PROBLEM GAMBLING: AN OVERVIEW

Eric L. Davis, PhD, LCSW, LCAC, ICOGS
Tom Prendergast, LCAC, ICAADC, ICOGS
INDIANA PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS PROGRAM (IPGAP)

• Why does IPGAP exist?

• How does IPGAP help with problem gambling in Indiana?
  • MISSION: IPGAP provides technical assistance for prevention, treatment and co-occurring issues.
  • In January 2005, the Indiana Prevention Resource Center at Indiana University expanded it's mission to include information and technical assistance to Indiana organizations seeking to prevent problem gambling by children, adolescents and young adults.
  • Life Recovery Center serves as a treatment provider for IPGAP's mission and fees are paid for the treatment of problem gambling by IPGAP funding.
PROCESS ADDICTIONS

Gambling  Food  Shopping/Spending
Sex  Gaming  Internet
Gambling is receiving the most attention at this time with its addition in the DSM-5.

Two components of addictive disorder:

- Obsessive Thinking
- Compulsive Behavior
MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT PROBLEM GAMBLING

• **MYTH:** You have to gamble every day to be a problem gambler.
  **FACT:** A problem gambler may gamble frequently or infrequently. Gambling is a problem if it causes problems.

• **MYTH:** Problem gambling is not really a problem if the gambler can afford it.
  **FACT:** Problems caused by excessive gambling are not just financial. Too much time spent on gambling can lead to relationship breakdown and loss of important friendships.

• **MYTH:** Partners of problem gamblers often drive problem gamblers to gamble.
  **FACT:** Problem gamblers often rationalize their behavior. Blaming others is one way to avoid taking responsibility for their actions, including what is needed to overcome the problem.

• **MYTH:** If a problem gambler builds up a debt, you should help them take care of it.
  **FACT:** Quick fix solutions may appear to be the right thing to do. However, bailing the gambler out of debt may actually make matters worse by enabling gambling problems to continue.
HISTORY OF GAMBLING

• One of mankind’s oldest activities

• Regulated in the laws of ancient China and Rome as well as in the Jewish Talmud and by Islam and Buddhism, and in ancient Egypt inveterate gamblers could be sentenced to forced labor in the quarries.

• The origin of gambling is considered to be divinatory: by casting marked sticks and other objects and interpreting the outcome, man sought knowledge of the future and the intentions of the gods. From this it was a very short step to betting on the outcome of the throws.
HISTORY OF GAMBLING IN AMERICA
WHAT IS PROBLEM GAMBLING?

• Compulsive gambling, also called gambling disorder, is the uncontrollable urge to keep gambling despite the toll it takes on your life. Gambling means that you're willing to risk something you value in the hope of getting something of even greater value.

• Gambling can stimulate the brain's reward system much like drugs such as alcohol can, leading to addiction. If you're prone to compulsive gambling, you may continually chase bets, hide your behavior, deplete savings, accumulate debt, or even resort to theft or fraud to support your addiction.

• Compulsive gambling is a serious condition that can destroy lives. Although treating compulsive gambling can be challenging, many compulsive gamblers have found help through professional treatment.
SYMPTOMS OF PROBLEM GAMBLING

Signs and symptoms of compulsive (pathologic) gambling include:

• Gaining a thrill from taking big gambling risks
• Taking increasingly bigger gambling risks
• Preoccupation with gambling
• Reliving past gambling experiences
• Gambling as a way to escape problems or feelings of helplessness, guilt or depression
• Taking time from work or family life to gamble
• Concealing or lying about gambling
• Feeling guilt or remorse after gambling
• Borrowing money or stealing to gamble
• Failed efforts to cut back on gambling
• On rare occasions, gambling becomes a problem with the very first wager. But more often, a gambling problem progresses over time. In fact, many people spend years enjoying social gambling without any problems. But more frequent gambling or life stresses can turn casual gambling into something much more serious.

• During periods of stress or depression, the urge to gamble may be especially overpowering, serving as an unhealthy escape. Eventually, a person with a gambling problem becomes almost completely preoccupied with gambling and getting money to gamble.
For many compulsive gamblers, betting isn't as much about money as it is about the excitement. Sustaining the thrill that gambling provides usually involves taking increasingly bigger risks and placing larger bets. Those bets may involve sums you can't afford to lose.

Unlike most casual gamblers who stop when losing or set a loss limit, compulsive gamblers are compelled to keep playing to recover their money — a pattern that becomes increasingly destructive over time.

Some compulsive gamblers may have remission where they gamble less or not at all for a period of time. However, without treatment, the remission usually isn't permanent.
WHEN IS GAMBLING OUT OF CONTROL?

Gambling is out of control if:

• It's affecting your relationships, finances, or work or school life
• You're devoting more and more time and energy to gambling
• You've unsuccessfully tried to stop or cut back on your gambling
• You try to conceal your gambling from family or others
• You resort to theft or fraud to get gambling money
• You ask others to bail you out of financial woes because you've gambled money away
RISK FACTORS FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING

• **Other behavior or mood disorders.** People who gamble compulsively often have substance abuse problems, mood or personality disorders, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Many compulsive gamblers abuse alcohol, and many experience major depression.

• **Age.** Compulsive gambling is more common in younger and middle-aged people.

• **Sex.** Compulsive gambling is more common in men than in women. Women who gamble typically start later in life, are more apt to have depression, anxiety or bipolar disorders, and may become addicted more quickly. But gambling patterns among men and women have become increasingly similar.
RISK FACTORS FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING (CONT’D)

• **Family influence.** If one of your parents had a gambling problem, the chances are greater that you will, too.

• **Medications used to treat Parkinson's disease and restless legs syndrome.** Medications called dopamine agonists have a rare side effect that results in compulsive behaviors, including gambling, in some people.

• **Certain personality characteristics.** Being highly competitive, a workaholic, restless or easily bored may increase your risk.
COMPLICATIONS

• Compulsive gambling can have profound and long-lasting consequences for your life, such as:
  • Relationship problems
  • Financial problems, including bankruptcy
  • Legal problems or imprisonment
  • Job loss or professional stigma
  • Associated alcohol or drug abuse
  • Poor general health
  • Mental health disorders, such as depression
  • Suicide
PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS
GAMBLING IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

• Pea Shake Houses and Skin Holes are similar to casinos in African American communities
• These numbers are not included in the statistical data involving gambling addiction due to illegal participation
• Average ages of people who visit these establishments are between 24 to 71 years old
GAMBLING IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY- CONT’D

Rationale

• Helps to supplement income
• Chances of winning are greater
• In the neighborhood-number runners will come to your home
• Familiar with the person

Problems

• Hotbed for illegal activities- (drugs/alcohol, stolen goods)
• Still a problem in pathological gambling
• Brings down property value
• Irrational thinking is still applied
SOUTH OAKS GAMBLING SCREEN

• Please see SOGS in your folder.
• Empirically based testing instrument
• Used to determine if a person has an issue with problem gambling.
• Must score 3 or higher to qualify for IPGAP assistance.
TREATMENT FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING

• Self-Help
  • Gamblers Anonymous is a twelve-step recovery program patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous. A key part of a 12-step program is choosing a sponsor. A sponsor is a former gambler who has time and experience remaining free from addiction, and can often provide invaluable guidance and support.

• Treatment/Therapy
  • Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  • Financial Counseling
CBT FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING

• **Cognitive-behavioral therapy** for problem gambling focuses on changing unhealthy gambling behaviors and thoughts, such as rationalizations and false beliefs. It also teaches problem gamblers how to fight gambling urges, deal with uncomfortable emotions rather than escape through gambling, and solve financial, work, and relationship problems caused by the addiction.

• The **goal** of treatment is to “rewire” the addicted brain by thinking about gambling in a new way. A variation of cognitive behavioral therapy, called the Four Steps Program, has been used in treatment of compulsive gambling as well. The goal is to change your thoughts and beliefs about gambling in four steps; re-label, reattribute, refocus, and revalue. More comprehensive information about cognitive behavioral therapy and applying it to your situation is found below.

• Seeing a therapist does not mean you are weak or can’t handle your problems. Therapy is for people who are smart enough to realize they need help. It can give you tools and support for reframing your thoughts that will last a lifetime.
LIFESTYLE CHANGES

- One way to stop yourself from problem gambling is to analyze what is needed for gambling to occur, work on removing these elements from your life and replace them with healthier choices. The four elements needed for problem gambling to continue are:

  - **A decision:** Before gambling occurs, the decision to gamble has been made. If you have an urge to gamble: *stop* what you are doing and call someone, *think* about the consequences to your actions, *tell* yourself to stop thinking about gambling, and *find something* else to do immediately.

  - **Money:** Gambling cannot occur without money. Get rid of your credit cards, let someone else be in charge of your money, have the bank make automatic payments for you, and keep a limited amount of cash on you at all times.

  - **Time:** Gambling cannot occur if you don’t have the time. Schedule enjoyable recreational time for yourself that has nothing to do with gambling, find time for relaxation, and plan outings with your family.

  - **A game:** Without a game or activity to bet on there is no opportunity to gamble. Don’t put yourself in tempting environments or locations. Tell the gambling establishments you frequent that you have a gambling problem and ask them to restrict you from betting at their casinos and establishments. Block online gambling sites on your computer.
### LIFESTYLE CHANGES (CONT’D)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Gambling</th>
<th>Sample Substitute Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide excitement, get a rush of adrenaline</td>
<td>Sport or a challenging hobby, such as mountain biking, rock climbing, or Go Kart racing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be more social, overcome shyness or isolation</td>
<td>Counseling, enroll in a public speaking class, join a social group, connect with family and friends, volunteer, find new friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To numb unpleasant feelings, not think about problems</td>
<td>Therapy, consult Helpguide’s Bring Your Life into Balance toolkit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom or loneliness</td>
<td>Find something you’re passionate about such as art, music, sports, or books then find others with the same interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To relax after a stressful day</td>
<td>As little as 15 minutes of daily exercise can relieve stress. Or deep breathing, meditation, or massage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To solve money problems</td>
<td>The odds are always stacked against you so it’s far better to seek help with debts from a credit counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be more social, overcome shyness or isolation</td>
<td>Counseling, enroll in a public speaking class, join a social group, connect with family and friends, volunteer, find new friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEALING WITH GAMBLING CRAVINGS

• **Reach out for support.** Call a trusted family member, meet a friend for coffee, or go to a Gamblers Anonymous meeting.

• **Do something else.** Distract yourself with another activity, such as cleaning your house, going to the gym, or watching a movie.

• **Postpone gambling.** Tell yourself that you'll wait five minutes, fifteen minutes, or an hour—however long you think you can hold out. As you wait, the urge to gamble may pass or become weak enough to resist.

• **Give yourself a reality check.** Visualize what will happen if you give in to the urge to gamble. Think about how you’ll feel after all your money is gone and you’ve disappointed yourself and your family again.

• **Avoid isolation.** If you gamble to socialize or be around other people, try healthier ways to build a social network. Volunteer, connect with old friends, make new friends.

• If you aren’t able to resist the gambling craving, don’t be too hard on yourself or use it as an excuse to give up. Overcoming a gambling addiction is a tough process. You may slip from time to time; the important thing is to learn from your mistakes and continue working towards recovery.
DOES MY LOVED ONE HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM?

If your loved one has a gambling problem, he or she might:

• **Become increasingly defensive about his or her gambling.** The more a problem gambler is in the hole, the more the need to defend gambling as a way to get money. Your loved one may get secretive, defensive or even blame you for the need to gamble, telling you that it is all for you and you need to trust in the “big win someday.”

• **Suddenly become secretive over money and finances.** Your loved one might show a new desire to control household finances, or there might increasingly be a lack of money despite the same income and expenses. Savings and assets might mysteriously dwindle, or there may be unexplained loans or cash advances.

• **Become increasingly desperate for money to fund the gambling.** Credit card bills may increase, or your loved one may ask friends and family for money. Jewelry or other items easily pawned for money may mysteriously disappear.
TOOLS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS OF PROBLEM GAMBLERS:

• **Start by helping yourself.** You have a right to protect yourself emotionally and financially. Don’t blame yourself for the gambler’s problems. The right support can help you make positive choices for yourself, and balance encouraging your loved one to get help without losing yourself in the process.

• **Don’t go it alone.** It can feel so overwhelming coping with a loved one’s problem gambling that it may seem easier to rationalize their requests and problems “this one last time.” Or you might feel ashamed, feeling like you are the only one who has problems like this. Reaching out for support will make you realize that many families have struggled with this problem. Or you might consider therapy to help sort out the complicated feelings that arise from coping with a problem gambler.

• **Set boundaries in managing money.** If a loved one is serious about getting help for problem gambling, it may help if you take over the family finances to make sure the gambler stays accountable and to prevent relapse. However, this does not mean you are responsible for micromanaging the problem gamblers impulses to gamble. Your first responsibilities are to ensure that your own finances and credit are not at risk.

• **Consider how you will handle requests for money.** Problem gamblers often become very good at asking for money, either directly or indirectly. They may use pleading, manipulation or even threats and blaming to get it. It takes time and practice to learn how you will respond to these requests to ensure you are not enabling the problem gambler and keeping your own dignity intact.
DON’TS FOR PARTNERS OF PROBLEM GAMBLERS

• Preach, lecture, or allow yourself to lose control of your anger.
• Make threats or issue ultimatums unless you intend to carry them out.
• Exclude the gambler from family life and activities.
• Expect immediate recovery, or that all problems will be resolved when the gambling stops.
• Bail out the gambler.
• Cover-up or deny the existence of the problem to yourself, the family, or others.
• Source: Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services
DO’S FOR PARTNERS OF PROBLEM GAMBLERS

• Seek the support of others with similar problems; attend a self-help group for families such as Gam-Anon.

• Explain problem gambling to the children.

• Recognize your partner’s good qualities.

• Remain calm when speaking to your partner about his or her gambling and its consequences.

• Let your partner know that you are seeking help for your own sake because of the way gambling affects you and the children.

• Understand the need for treatment of problem gambling despite the time it may involve.

• Take control of family finances; review bank and credit card statements.

• Source: Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services
PREVENTING SUICIDE IN PROBLEM GAMBLERS

• When gamblers are feeling hopeless, the risk of suicide is high. It’s very important to take any thoughts or talk of suicide seriously. If you or someone you care about is suicidal, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. For a suicide helpline outside the U.S., visit Befrienders Worldwide.
QUESTIONS?
FIVE INDIANAPOLIS LOCATIONS!
WWW.LIFERECOVERYCENTER.NET
(317) 887-3290