

## Gambling - Part 2

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**When is the line crossed?** What is the difference between leisurely, social recreation that many people view as harmless entertainment, and a person's apparent out of control impulses that allow them to ruin their lives? Both people started off doing the same activities at roughly the same initial level of involvement. Maybe they are college students who play cards occasionally with friends. But then one seems to slow down, find other interests, and is only occasionally available to sit for the game. The other individual increases their exposure and opportunities to gamble. They buy scratch tickets, set up card games, bet on sports, watch poker on TV for tips, and tend to gravitate to social activities that will have gambling associated. That could even mean Church bingo nights. Gambling becomes much more of a focus to them than to the other person who can seem to "take it or leave it".

**What does it mean to be addicted to gambling?** Is it really a disease? Why don't they just stop? All of these are good questions to ponder. Addiction can have many definitions. Some include the disease model. People are often treated with both talk therapy, and can include people who have responded well to medication as part of their treatment. Other definitions focus on the pathological aspects of gamblers who will, despite obvious adversity, make that next bet. Self help groups tend to work well for people who are ready and willing to look at these issues with the support of other "recovering" gamblers.

Many people who work in the treatment and recovery fields tend to describe addiction in terms of how the behaviors of the person in question is affecting their daily lives. A survey can be given in a non-judgmental way. People are asked about their habits, and the outcomes, and based on that information, an individual can assess as to whether they are in trouble with their gambling.

***In other words, if gambling causes problems in your life, then gambling is a problem.***

A gambler tends to go through many stages before entering the strong grip of gambling. Initially gamblers find betting, slots, etc. fun. It's an escape or stress reducer for others. As people become more preoccupied with winning, the need for bigger and more frequent betting occurs. Next is the desperation stage where the gambler sees relationships fall apart, health issues, both medical and psychological arise, financial ruin is quickly creeping up, and sometimes the person turns to crime so they can still bet. The struggle to get out of gambling is very powerful at this point, and getting into treatment is crucial so that a person doesn't enter the fourth or final stage. At this point, the gambler may become so desperate that they no longer believe that there is any hope left, or any way out for him or herself.

Depression can be common, and suicide is also a risk. Fortunately not all people have to go through all the stages before they realize where they're headed.

Next week, I'll outline symptoms to look for in someone you think may have a problem, and also the questions to ask yourself about your own gambling habits.

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