine when gambling becomes problematic. Gambling becomes an issue when it causes a negative impact on any area of the person's life.

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

2 million U.S. adults (1%) are estimated to meet criteria for severe gambling problems each year. Another 4-6 million (2-3%) would be considered to have mild or moderate gambling problems; that is, they do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for gambling addiction 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 can do so responsibly.

CAN CHILDREN OR TEENAGERS DEVELOP GAMBLING ISSUES?

A few 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 in states where it is not legal. Thus, it is not surprising that research shows that a vast majority of kids have gambled before their 18th birthdays, and that children may be more likely to develop issues related to gambling than adults. While debate continues, there appears to be several factors influencing this finding. Parental attitudes and behavior play a role. Age of exposure also plays a part – research shows that adults who seek treatment for problem gambling report having started gambling at an early age.