



## Seek help for gambling addiction

March 1, 2010

*Evansville Courier and Press*

For most people gambling can be a source of entertainment. A way to unwind, socialize with friends and family, and have some fun. However, for some this can be a devastating addiction that can be equally as debilitating as any chemical addiction.

The National Council on Problem Gambling estimates that approximately 2 million Americans or 1 percent of the population suffer from pathological gambling and another 4 million to 6 million (4 percent to 6 percent) could be considered problem gamblers.

While pathological gambling is the clinical term used in describing this disorder, pathological gambling, compulsive gambling and problem gambling are used interchangeably.

People suffering from problem or pathological gambling can experience problems associated with finances, relationships, employment, the legal system, even their health.

Unfortunately, it is many times not as easy to identify a gambling addiction as it is a chemical addiction. There are no urine or blood tests for gambling, people do not slur their words, stagger or otherwise give any physical cues, and you can't smell gambling on someone's breath. Therefore many times gambling goes undetected until a crisis occurs.

There are, however, some ways to detect problem gambling before it gets to this stage. If you are concerned that a family member or friend may have a problem with gambling, the warning signs listed below may be helpful.

- Preoccupation with gambling
- Secretiveness

- Being gone for unexplained periods of time
- Missing money
- Absences from work
- Increased drinking or substance usage
- Depression
- Inappropriate anger
- Isolation
- Loss of interest in activities

If you feel you may have a problem with gambling, the following symptoms identified by the American Psychiatric Association may be helpful in making this determination.

- Preoccupation with gambling
- Gambling in increasing amounts
- Unsuccessful attempts to stop or cut back on gambling
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Using gambling as an escape from problems
- After losing, returning to attempt to "get even"
- Lying about gambling
- Committing illegal acts to fund gambling
- Loss of an important relationship, job, educational or career opportunity as a result of gambling
- Relying on others to relieve financial problems caused by gambling

There is help for people who experience problem gambling. Psychotherapy has proven to be helpful in assisting problem gamblers to deal with their problems and achieve recovery. The 12-step self-help program of Gambler's Anonymous also

is useful in providing peer support for problem gamblers.

If you suspect you or a loved one may be suffering from problem gambling, do not hesitate to seek help. This disorder is by nature progressive and usually will worsen and create more problems over time. Gambling is an addiction and should be treated as one.

---

Mike Musgrave is an outpatient therapist for Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. Contact the organization at (812) 436-4221 or [comments@southwestern.org](mailto:comments@southwestern.org).