

Solutions

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NEWSLETTER

Issue 20

\$\$\$\$\$ GAMBLING: The Secret Addiction \$\$\$\$\$

Gambling is an extremely popular activity among Canadians. More than half of the adult population gambles on occasion, and a sizable number of people gamble every week. Most Canadians gamble without problem, purely for entertainment purposes. But for a small minority, gambling can be problematic or even pathological. Somewhere between 600,000 and 1.2 million Canadians have gambling problems. For these people, gambling is like alcohol to an alcoholic.

Gambling is often a hidden addiction. Problem gamblers are usually able to keep their addiction a secret from the people closest to them, at least until the gambling leads to some crisis such as missing money or fraud. It is not always easy for the family to know there is a problem because it is often so well hidden.

When is gambling a problem?

Gambling becomes a problem when the gambler no longer thinks of gambling as just a form of entertainment. Problem gambling is gambling behavior that compromises, disrupts or damages the gambler's personal, family or work life.

Problem gambling has many names. It may be referred to as compulsive, problem, pathological or addictive gambling, but regardless of what it is called, compulsive gambling is an illness that negatively affects every aspect of the gambler's life.

Why do they gamble?

Research indicates that the majority of compulsive gamblers have unresolved underlying issues. Gamblers may become compulsive if they use gambling as a way of escaping from these issues. Underlying issues can include; stress, depression, loneliness, unhappy personal relationships, grief, feelings of inadequacy or boredom. A substantial initial win can also get a gambler "hooked".

What do they gamble on?

A compulsive gambler does not have to go far to gamble. Even if there is not a racetrack or casino in the area, gambling is still available. Lotteries are one of the most common forms of gambling for compulsive gamblers. Problem and compulsive gamblers prefer forms of gambling that give instant gratification such as lotteries, Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs), Bingo, horse racing, and casino betting. Sports pools, sports lotteries and card games are also common.

Negative Effects of gambling

Most people assume the biggest risk in gambling is to your wallet, but there are also health and social risks. Compulsive gambling can lead to financial ruin, job loss, family break down, health problems, and even suicide.

Family members of compulsive gamblers are more likely to have substance abuse problems and to attempt suicide.

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GAMBLING: The Secret Addiction (*continued*)

Do you have a gambling problem?

1. Do you often think about gambling during the day and/ or about your next venture?
2. Do you lie to your family or friends about your gambling to conceal how often you play?
3. Have you stayed away from your work and gambled instead?
4. Is gambling making your home life unhappy?
5. Do you gamble alone?
6. Do you ever gamble to get money to pay debts or to solve financial difficulties?
7. After losing do you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses?
8. Do you ever gamble longer than you had planned?
9. Do you use gambling as a way to escape your problems?
10. Have you taken money from special savings or trust accounts?
11. Have you spent money on gambling instead of paying bills?
12. Have you ever committed, or considered committing an illegal act to finance gambling?

Help for gamblers and their families

If you or someone you know has a gambling problem contact:

- **Your FSEAP professional**
He or she will let you know about the treatment and counseling services available to you.
- **Gamblers Anonymous**
A self-help organization for compulsive gamblers. They hold meetings in all ten Canadian provinces. GA follows the principals of the 12 steps of recovery also used by Alcoholics Anonymous. Anyone with the desire to stop gambling can join. For meeting locations and times in your area, see the Gamblers Anonymous Website at <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org>
- **Gam Anon**
A support group for the spouse, family or friends of compulsive gamblers. It is a sister association of Gamblers Anonymous. For meeting locations and times in your area, see the Gam Anon Website at <http://www.gam-anon.org>

Problem Gambling Helplines

Alberta	1-800-665-9676
British Columbia	1-888-795-6111
Manitoba	1-800-463-1554
New Brunswick	1-800-461-1234
Nova Scotia and Newfoundland	1-888-347-8888
Ontario	1-888-230-3505
Quebec	1-800-461-0140
Saskatchewan	1-800-306-6789

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:

1-800-668-9920