

## Video Transcript: Cognitive-behavioural Therapy and Problem Gambling

This video provides an overview of cognitive-behavioural therapy, or CBT, for problem gambling.

CBT is a widespread and well-researched psychological treatment that focuses attention on how thoughts, emotions and behaviours are linked. CBT helps people to understand and change their thoughts and behaviours to help them alleviate certain problems in their lives.

CBT approaches to problem gambling often include an effort to raise awareness and correct cognitive distortions or 'faulty thinking' about gambling, to substitute gambling with healthier, non-gambling behaviours, and to develop skills to prevent relapse.

CBT can be done individually or in a group. In CBT sessions, the problem gambling therapist will encourage clients to talk about thoughts and feelings related to their gambling. This will help them to gain a better understanding of what may be triggering gambling, the thoughts and feelings they may be experiencing as a result of the triggering situation, and how this may reinforce the problem gambling behaviour. Learning how to manage triggers and make changes to thought patterns can help reduce problem behaviours.

As treatment progresses, therapists may encourage their clients to engage in activities, reading, or practices that build on what was learned in counselling sessions, and apply what they are learning to their daily lives.

Here are some examples of what CBT may look like in practice.

CBT can help identify triggering situations and the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that might arise.

A common gambling myth is that one can win back losses. Someone who has recently received his credit card statement and realized he is in significant debt may increase his rate of gambling to try to pay off that debt.

Here the person's trigger is receiving the credit card statement; his feelings are fear and anxiety of the pending debt; his thought is, "I'm doomed unless I win at the casino"; and his behaviour is gambling at an increased rate.

The therapists can work with the client to identify some of the negative consequences associated with this behaviour, such as the possibility of deepening debt causing increased stress and further straining family relationships.

The therapist can then help the client identify steps that can be taken to stop or interfere with the process at different points, with the goal of changing the gambling behaviour in the future when a similar trigger presents itself.

The client might eventually learn to develop more rational or balanced thoughts, such as "Gambling can result in further debt" or "The odds of winning in gambling are against me, so I should find another way to pay off my debts." This new thinking can help to manage triggers and break behavioural patterns related to problem gambling.

Example two: CBT can help to explore faulty beliefs that contribute to problem gambling.

People with problem gambling may experience thoughts such as:

- "I am lucky. I can beat the odds."
- "I am on a winning streak. It's a good time to double down."
- "I know this slot machine like the back of my hand. I know it's going to pay out today."
- "I will win back what I lost if I keep playing."

A therapist might ask a client who believes her slot machine is going to pay out today about her understanding of how slot machines work and the odds of winning.

The therapist might ask the client to explain her beliefs in more detail. Bringing these beliefs to a conscious level can raise doubts in the client's mind, and make it possible for her to challenge her own thinking. This dialogue can help the client recognize that her thoughts are ideas not facts.

Example 3: CBT can help with relapse prevention.

People who have been able to achieve their goals of minimizing or stopping their problem gambling behaviours might need ongoing support. A therapist might work with clients to identify and develop coping strategies for situations or triggers that make them more at risk for problem gambling.

This video is part of ProblemGambling.ca Helping Professionals website. Learn more about cognitive-behavioural therapy, problem gambling and treatment by visiting ProblemGambling.ca.