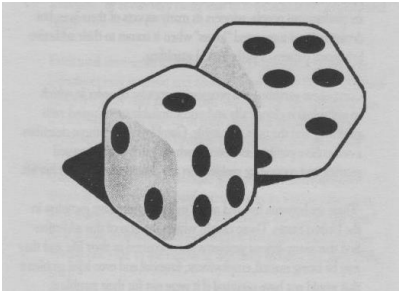


Winning



Over Gambling Addiction



A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

Gambling Addiction

People have probably been gambling ever since Eve first bet Adam that one bite wouldn't hurt – and we've all been paying off that bet ever since!

Gambling used to be looked upon strictly as recreation or diversion. Now it is a major thrust to raise revenue for governments and other organizations. Although gambling turns over more money each year than do many large corporations combined, the severity of "problem gambling" is not as obvious to the general public as it is with other addictions – like alcoholism for example.

The reasons are simple: gambling is a pure form of psychological addiction – there are no physical symptoms. Those who suffer from it don't stagger like the alcoholic. There is no glassy look in the eye. Problem gamblers are usually hard workers and big achievers. Many are professional people, winners in many aspects of their lives, but devastated and tormented "losers" when it comes to their addictive behavioral pattern of pathological gambling.

What is Gambling Addiction?

Compulsive gambling is a progressive impulse disorder in which an individual is chronically and uncontrollably preoccupied with gambling, and the urge to gamble. Gamblers Anonymous describes a compulsive gambler as a person whose gambling has caused growing and continuing problems in any department of his or her life. Those caught within the grip of this addiction find that many serious problems have occurred in their life, and they may be facing marital, employment, financial and even legal problems that would not have occurred if it were not for their gambling.

The compulsive gambler is a master at deceiving themselves about their addiction, and is quite adept at deceiving their families and friends as well. There is little chance that they can be "spotted" by a friend or colleague because the nature of the disorder lends itself to privacy and lack of detection.

The problem gambler manipulates people without meaning to do so, for he/she suffers from a compulsion that defies logic, reason and good intentions. They labor under the delusion that they are going to make that "big score" and pay everyone back with interest – particularly their spouse and children.

The victims of this problem are literally destroying themselves at disproportionate levels, with suicide rates of 180 times above the normal population, frequent involvement in loans, larceny and other lies affecting their families. They are as different as any cross section of a million people can be except for one fact: compulsive gambling is causing continuing problems in their lives.

Is Gambling Wrong?

While there is nothing in the Bible that specifically forbids gambling, it clearly condemns some of its principle ingredients such as greed, slothfulness and worldliness. The "casting of lots" from where we get our word "lottery" was referred to in both the secular and sacred records of many ancient peoples. The Bible records numerous decisions that were made on the basis of casting lots but such examples should not be construed as gambling. Rather, at that time it was used to seek God's direction regarding a necessary decision. Real gambling involves chance, risk, excitement and greed.

During the Middle Ages Jewish rabbis forbade all games of chance. Muhammad included gambling among the Koran's list of forbidden activities. Confucius referred to gambling as a human weakness to be shied away from. Francis Scott Key introduced an antigambling resolution in 1817 in which he characterized the vice as "inconsistent with Christian sobriety, dangerous to the morals of church members, and unbecoming to the character of communicants." Yet, it has been found that many Christians think nothing of "investing" in lottery tickets with every pay cheque, forever fantasizing about that big payoff. Dr. Durand Jacobs, founder of the California Council on Compulsive Gambling, believes that many of the new compulsive gamblers "were baptized in the local 7-Eleven," where they bought lottery tickets. However, a person is 3-1/2 times more likely to be killed by lightning and 5 times more likely to be eaten by a shark than he is to win a lottery jackpot.

How Does the Addiction Progress?

Compulsive gambling begins with “social” gambling – for excitement, leisure or escape, or merely to relieve boredom. Monetary profit is rarely a factor at that point. The addictive aspect may later be triggered by a large win, providing the gambler with a “high” that develops into an exhilarating feeling that Lady Luck will repeat the win and all his/her financial problems will be over. This false assumption can eventually progress into large losses of money and self-esteem that lead to a frantic pursuit of wins. By the time the gambler is out of control and tries to stop, they may have already lost a family or career. Though their resources have been depleted, big borrowing allows them to resume gambling with a frenzy. Eventually, with assets gone and a huge debt incurred, along with a possible criminal record, a compulsive gambler will “bottom out” and may seek treatment. The sad part is that few compulsive gamblers ever achieve long-term abstinence, but victory is all the sweeter for those who do!

Help for Gambling Addiction

Total abstinence seldom works very well for the gambling addict unless the person introduces new interests and activities into his/her life. In Matthew 12:43-45 Jesus talks about a man who was freed from “an unclean spirit”, but instead of then filling his life with God’s righteousness, he simply remained “empty, swept and garnished.” This story, when applied to the gambler, means he/she must fill the void with good things, otherwise, when the temptation returns – as it always does – it will find an easy entrance into its former habitation. It is also wise to assure continued success through completely committing one’s life to the daily cleansing and filling of God’s Holy Spirit.

A valuable service for pathological gamblers is Gamblers Anonymous, who requires complete acceptance of what is termed “The Six Basic Truths” concerning the nature of gambling addiction:

- 1) Gambling is a progressive illness.
- 2) It always gets worse, but never better.
- 3) It can only be arrested and may never be cured, regardless of the length of abstinence.
- 4) It can only be arrested by total abstinence.
- 5) It is a baffling, insidious and compulsive addiction.
- 6) It can very easily lead to demoralization, insanity and death.

The Family’s Role

Just as the illness of compulsive gambling is progressive, so is the complexity of the spouse’s reactions. They too go through stages of awareness. Though they may at first enjoy the excitement of the gambling scene with its fantasies of winning and dreams of luxury, eventually losing starts to change their standard of living. Later they wake up to their loved one’s preoccupation with gambling and may become aware of serious financial problems. If the family of the compulsive gambler neglects the well-known axiom of “True love is not shown by what you are willing to DO for the loved one, but what you are willing NOT to do for the loved one,” they may become enablers, with parents especially being targeted for loans and financial bailouts.

Once a person realizes that they are dealing with a compulsive gambler, it is important to resist the temptation to accept blame for his/her illness. The compulsive gambler cannot start recovering until he/she has hit bottom – that is, until they have accepted the fact that they are sick, not just unlucky.

No one needs to be alone with their battle! Overcomers Outreach provides Christ- centered 12-Step support groups that become the backbone for abstinence or dealing with codependency. Other 12-Step organizations which have support group meetings are Gamblers Anonymous – for the compulsive gambler and GamAnon – for family members and friends of the compulsive gambler.

Your road to recovery can start today!

For more information or to find a meeting, contact us:

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