

PROBLEM A Guide for Helping Professionals GAMBLING

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Table 12

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Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale

Problem Gambling: A Guide for Helping Professionals



A Pan American Health Organization /
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Collaborating Centre

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Problem Gambling: A Guide for Helping Professionals

Problem Gambling Project staff

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Other Resources in This Series

Problem Gambling: A Guide for Families

Problem Gambling: The Issues, the Options

Problem Gambling: A Guide for Financial Counsellors

Problem Gambling: Legal Information for Helping Professionals

Problem Gambling: Legal Information

Problem Gambling: Legal Information for Families

Introduction

This guide is for people who work in the “helping professions,” including addiction specialists, social and health care providers, workers in the criminal justice system, the clergy and employee assistance program counsellors.

Many people who come to you may be struggling with serious financial, emotional, health and relationship problems related to problem gambling. It is also likely that they will not tell you about these problems—unless you ask.

This guide has been developed to:

- increase your knowledge of problem gambling, and your understanding of its impact on those who gamble and their families
- give you the information and tools you need to identify and support people with gambling problems
- give you strategies to explore concerns about gambling and to prompt clients to take appropriate action
- increase your knowledge of community supports and services that are available to people with gambling problems.

1

Introduction to Gambling

Gambling in Canada has grown at an unprecedented rate over the last decade and is an increasingly popular recreational activity. While gambling was once illegal, or viewed as a disreputable activity, social norms have shifted.

Gambling is now a multi-billion dollar industry in Canada, and its growth is likely to continue. Surveys indicate that the general population favours funding charities, health care and other important initiatives through the funds raised from gambling. Generally, the public prefers this to increases in direct taxation.

For some people, gambling may become a serious problem that affects all aspects of their lives. And as gambling becomes more accessible, the number of people affected by problem gambling also increases.

What Is Gambling?

A person is gambling whenever he or she takes the chance of losing money or belongings, and when winning or losing is decided mostly by chance.

There are many different ways to gamble, including:

- casino games
- bingo
- keno
- slot machines
- lottery tickets
- scratch, Nevada or pull-tab tickets
- betting on card games, mah-jong or dominoes
- betting on horse racing
- other sports betting
- betting on games of skill, such as golf or pool
- tombola and similar games
- Internet gambling
- stock market speculation.

FACTS ABOUT GAMBLING IN ONTARIO AND CANADA

- In 2005, 63.3% of Ontario adults gambled at least once in the last year—usually with lottery tickets. The vast majority of people who gamble do so without problems.¹
- The gaming industry in Canada generates more than \$14 billion in revenues. Spending on gaming in Canada is larger than magazine, book, spectator sport, movie theatre and performing arts sectors combined.²
- Ontario has over 11,000 ticket lottery outlets—the most in North America. Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG) operates 101 lottery games (16 online, 76 instant, four sports and five bingo). Online games remain the top revenue generators in the lottery division and account for 65% of overall OLG lottery revenues.³
- In 2006, OLG lotteries and bingo generated \$2.4 billion in revenue (before prize deductions).³

(“Facts About Gambling in Ontario and Canada” continued)

- In 2006, total commercial casino revenue was \$1.7 billion.³
- Ontario’s four commercial casinos created more than 27,000 direct and indirect jobs.⁴
- Since 1998, six charity casinos have opened in the province. From these operations, Ontario charities are guaranteed \$100 million annually.⁴
- Charity and casino racetrack slot machines generated \$1.9 billion in revenue in 2006.³
- Since the opening of Ontario’s first slot machines in 1998 (Windsor Raceway), Ontario now has 17 racetracks with slot machines. As of 2006, Ontario racetracks housed more than 10,000 slot machines, which are played by almost 17,000 patrons per day. There are only five racetracks without slot machines in Ontario. The racing industry receives 10% of the revenue from slot machines.³

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What Is Problem Gambling?

Problem gambling is not just about the loss of money, but how it can affect the person's whole life. Gambling is a problem when it:

- interferes with work, school or other activities
- leads to emotional or physical health problems
- causes financial problems
- harms the family or other relationships.

You may have heard the following terms, which have also been used to describe problem gambling:

- gambling addiction
- compulsive gambling
- pathological gambling
- gambling disorder.

FACTS ABOUT PROBLEM GAMBLING IN ONTARIO AND CANADA

- In 2005, 3.4% of adults had a moderate to severe problem with gambling. An additional 5.8% were classified as "at-risk" for problem gambling.¹
- The number of clients being served by Ontario's specialized treatment system is low but slowly increasing.²
- In 2005 about 4% of high school students were at risk for a gambling problem. The percentage of all students who gambled at cards significantly increased since 2003.³
- In 2005, one in seven adult men and women living alone spent money on casinos, slot machines or video lottery terminals, yet men spent more than three times as much money on gambling as women.⁴
- Problem gambling prevalence rates are higher for people with a history of mental illness or substance use problems.⁵

(“Facts About Problem Gambling in Ontario and Canada” continued)

- In 2005, 9.6% of adults reported experiencing negative impacts by someone else’s gambling compared to 5.2% in 2001. Those affected by problem gambling often experience financial difficulty, emotional distress and relationship problems.¹
- In 2005, adults experiencing severe problems with gambling spent roughly 21% of their personal income on gambling compared to non problem gamblers who spent roughly 1.5%.¹

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Gambling problems occur along a continuum. These are not discrete categories but possible points along a range of involvement.



- **No gambling:** Some people never gamble.
- **Casual social gambling:** Most people gamble casually, buying the occasional raffle or lottery ticket or occasionally visiting a casino for entertainment.
- **Serious social gambling:** These people play regularly. It is their main form of entertainment, but it does not come before family and work.
- **Harmful involvement:** These people are experiencing difficulties in their personal, work and social relationships.
- **Pathological gambling:** For a small but significant number of people, gambling seriously harms all aspects of their lives. People with gambling problems this severe are unable to control the urge to gamble, despite the harm it causes. These people are more likely to use gambling to escape from problems and to get relief from anxiety.

Pathways into Problem Gambling

This model was developed by Alex Blaszczynski to describe an integrated approach to understanding the entryways into problem gambling. More detailed information can be found in his book, *Overcoming Compulsive Gambling* (1998). This approach takes into account the fact that not everyone who develops a gambling problem exhibits DSM-IV criteria, nor do they necessarily have an underlying or contributing pathology. People with gambling problems fall into three main categories.

1. “Normal” problem gamblers are people whose entry into problem gambling is linked to environment and learning. It may have stemmed from an early win or cognitive distortions about true odds and probabilities. The gambler does not necessarily have pre-existing psychological problems.
2. “Emotionally vulnerable” gamblers are people whose entry into problem gambling results from their difficulty in managing stress or crisis in their lives. They use gambling as an emotional mask and a way of avoiding underlying issues and current stresses.
3. “Biologically based” gamblers are people who have impulse disorders, such as ADHD, and are the most challenging in terms of treatment success. Gambling can also trigger other binge behaviours and, according to Blaszczynski, these people should receive counselling to deal with impulse control and should also explore antidepressant and other medication options with a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Problem Gambling Affects People Differently

Not all people who gamble excessively are alike, nor are the problems they face. People with gambling problems are found in all age groups, income groups, cultures and jobs. Some people develop gambling problems suddenly, others over many years. There are many reasons why a gambling problem may develop. For example, some people develop problems when they try to win back money they have lost, or because they like to be “in the action.” Others have many life stresses that make gambling a welcome relief.

Risk Factors

There are risk factors that can contribute to the development of gambling problems or make it more difficult to stop. People are more at risk if they:

- have an early big win (leading to false expectations of future wins)
- have easy access to their preferred form of gambling
- hold mistaken beliefs about the odds of winning
- do not take steps to monitor gambling wins and losses

- have had a recent loss or change, such as divorce, job loss, retirement or death of a loved one
- often feel bored or lonely, or have a history of risk-taking or impulsive behaviour
- have financial problems
- have few interests or hobbies, or feel their lives lack direction
- have a history of mental health problems, particularly depression and anxiety
- have been abused or traumatized
- have a parent who also has (or has had) problems with gambling
- have (or have had) problems with alcohol or other drugs, gambling or overspending
- tie their self-esteem to gambling wins or losses.

The more factors that apply, the more likely a person is to develop a gambling problem.

Risk Groups

Research into gambling problems suggests that some groups may be more at risk of developing problems or may experience greater harm because of their gambling behaviour.

YOUTH

Research shows that teens are twice as likely as adults to have gambling problems. Easy access to gambling, its wide acceptance as a way to have fun, the perception that it is a quick way to a good life and the element of risk make gambling attractive to teens. The social, educational and emotional consequences are serious. Gambling in teens is correlated with poor academic and vocational performance, mental health problems, problems with alcohol or other drugs and high-risk behaviour. Long-term studies are not yet available to tell us if gambling in youth becomes a lifelong problem.

OLDER ADULTS

More seniors are gambling today than ever before. The gaming industry has recognized older adults as an important market and has introduced special promotions, cheap transportation and free lunches to encourage seniors to visit local casinos. Seniors enjoy gambling and report feeling safe in the brightly lit and well-supervised settings.

Statistically, older adults are less likely to gamble and are at lower risk of developing gambling problems. When gambling is a problem, however, the consequences are often more severe, because seniors are less able to replace lost savings. Seniors who have recently lost a loved one, have health problems or who lack a strong social network or alternative work or leisure activities may be more at risk of experiencing problems if they choose to gamble.

NEW IMMIGRANTS

Research suggests that recent immigrants may be at increased risk for developing gambling problems because of the stress of immigration, weakened social and familial relations, loneliness and isolation, financial difficulties, employment challenges, language and cultural barriers or a desire to achieve rapid financial success. Cultural factors shape beliefs about money and gambling; these beliefs need to be asked about, understood and factored into your relationship with the person seeking your help.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Aboriginal people may be at increased risk for developing gambling problems because of the stresses associated with isolation, poverty, racism, oppression and the loss of culture and language. A study by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres in 2000 found that 43 per cent of aboriginal people had significant problems with gambling. Many of these people were also dealing with grief. Cultural factors shape beliefs about money and gambling; these beliefs need to be asked about, understood and factored into your relationship with the person seeking your help.

LOW-INCOME PEOPLE

Little is known about the gambling patterns of people with the lowest incomes in Ontario. Most studies have used telephone surveys, and many people with low incomes do not have telephones. One Ontario study found people with incomes of less than \$20,000 per year were the most likely to experience problems with gambling, but they were also the least likely to gamble at all. They gamble less because they do not have the disposable income to do so. On the other hand, those that do may run into serious financial problems quickly because their incomes are low.

WOMEN

Women have gambling problems less frequently than men. But because their incomes tend to be lower, they may run into serious financial problems more quickly. On average, women still earn much less than men. Older women and single mothers are especially affected by poverty. Money pressures may be a greater motivation for women to gamble.

Impact of Problem Gambling

People with moderate to severe gambling problems can experience serious social, emotional, financial and health consequences including:

- significant financial loss
- work-related difficulties including lower productivity, higher absenteeism and job loss
- higher rates of emotional or health problems including depression, anxiety and problems with alcohol or other drugs
- higher rates of suicide
- higher rates of marital and family breakdown
- engaging in illegal activities to support their gambling.

People who gamble excessively will sometimes seek help for the financial, employment, relationship or health problems caused by their gambling without addressing the root cause of their problems. When the gambling behaviour is not addressed, these other problems often continue or worsen.

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Just as there are differing levels of gambling problems, families are also affected in various ways and to differing degrees. Because gambling can be hidden for a long time, many families are shocked when the full impact of the gambling loss is discovered. While some families are able to recover, not all are able to survive gambling problems. Rates of separation and divorce are significantly higher than in the general population.

Here are some common problems that families face:

Financial Crisis

The most common negative impact is serious financial loss. Problems may first appear as a sudden money crisis. Savings, property or belongings may be lost. Excessive spending on gambling often means that bills are not paid, utilities are cut off and money for necessities like groceries is in short supply.

Hiding debt, stealing money and having secret gambling funds are not uncommon. The person who is gambling may not want his or her family to know the full scope of what is going on financially.

Emotional Difficulties and Isolation

Intense emotions within families are common and may make problem-solving difficult. Families may feel helpless and unable to see solutions to their problems. The person who gambles may even deny that there is a problem.

Isolation is another problem:

- Many partners do not want to be emotionally or physically close with the person they no longer trust.
- Many families and people who gamble avoid those who normally give them love and support because they feel ashamed.
- Friendships may end because of unpaid debts, causing family conflict.

Health Problems

The stress of gambling may cause health problems, both for the person who gambles and the family. Common problems include anxiety, depression and stress-related disorders such as difficulty sleeping, ulcers, irritable bowel, eating disorders, headaches, muscle aches and pains. Compared to the general population, people who gamble and their spouses are more likely to have problems with alcohol or other drugs. They are also three times more likely to attempt suicide.

Burnout

Many families under stress have trouble coping. One family member may try to keep things under control by taking on more tasks. This can lead to emotional and mental fatigue. Family members can become so focussed on the person who gambles that they forget to take care of themselves or have fun.

Impact on Children

When a parent or caregiver has a gambling problem, children can feel forgotten, neglected, depressed and angry. They may believe they caused the problem and that if they are “good,” the problem will stop. Some take on parenting roles, to compensate for the missing parent. They may feel forced to take sides between fighting parents. Others may become depressed or get into trouble at school. Children of adults with gambling problems are two times more likely to attempt suicide and have lower grades than their peers. They are more likely to have problems with alcohol and other drugs than their peers and more likely to engage in illegal activity as a way of drawing attention away from their parents. Children may need help to understand that the problems in the family are not their fault and to return to the normal tasks of childhood.

Older Adults May Be at Risk

The person who gambles may demand money from older family members. He or she may also abuse power of attorney, misappropriate funds, steal possessions or force changes to the will in order to gain access to money or to pay off debts.

Physical and Emotional Abuse

Violence is more common when families are in crisis. Gambling problems can lead to emotional and physical abuse of a partner, elder parent or child. Children may be hurt by the person who gambles or by the partner who releases his or her pent-up anger and frustration. If you suspect neglect, or emotional or physical abuse, you are obligated under the Child Welfare Act to report your suspicions to the appropriate authority.

Depression and Anxiety

Both people with gambling problems and their families are at risk for anxiety and depression. Watch out for the signs and symptoms of depression and take steps to link the client to treatment.

Symptoms of depression include:

- loss of interest in usual activities
- feeling depressed, lethargic and more irritable
- changes in sleep (e.g., problems falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much)
- changes in appetite, weight loss or weight gain
- feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and despair
- difficulty thinking, remembering and slowed thoughts
- guilty ruminations and obsessing over real or perceived problems
- loss of interest in sex
- physical fatigue, or agitation and restlessness
- thoughts of suicide.

Risk of Suicide

People who gamble excessively and their families have higher rates of suicide. The risk of suicide increases for people who also have mental health problems or problems with alcohol or other drugs. People who have threatened suicide or have a history of self-harm are also more at risk.

Clients may have thoughts of suicide if they:

- talk about suicide and say they have a plan
- show changes in behaviour, appearance or mood
- seem depressed, sad or withdrawn
- give away prized personal objects
- prepare for death by making a will or telling final wishes.

Steps to take:

- Stay calm and listen carefully to better understand what is happening.
- Let them talk about their feelings. Accept what they are saying without passing judgment or trying to solve their problem.
- Ask clients specifically if they are feeling suicidal and have a plan.
- Take all suicide threats seriously.
- Encourage clients to remove any available means of self-harm (e.g., firearms, medications).
- Direct clients to the nearest emergency department for assessment, or encourage them to get professional help from a crisis centre, counsellor or doctor.
- Do not promise to keep the person's suicidal thoughts confidential.

Impact on the Community

The cost of problem gambling is difficult to quantify, but it can affect communities in many ways. The community is usually called upon to cover the costs of health care, problem gambling treatment, bankruptcy losses, civil and criminal court proceedings as well as increased policing, incarceration and security. The harm it can cause to families and workplaces is also part of its impact on the community.

CRIME

Among the most troublesome and least understood costs of gambling is gambling-related crime. Several studies have reported high rates of gambling-related criminal activity among problem gamblers. A recent study of incarcerated Canadian male federal offenders in the Milhaven Assessment Unit found that 26.9 per cent experienced some degree of problem gambling. The rate of pathological gambling using the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) was 9.7 per cent.¹ Studies of gambling in jails and prisons in other countries have shown that gambling problems are strongly related to criminal behaviour. These studies show that between 17 and 60 per cent of inmates have problems with gambling. Compare this with the general population, where just four per cent have problems with gambling. Incarceration can also make an existing gambling problem worse. Inmates have easy access to many forms of gambling. Gambling is a part of the subculture within prison populations. Inmates may be at risk of serious injury or even death if gambling debts are left unpaid.

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2

Talking about Gambling

As a helping professional, you probably provide services to people with gambling problems. People with gambling problems often access services for health, social, emotional, marital or financial concerns well before seeking counselling for a gambling problem.

You are in a position to identify people who may be experiencing problems with gambling, to support their efforts to change and to connect them to problem gambling resources.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Make it routine practice to talk about gambling with every person seeking your assistance.
- Establish a rapport that invites disclosure and motivates change.
- Be alert to the signs and indicators of problem gambling.
- Make information on problem gambling available and link people to specialized services.
- Explore clients' concerns and provide accurate information about problem gambling counselling, emphasizing the benefits of counselling.
- Help clients develop workable budgets and manage their debts in ways that relieve financial pressure. This reduces an important gambling trigger.
- Help clients and their families protect their remaining assets from further gambling losses.

Signs of Gambling Problems

Gambling problems share many similarities with other addictive disorders. However, there are no visible signs or physical changes that will indicate a gambling problem.

Here are common signs of problem gambling that helping professionals may identify in clients. While you may see individual symptoms in clients who do not have gambling problems, when a client exhibits a large number of signs—and an overall pattern of problems—the possibility that gambling is a problem should be explored further.

BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS

The client:

- stops doing things he or she previously enjoyed
- misses family events
- changes patterns of sleep, eating or sex
- ignores self-care, work, school or family tasks
- has conflicts over money with other people
- uses alcohol or other drugs more often
- leaves children alone, seems less concerned about who looks after them, neglects their basic care
- thinks and talks about gambling all the time
- is less willing to spend money on things other than gambling
- cheats or steals to get the money to gamble or pay debts
- has legal problems related to gambling
- is often late for work or school
- organizes staff pools
- is gone for long, unexplained periods of time
- neglects personal responsibilities.

EMOTIONAL SIGNS

The client:

- withdraws from family and friends
- seems far away, anxious or has difficulty paying attention
- has mood swings and sudden outbursts of anger

- complains of boredom or restlessness
- seems depressed or suicidal.

FINANCIAL SIGNS

The client:

- frequently borrows money or asks for salary advances
- takes a second job without a change in finances
- cashes in savings accounts, RRSPs or insurance plans
- alternates between being broke and flashing money
- family members complain that valuables and appliances are disappearing, or money is missing from a bank account or wallet.

HEALTH SIGNS

The client complains of stress-related health problems, such as:

- headaches
- stomach and bowel problems
- difficulty sleeping
- overeating, or loss of appetite.

Asking about Gambling

Establish a rapport that invites disclosure and motivates change. Shame, embarrassment or fear of disclosure may keep people who gamble from revealing the true nature of their problems. The challenge is to provide a safe and supportive environment that will facilitate disclosure in a manner that will allow you to address concerns and link people to appropriate help.

It is rarely helpful to ask directly “Are you having a problem with gambling?” Some clients may not have insight into how their problems are associated with gambling. For other clients, this blunt approach may lead to a defensive response and leave the client unwilling to explore the issue further.

There are, however, a number of ways you can ask gambling questions as a routine part of your assessment process.

- Ask about recreational activities: “What do you do for fun? Do you go to the movies, night clubs, or the racetracks?” “Do you ever go to casinos or other gambling venues?” When asking questions, assume that your client participates in some type of gambling: “How often do you buy lottery tickets?” Avoid moral judgments.
- “How much time and money do you spend on these activities?” You may find it difficult to ask clients about how they spend their money if this is not what you usually do. Many North Americans believe that it is rude to ask other people about money. You can assure your clients that problems with gambling are common and so you ask all people seeking your assistance about it.
- If you identify gambling as a concern, ask about debts to employers, family, friends, co-workers, casinos, bookies or loan sharks. Ask if RRSPs or savings have been cashed in to cover gambling losses. This will let you know whether the client should consider financial counselling.
- Consider using the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) which is provided in this guide.
- If you suspect that a client is having problems with gambling, keep relevant print information on gambling counselling in the client’s file and offer information at opportune times.

Problem Gambling Is a Family Problem

Consider including the client’s partner or family in the discussions, or arrange to meet with the family separately. Often family members are more willing to discuss the impact of gambling than the person who gambles. Your assessment of a client’s gambling problem may be based on what a family member tells you.

Many partners are unaware that gambling is a problem until there is a crisis. Clients may not want their partners to know everything that is going on. Try to balance the idea that secrecy enables gambling with the need to build trust and your responsibility to respect confidential information.

EMOTIONS CAN RUN HIGH

Discussing the family's situation can be an agonizing experience for the person who gambles and his or her partner. This may be the first time the client has acknowledged the full extent of his or her gambling losses. For his or her partner, there will likely be a resulting loss of trust and high levels of anger and frustration. This can be a challenge for the helping professional.

Take the time to provide information, support and encouragement so that both parties can feel more comfortable seeking counselling. This step can be taken with or without the person who gambles. When a family member seeks help, this often instills hope and clears a path for the person who gambles to take action. Children may also need help understanding that the problems in the family are not their fault. They may need to be encouraged to let go of that sense of responsibility.

PROTECT THE FAMILY FINANCES

Families may be willing to help by paying off the gambling debts. This approach is risky. With the money pressure off, the client may return to gambling knowing that if they get into trouble someone will bail them out. Helping professionals may encourage families to take steps to protect their assets from further loss with the help of a financial counsellor. The family may also need legal advice to help sort out which debts belong to the family (e.g., co-signed loans) and which belong to the person who gambles. Information on provincial legal services is included in the resource list.

Engaging the Client to Seek Help

When the client's life has become unmanageable, it may be appropriate for the helping professional to become more active in finding solutions to the client's problem. The challenge is to balance counsellor assistance with building client control and accountability.

Problem gambling experts have identified a number of counselling principles and best practices that are particularly effective in dealing with gambling problems and can complement your work as a helping professional.

MOTIVATING CLIENT CHANGE

Helping to build motivation to change is an important aspect of counselling. People who gamble struggle with conflicting motivations. They may want to stop gambling, but may not want to give up the hope of the big win. They may still see gambling as a solution to their problems or fear the emptiness of life without it.

Motivational interviewing helps clients to recognize their problems with gambling—and do something about them. Through gentle exploration and presentation of facts, counsellors guide clients to their own conclusions. Motivational principles include:

Express Empathy

A respectful and compassionate approach helps to facilitate openness.

“You must be feeling overwhelmed with all the challenges you are facing. How have you managed for so long?”

Through the interview process, acknowledge the challenges clients are facing and the efforts they have made to resolve their problems. Accept ambivalence towards change as normal.

Help the Client See the Consequences of Gambling

Create a discrepancy between continued gambling and achieving important goals identified by the client, such as getting out of debt or improving family relations and health:

“I don’t understand. You’ve said you want to work on things at home, but you tell me you go out gambling every night.”

Use a non-judgmental tone when pointing out discrepancies. If clients feel attacked or confronted, they may withdraw or become defensive. Try to assume a “not knowing” stance.

Avoid Arguments

Arguments do not help and can lead to defensiveness:

- Provide information so that clients can draw their own conclusions and identify their own reasons for change.
- If your approach isn't working, change it.
- Labelling the client as a “problem gambler” is not helpful or necessary.

Roll with Resistance

Accept clients' right to choose:

“You may decide after our discussion that you would rather continue as you are. That is your choice. Should you wish to work on these problems, I am here to help.”

Support Self-Efficacy

- Help clients identify their own solutions.
- Tell clients that you believe that they can change, cope and overcome obstacles without gambling. Point out examples of success.
- Match your intervention to the client's stage of change (see below).

Stages of Change

Some people seeking help respond quickly when a concern is identified, while others resist. If you suggest that a client go for problem gambling counselling when they have not yet identified that their problems may be related to gambling, you will probably meet with resistance. You may even discourage the client from continuing to work with you. Your influence will be greater if you understand and match your support to the client's stage of change.

Pre-contemplation

The person is not considering change and does not recognize the need for change.

“Yes I gamble and I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that.”

Helping professionals can give clients feedback on the impact that gambling is having on their life. Encourage clients to reflect on why others may think there is a problem. Invite clients to use the *Gambling Monitoring Tool* provided in the Client Handout section to help track gambling and the Canadian Problem Gambling Index to enhance awareness. If clients don’t respond, let them know that you can discuss the matter in the future.

Contemplation

The person is considering change and may be ready to commit to change.

“Yes, I’ve thought about staying away from the casino, but I’m due for a big win.”

Helping professionals can help clients weigh the positive and negative aspects of continuing to gamble. When clients begin to deal with the reality of their problems, they may begin to link gambling to their current problems and consider changing their behaviour.

The *Gambling Monitoring Tool* and the Canadian Problem Gambling Index may be useful here. Provide information about problem gambling counselling services, and safer gambling. Discuss perceived barriers to accessing these services. Help clients explore possible solutions to the problems they’ve identified.

Action

The person is ready to commit to change.

“Who can I call for help?”

Helping professionals can link clients to appropriate problem gambling support. Several programs are available:

- Problem gambling counselling services are available throughout the province. The Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline can provide the phone number of the service in your community. These services are funded by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. They offer individual, couple, family and group counselling to people with gambling problems. They will also provide counselling to family members on their own.
- The Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline can also link clients to the Tele-Counselling Treatment Services that have been developed to increase availability of counselling services. The program is suitable for people who are unable to access a local service for reasons such as distance, a disability, concerns about privacy, financial limitations, full-time work obligations or childcare needs. Clients receive six weekly telephone sessions with a counsellor experienced in gambling treatment.
- Residential programs for people more severely affected by problem gambling are also available. The local problem gambling counselling service can provide the client with more information about this treatment option and will refer when appropriate.
- Gambler's Anonymous is available in many communities. Based on Alcoholics Anonymous, GA uses a 12-step mutual-aid approach to recovery.
- Gam-Anon is a 12-step, self-help program for the family members, friends and loved ones of people with gambling problems.
- Gam-Block helps gamblers avoid online gambling by blocking access to Internet gambling sites.
- The Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation offers Self-Exclusion Programs at all casinos and slot machine facilities at racetracks. Only the person who gambles can take this step. The person will be removed from the marketing lists, and barred from entering casinos and slot machine facilities at racetracks. The program is not always successful in keeping people out of these facilities if they want to get in, but if they are caught trying to re-enter, trespassing charges may be laid. The fear of being charged does deter some people.
- Many self-help books and websites are available.

When clients reach the “Action” stage, helping professionals should support their efforts and and commitment. Give them lots of praise and encouragement to move them to the next stage.

Maintenance

The person is adjusting to the change and learning and practicing new skills.

“I’m taking things one step at a time.”

Help the client come up with some strategies to maintain the change. Continue to praise the client’s efforts and progress. Acknowledge that slips happen. Encourage clients to develop relapse prevention skills.

At this point, clients may feel motivated to take on a second job as a way of quickly repairing the financial damage caused by their gambling. This can be helpful in demonstrating responsible behaviour, restoring trust and avoiding further borrowing; however, recovery from gambling also requires a restoration of balance within the person’s life. This includes striking a healthy balance between work, family and leisure pursuits and not just replacing gambling with work.

Relapse

The person has not maintained the change.

“I had an extra fifty bucks and I felt lucky.”

Work with clients to bring them back to maintenance stage. The client may be back at the first stage again.

(Adapted from the work of Prochaska and DiClemente.)

3

Problem Gambling Treatment Services

There are many reasons why people with gambling problems don't get help. Recent Ontario research has revealed that many people in need of help are unaware that specialized problem gambling counselling services are available. Other people initially refuse help because they are ambivalent about giving up their gambling, fear what may happen in counselling or are afraid of being stigmatized. Still others have not made the connection between their current difficulties and their gambling behaviour.

As a helping professional, you can address these concerns and provide accurate information about what happens in problem gambling counselling and what services are available.

Normally, clients are encouraged to contact the problem gambling counselling agency themselves. Their motivation to seek help will waver, however, so take any opportunity to link clients to services. You may want to help clients make appointments from your office or provide them with print materials they can take home.

Where to Find Help

There are specialized problem gambling services available in most communities across Ontario. Every effort is made to respond to calls within 24 hours and most people can be seen within days. Finding out about available specialized and community resources is easy by contacting the Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline, a free, confidential and anonymous service open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This service provides information about and referrals to problem gambling counselling services, telephone-counselling services and mutual aid organizations such as Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon.

Help for a problem with gambling is available:

- free of charge and close to home
- to anyone affected by problem gambling—not just the person who gambles
- confidentially
- individually, in groups and through couple and family counselling
- by telephone in some areas
- in residential treatment programs.

Clients who are actively involved in counselling report that it has helped them identify their gambling triggers, restore balance and made them feel better equipped to deal with life.

Problem Gambling Counselling Approaches

Problem gambling counsellors will not make the client stop gambling. Only the client can make that choice. Instead, counsellors support clients as they explore issues they see as priorities. The client may be ready to focus on gambling or may be more motivated to address concerns related to finances, work and family relationships first. Counsellors may also help clients identify new options and provide feedback as to whether goals are reasonable and achievable.

By focussing on clients' identified concerns, strengths and solutions—and by helping them set short-term, achievable goals—counsellors inspire hope and a sense that change is possible. When ambivalence is high, a **brief solution-focussed approach** may be most effective in increasing awareness, building trust and engaging the client in a therapeutic relationship.

Harm reduction is a common counselling approach. Counsellors help clients assess their gambling and reduce the negative impact it is having on their lives. This is a method of reaching clients who are at all stages of change, and it respects clients' right to choose their own goals. Some people who gamble choose to set time and money limits, or to stay away from gambling activities that cause them the most harm. Others decide that the only solution to their problem is abstinence and stop gambling completely.

Using **motivational interviewing**, problem gambling counsellors provide accurate information, advice and support that helps clients assess the harm gambling is causing and decide what is right for them. Problem gambling counsellors will often encourage clients to take a break from gambling in order to assess its impact and gain control.

Problem gambling counsellors can help clients:

Gain Control over Gambling

Using cognitive and behavioural techniques, clients learn to control gambling triggers, patterns and urges and to plan ways to stay in control of their gambling. Counsellors may help clients identify faulty beliefs about gambling, such as the role of skill, the odds of winning, randomness and their ability to influence outcomes. Counselling helps clients uncover and explain those faulty beliefs in a way that helps them understand their urge to gamble and gain life-long control.

Some of the common faulty beliefs about money that may be addressed in counselling include:

- money lost through gambling is not “lost” and, with time, it will be won back
- gambling is a good “investment” and persistence will eventually pay off
- gambling is a quick and easy way to “earn” money
- if you gamble enough, you will eventually win
- past gambling losses indicate that a win is due
- debts can only be paid off as a lump sum.

Counsellors can help clients understand that once money is lost, it is lost, that future gambling is not affected by past gambling, that the more they gamble, the more they are likely to lose and that debts can be paid off in stages.

Deal with Feelings

Some people use gambling to cope with abuse, sickness, loss or caregiver burden, or to avoid difficult feelings such as depression, anger or anxiety. Counselling helps clients understand and cope with those challenges in other ways. Learning to identify feelings and accept them as normal and healthy can help to reduce the urge to gamble, restore intimacy, health and a sense of well-being.

Address Health Problems

Clients may also be struggling with other serious health problems including problems with alcohol or other drugs, physical illness and emotional or mental health concerns. Problem gambling counsellors can help link clients and families to the services they need.

Heal Family Relationships

Through individual, couple or family counselling, counsellors help the family understand what has happened and explore ways to restore trust within the family or to deal with the impact of separation.

Find Balance

Gambling problems often result in the loss of overall balance in life. Counselling can help the person who gambles and his or her family return to normal routines and replace gambling with healthier and more rewarding lifestyle choices.

Prevent Relapse

Relapse is often part of the recovery process and can help reinforce the client's need to manage his or her gambling. Counselling can help the client identify his or her unique patterns and triggers and plan ways to reduce risk and increase control.

4

Resources

Ontario's Specialized Problem Gambling Services and Resources

The following list of resources and programs has been funded by the government of Ontario as part of the province's problem gambling strategy.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Problem Gambling Project

(416) 535-8501 x4253

The Problem Gambling Project is the professional awareness and educational component of Ontario's government-funded problem gambling strategy. This program provides training and supportive resources to Ontario's designated problem gambling treatment services. The Project also collaborates with allied professional systems on the development and dissemination of customized materials, tools and training events that support their efforts to be of assistance to people affected by problem gambling. Some of the allied professional groups the PGP has worked with include financial counsellors, the correctional system, health care workers and ethnoracial counsellors. A collaborative process is utilized to ensure that specific needs are identified and that training and resources are appropriately adapted to each system.

The Project has produced a number of comprehensive resources for professionals, including this *Guide for Helping Professionals* and a *Guide for Financial Counsellors*, as well as *Problem Gambling: Legal Information for Helping Professionals*. The following resources for people affected by problem gambling are also available free of charge:

- *Problem Gambling: The Issues the Options*—for people experiencing problems with gambling.
- *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Families*—for family members of people experiencing problems with gambling.
- *Problem Gambling: Legal Information*—provides information about common legal questions
- *Problem Gambling: Legal Information for Families*—provides information for family members about common legal questions

These handbooks are intended to encourage self-reflection and to provide information about options. They can be used in preparation for, or as an adjunct to, specialized counselling.

For further information about our training and resources, please call (416) 535-8501 x4253 or e-mail Problem_GamblingProject@camh.net.

Journal of Gambling Issues

www.camh.net/egambling/

The Journal of Gambling Issues (JGI) offers an Internet-based forum for peer-reviewed articles on research, treatment and policy. There are also service profiles of innovative treatment centres, first-person accounts of gambling experiences, reviews (books, videos, Web sites) and letters to the editor. The *JGI* publishes articles about gambling as a social phenomenon and about the prevention and treatment of gambling problems; our aim is to help make sense of how gambling affects us all. Copies and subscriptions are free through the Web site.

Niagara Multilingual Prevention/Education Problem Gambling Program, Addiction Services, Hotel Dieu Hospital

www.gamb-ling.com

(905) 682-6411 x3849

This program is specifically designed to serve members of ethno-cultural

communities and their families, as well as service providers and other professionals in the Niagara region.

The Web site contains linguistically and culturally appropriate information, a confidential e-mail question and answer forum, and links to other related sites. Information is provided in the following 11 languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, Farsi, Hindi, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish and Urdu.

The program provides gambling and problem gambling information/awareness sessions for ethno-cultural communities, social service providers, financial/legal sector and ESL classes, and also has an Info-Centre with multilingual problem gambling educational resources and materials.

All services are culturally and linguistically appropriate, free and confidential.

Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline

1 888 230-3505

www.opgh.on.ca

The Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline (OPGH) is an information and referral service available to members of the public, including problem gamblers, family and friends of problem gamblers, and service providers working with clients experiencing problems related to gambling. The OPGH is designed to link callers with problem gambling services in the province of Ontario. It is a free, confidential and anonymous service. You can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. OPGH provides information in over 140 languages. It also gives referrals to:

- treatment and counselling services for problem gambling
- credit and debt counselling services
- telephone-counselling services if they are available in your community
- self-help organizations such as Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon.

Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre

www.gamblingresearch.org

1 877 882-2204

An arms-length agency that provides funding for research on problem gambling, increases the capacity in Ontario to conduct research on gambling problems and disseminates research findings. Funds are also available to assist end-users with the incorporation of research results into practice.

The Responsible Gambling Council (RGC)

www.responsiblegambling.org

1 888 391-1111

A non-profit organization that works with people and communities to address gambling in a healthy and responsible way. The Council undertakes research and public awareness programs designed to prevent gambling-related problems. The Web site provides an e-library of resource materials, information on awareness programs, Discovery Conferences and Symposia, links to counselling and support services in Ontario, and other related sites. The Web site also provides access to *Newslink*, a newsletter that provides an ongoing and convenient summary of trends, issues and various views on problem and responsible gambling, and *NewsScan*, a weekly e-mail digest of gambling news.

YMCA Youth Gambling Project

www.ymcatoronto.org/gambling

1 877 525-5515

The Youth Gambling Program is a prevention and education program designed to reduce the harm associated with youth gambling. Its Web site provides contact information for the 18 Ontario communities that it serves.

Other Services

Community Information Centres (CICs)

Dial 0 for the operator or try dialing 211

www.211Ontario.ca

CICs are not-for-profit groups that gather information on local government services, community services and social services. These include crisis services, shelters and counselling. Call the operator to see if there is a Community Information Centre in your area.

Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO)

(416) 408-4420

www.cleo.on.ca

CLEO is a not-for-profit legal information service. It provides easy to understand printed information on legal issues such as creditor harassment, family law and landlord/tenant issues.

Compulsive Gamblers Hub

www.cgghub.homestead.com

An Internet self-help group, based on Gamblers Anonymous

Gam-Anon and Gam-Ateen

(416) 366-7613

www.gam-anon.org

Gam-Anon offers peer support to family members and friends of people with gambling problems. It helps them cope, stop blaming themselves for the person's gambling problems, and focus on their own health and well-being.

Gamblers Anonymous (GA)

(416) 366-7613

www.gamblersanonymous.org

GA is available in many communities. Based on Alcoholics Anonymous, GA uses a 12-step self-help approach to recovery.

Gambling Watch Network—Ontario

www.gamblingwatch.ca.

Gambling Watch Network is a grassroots advocacy group of citizens from across Ontario who are concerned about the expansion of gambling. For more information about the work they do, see their Web site.

GamBlock

www.gamblock.com

Gamblock blocks access to Internet gambling sites. It helps people with gambling problems avoid the dangers of online gambling.

Help Lines and Distress Centres

Call the operator or check the list of emergency numbers in the front of your telephone book for the distress centre or help line in your area.

Kids Help Phone

1 800 668-6868

www.kidshelp.sympatico.ca

A free, 24-hour telephone support and information line for children and youth. Available in French and English.

Lawyer Referral Services (LRS)

General Referral: 1 900 565-4577

www.lsuc.on.ca/public/referral_en.jsp

LRS will give you the names of lawyers (including those who accept legal aid) in your area who will provide a free half-hour consultation. A fee is billed to your telephone number. You can use the crisis line free of charge if you are calling from hospital or jail, if you are under 18, or if you are homeless or in crisis.

Legal Aid Ontario

1 800 668-8258

www.legalaid.on.ca

Legal Aid may be able to help you pay for legal help if you have a low income. If you qualify, you can get financial help for a variety of legal problems, including criminal matters, family law, and immigration and refugee law. You may also be able to get help with some civil cases and final appeals.

Parent Help Line

1 888 603-9100

www.parentsinfo.sympatico.ca

A free, 24-hour telephone support and information line for parents. Available in French and English.

Suggested Reading

Berman, L. & Siegel, M. (1999). *Behind the 8 Ball: A Guide for Families of Gamblers*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Blaszczynski, A. (1998). *Overcoming Compulsive Gambling: A Self-help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques*. London, England: Constable & Robinson.

Blaszczynski, A. (2000). Pathways to Pathological Gambling: Identifying Typologies. *eGambling: The electronic journal of gambling issues*.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Problem Gambling Project, (2003). *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Families*. Call 1 888 647-4414.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Problem Gambling Project, (2003). *Problem Gambling: The Issues, The Options*. Call 1 888 647-4414.

Ladouceur, R., Silvain, C., Boutin, C. & Doucet, C. (2002). *Understanding and Treating the Pathological Gambler*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Little, D. (2002). *Losing Mariposa: The Memoir of a Compulsive Gambler*. Toronto: ECW Press.

National Council on Problem Gambling (2000). *Personal Financial Strategies for the Loved Ones of Problem Gamblers*

Prochaska, J., Norcross, J. & Diclemente C. (1995). *Changing for Good*. Morrow, William & Company.

5

Client Handouts

1 **Canadian Problem Gambling Index—Self Assessment Screen**

This questionnaire is based on the Canadian Problem Gambling Index. Clients can use it as a self-assessment tool. It can also be included as part of your screening process and discussed in the client interview.

2 **What Factors Can Put You at Greater Risk for Problems?**

This handout ties in well with the Canadian Problem Gambling Index. The more risk factors that are identified by a client, the greater the chance that the client may develop problems. The risk factors in combination with the CPGI score can provide a good indication of a client's likelihood of developing problems. It can also provide an opportunity to explore gambling further with a client.

3 **Winning Ways to Keep Gambling Safe**

This handout provides tips for safe gambling for those clients who choose to continue gambling. If they would like to understand their gambling behaviour better you can also give them the booklet, *Problem Gambling: The Issues, the Options*.

4 Is There a Gambling Problem in Your Family?

This handout can be given to family members who indicate to you that they are concerned about someone's gambling or that someone they care about appears to be gambling a lot. You could also give them the booklet, *Problem Gambling: A Guide for Families*.

5 Finding Help

This handout can be given to clients who may be interested in learning more about problem gambling counselling. It provides a brief description of problem gambling counselling, along with the 1-800 number. You can also give clients the booklet, *Problem Gambling: The Issues, the Options*.

6 Self-Monitoring Gambling or Urges to Gamble

This tool can be given to clients who would like to gain a better understanding of their gambling. They can review it with you and you can help them identify their gambling patterns triggers and coping strategies.

7 Credit Counselling Services—Financial Options

This handout provides a summary of the financial options available to clients.

Ligne ontarienne d'aide sur le jeu problématique
1 888 230-3505