

Gambling- A Potential Danger

Gambling can be defined as any activity where an item of value is placed at risk in attempt to gain something of greater value. Most people who choose to gamble do so for fun. However, gambling can become out of control and can lead to many problems. Much like a dependency on alcohol or other addictions, the need to gamble may overtake an individual's life.

In New York alone, more than 750,000 residents have experienced problems due to gambling at some point in their lives with an additional 125,000 residents currently experiencing serious to severe difficulties related to their gambling. With the growth of various forms of legalized gambling within New York State and the region, these numbers are expected to increase.

Gamblers can be classified into the following five types:

1. Social Gambler- A social gambler gambles for entertainment and little excitement. He or she dedicates only small amounts of leisure time and gambling is not given excessive emphasis. Social gamblers never gamble more money than they have.
2. Problem gambler- A problem gambler dedicates more time, thoughts, and money towards gambling. It often causes problems in his or her life.
3. Pathological (Compulsive) Gambler- This type of gambler has an uncontrollable preoccupation and urge to gamble, with gambling being the most important thing in his or her life.
4. Organized Crime Gambler- An organized crime gambler launders illegal gambling revenue at race tracks, casinos, and through lottery wagering.
5. Professional Gambler- A professional gambler makes a living through gambling. He or she bets in a controlled way, handles losses well and does not let gambling interfere with normal activities.

The National Gambling Impact Study Commission found in its 1999 study that pathological gambling often occurs in conjunction with other behavioral problems, including substance abuse, mood disorders, and personality disorders. Research suggests that the earlier a person begins to gamble, the more likely he or she is to become a pathological gambler. The presence of a gambling facility within 50 miles roughly doubles the chance of problem and pathological gambling. A national prevalence study found that 3 million adults are problem gamblers and 2.5 million adults are pathological gamblers, with 15 million being at risk. The National Adolescent Review found that 1.5% of teens ages 16-17 can be classified as "problem or pathological gamblers" with 2% being classified as "at risk."

Many families of pathological gamblers suffer from a variety of financial, physical, and emotional problems, including divorce, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and a range of other difficulties stemming from the severe

financial hardship that commonly results from problem and pathological gambling. Children of compulsive gamblers are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and using drugs. These children are also at risk of developing problem or pathological gambling themselves.

Gambling- A Chance Game

Although the odds of someone winning is based on pure luck most people who become addicted to gambling have a belief that they have a special gift that enables them to perform so well. These people also have a belief that they know how to pick numbers or a belief that God is going to show them the numbers.

There is a wide variety of types of gambling in New York State. One of the most common forms of gambling is the lottery, including instant scratch-off tickets, daily numbers, Lotto, Quick Draw, and Mega Millions. Although the odds of winning are not great, people perceive gambling as easy money and take the chance.

Odds of Winning

- Big Game Lottery Jackpot: 1 in 76, 275, 360
- Lotto Jackpot: 1 in 22.5 million
- Mega Millions: 1 in 135 million
- Pick 10 jackpot: 1 in 8,911,711
- Win 4 Life Scratch-Off jackpot: 1 in 5,292,000

Typical Signs That One Is Having a Gambling Problem

1. Gambling to escape worry, boredom, or trouble.
2. Suffering from severe mood swings.
3. Believing that life without gambling is impossible.
4. Neglecting personal responsibilities to focus on gambling activities.
5. Fantasizing about "this week's win" to overcome "last week's losses," and dreaming of "the big win."
6. Scheming to borrow money from friends and family.
7. Considering illegal acts, such as prostitution, stealing, and forgery as a means to obtain money for gambling.
8. Lying to conceal activity.
9. Jeopardizing employment or school work due to gambling.
10. Having self-destructive thoughts because of problems related to gambling.

If you have identified with any of the above warning signs, you may have a problem with gambling. Resources for problem gamblers include the self-help

group Gamblers Anonymous (GA), local treatment and education providers, and mental health care professionals.

GA is a fellowship of male and female recovering compulsive gamblers who meet regularly to share their experience, strength, and hope. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop gambling. Local professional treatment and education program providers offer counseling and support services for problem gamblers and loved ones.

For supportive intervention, information, and services, call the New York Council on Problem Gambling's 24-hour helpline at 1-800-437-1611.