

March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month Learn the Facts – Have the Conversation

Why do I need to know about problem gambling?

- Although most people gamble for fun and recreation, some develop a problem that can lead to severe negative consequences.
- Gambling addiction affects 6-9 million Americans (2-3% of population).
- Anyone who gambles can develop problems if not aware of the risks.
- Gambling is more available today in the U.S. than at any other time in our history; 48 states allow some form of gambling.

How does problem gambling impact me?

- It is estimated that 8-10 people are affected by one individual's gambling problem.
- If you gamble it is important to recognize that what was once fun can become a serious issue.
- Your awareness may help a loved one seek the necessary help.
- Problem gambling is a public health issue that impacts relationships, families, businesses and communities.

What are the potential consequences of an untreated gambling addiction?

- Serious health issues including suicide, co-occurring disorders, domestic violence, and work issues.
- Children of a person with a gambling problem show higher rates of gambling disorder and higher levels of tobacco, alcohol, drug use and overeating than children of people without gambling problems.
- Ruined relationships and families.
- Financial devastation.
- Depression and other mental health concerns.

What is a Help Line and what does it do?

- Most states have established confidential toll-free helplines to help problem gamblers and their families obtain information about counseling, Gamblers Anonymous and other supportive resources.
- A helpline gives a caller an opportunity to share what is on his mind and be heard by someone who cares and can listen in a nonjudgmental fashion.
- A helpline provides assistance, information and referrals.

How can a trained counselor help someone with a gambling problem?

- Certified professionals are trained to understand and treat the unique circumstances and experiences of problem gamblers.
- A counselor can help the gambler sort out options when coping with difficulties.
- A professional can offer hope and present evidence that change is possible.
- A counselor's office is a safe place to discuss uncomfortable thoughts, such as suicide.

What is Gamblers Anonymous and why is it beneficial?

- Gamblers Anonymous is a confidential fellowship of men and women from diverse social, economic, racial and religious backgrounds, who meet to share their experiences, strength and hope as it relates to stopping gambling and living a happy and productive life.
- Gamblers Anonymous is based on 12 guiding principles and 12 steps of recovery.

What resources are available?

- DSHS funds the Washington Recovery Help Line (1-866-789-1511) and the Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling (ECPG) Helpline (1-800-547-6133).
- DSHS funds prevention, awareness and training through ECPG, and treatment for problem gambling. Find a [treatment facility](#).
- Gamblers Anonymous – www.gamblersanonymous.org
- Gam-Anon – www.gamanon.org

How do I have the conversation with a loved one?

Talking with someone you know about a potential gambling problem can be difficult. Remember, you can't stop the person from playing; only he or she can make the decision to stop. Choose the moment, speak in a caring and understanding tone and hear what he or she is saying. To start a conversation:

- Tell him you care about him and you're concerned about how he is acting.
- Tell her exactly what she has done that concerns you.
- Tell him how his behavior is affecting other people. Be specific.
- Be clear about what you expect from her ("I want you to talk to someone about your gambling.") and what she can expect from you ("I won't cover for you anymore.").
- After you've told him what you've seen and how you feel, allow him to respond. Listen with a non-judgmental attitude.
- Let her know you are willing to help, but don't try to counsel her yourself.
- Give her information, not advice.
- Encourage him or her to call one of the Help Lines listed above.

Adapted from the National Council on Problem Gambling.