

Stop Gambling

A self-help manual for giving up gambling

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Introduction

How this manual can help you

Welcome and congratulations! By reading this manual, you have taken a positive step towards freeing your life from gambling. I admire you for having the courage to change. It can be hard to admit that you need help and working through a self-help manual is a great place to start. The techniques used in this manual have successfully helped many people to stop gambling. It IS possible to stop gambling and when you succeed, your life will change dramatically for the better.

This manual will give you some of the skills that you need to stop gambling. You may be wondering what these skills are. Surely it's just all willpower, isn't it? If you want to stop, you will stop, won't you? Well, I agree that willpower plays an important role in giving up any damaging habit. But gambling isn't just any damaging habit.

Compare gambling to some common problem behaviors. If you smoke, you probably smoke between 20 to 50 cigarettes a day. If you drink heavily, at worst, you drink between 20 to 30 standard drinks a day. By contrast, if you play ten lines on a five-cent poker machine and lose \$200 in a session, you have pressed the button on the machine about 1000 times, perhaps even more! Think about it. Even if you have only been playing the pokies for a short period of time, the number of button presses over your gambling career is phenomenal. If you bet on horses or dogs or play

casino games, the number of bets may not be as high, but it is still extremely substantial.

The sheer volume of bets that you have made means that gambling is very entrenched in your brain. It has become a deeply engrained habit. This means that willpower alone will only take you so far. You will need to learn some special skills if you are going to break this habit.

The skills taught in this manual are part of a treatment known as cognitive behavioral therapy. Cognitive means that some of the skills focus on the way you think about gambling. The behavioral skills address the causes of your gambling and help you to stay off gambling for good. Currently, cognitive behavioral therapy is the empirically-validated, best practice for problem gambling. This means that carefully controlled research has found that it is the most effective treatment for people with gambling problems.

Do you have a gambling problem?

Anyone who gambles will have days when they lose money. This is inevitable. Many gamblers are prepared to lose a small amount of money in return for entertainment and the hope of a big win. So, how do you know whether you have a gambling problem? How bad do the losses have to be before you should do something about it? The following questions can help you to decide this issue. Work through each of them carefully and answer them as honestly as you can.

Question 1) Are you preoccupied with gambling? Do you spend a lot of time thinking about gambling? Do you spend a lot of time thinking about ways to get money to either gamble or to pay debts that were caused by gambling? (Circle YES if you answered yes to any of these questions).

YES NO

Question 2) On average, has the amount of money you lose in each session increased significantly since you began gambling? Has the size of your average bet increased significantly since you began gambling? Do you risk more money now compared to when you first started gambling?

YES NO

Question 3) Have you tried to cut back, control or stop gambling, but been unsuccessful in these attempts?

YES NO

Question 4) If you have tried to cut back or stop gambling, have you felt restless or irritable during these attempts?

YES NO

Question 5) Do you gamble as a way to escape? Do you gamble to escape from feeling anxious, stressed, depressed, helpless or guilty? Does gambling distract you from your problems?

YES NO

Question 6) After losing money, do you chase your losses? Do you bet more and more money, to win back what you have lost?

YES NO

Question 7) Have you lied to people about your involvement in gambling? Have you lied about whether you were actually gambling or not? Have you lied about how much money you lost or how much time you spent gambling?

YES NO

Question 8) Have you committed an illegal act to help finance gambling or to meet financial commitments that were not met because of gambling?

YES NO

Question 9) Have you lost or put at risk a job, a relationship, an educational opportunity or a career opportunity because of gambling?

YES NO

Question 10) Have you relied on other people (including financial institutions and pawnbrokers) to lend or give you money to help you out of a desperate financial situation caused by gambling?

YES NO

If you have answered YES to five or more of the above questions, it is likely that you have a serious gambling problem and this manual will be of great assistance to you. However, if you have answered YES to any of the questions, gambling is starting to

cause problems in your life. We know that gambling is progressive which means that the longer your gambling goes unchecked, the more likely it is that you will develop a serious gambling problem in the future. Gambling can be a little bit like cancer. The longer it goes untreated, the worse the problem becomes. The quicker it is cut out, the better the prognosis.

How to use this manual

The goal of this manual is to give you the knowledge and skills that you need to stop gambling. The manual begins by explaining how gambling problems develop. The manual is then organised into separate chapters for each new skill that you learn. Each chapter has practice exercises and sets daily and weekly tasks to help you develop competence in each skill. Throughout the manual, there are case studies of problem gamblers who have been successfully treated using the techniques in this manual. Their names and details have been changed to protect their confidentiality. However, their stories are an accurate reflection of what many problem gamblers experience.

Work through each chapter carefully and thoughtfully. Every chapter has information and skills that will be useful at some time in your recovery from gambling. It is easy to think that a chapter doesn't apply to you or that you already know the information. However, the more you practice and revise these skills, the easier you will find it to stop gambling.

Many gamblers find it useful to use an exercise book or diary to complete the tasks that are set in the manual. Although space is provided for the tasks, many of them

require a lot of repetition and a personal workbook will be helpful if you run out of space.

You will notice that many of the examples in the manual concern poker machine players. This is because around 80% of problem gamblers play poker machines. However, rest assured that the skills you need to stop gambling are the same regardless of your gambling type.

Patience and perseverance

Learning new skills takes time and hard work. Don't become disheartened if it takes time for you to stop gambling. The more you practice, the more skilled you will become and the easier it will be for you to fight the urge to gamble.

You may also find that it takes some time for your life to improve even though you have stopped gambling. For some, the financial devastation caused by gambling carries on for some time after they have stopped. Again, be patient and persevere with the program set in this manual. As long as you stay away from gambling, your life can improve. If you go back to gambling, you have no chance.

Now you are on your way!

Congratulations! You've taken the first step in an important journey. Remember, patience and perseverance are the key ingredients. Good luck as you work your way through the manual.

Chapter 1 - Self-knowledge

Understanding your gambling problem

I know that I won't win, but I'm hoping that I do – Barry

When I gamble, I don't think about anything. It's just me and the machine and everything else is forgotten. – Fiona

By learning the causes of gambling, you can understand why you have struggled to control your own gambling and decide what you need to do to stop.

Introduction

Gamblers often struggle to understand their gambling. When you step back and look at it, gambling doesn't really make much sense. Why do you keep gambling when you nearly always lose? For many, gambling is quite out of character. They are intelligent people. They are disciplined in many areas of their life, such as work or family, but they just can't stop gambling. Some gambled happily for years without a problem, but now they can't stop gambling. What's more, these losses have a devastating impact. Finances are destroyed. Massive debts are run up.

Relationships fail. Jobs are lost. Some gamblers even end up in jail. Yet, the gambling goes on.

It is very difficult to change a habit if you don't understand what causes the behavior in the first place. Recently, researchers have begun to explain problem gambling using a cognitive behavioral model. This model closely examines the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of problem gamblers and provides clear directions about what problem gamblers need to change in order to stop gambling. It is very practical and straightforward approach to the problem. Let's look at this model more closely.

The cognitive behavioral model

When you ask problem gamblers to explain their gambling, you get some interesting answers. Quite often the first response is "I am addicted" or "I am compulsive". Some gamblers say that they must want to punish themselves by gambling. It is the only way they can understand their continued gambling in the face of massive losses. However, when asked to monitor their thoughts, feelings and behaviors before they gamble, the responses are quite different. Far from wanting to punish themselves, problem gamblers are actually hoping to get something positive out of gambling.

As you can see in the following testimonies, one of the most common responses is that they are hoping to win money:

I think about winning back some of the money that I have lost. – Robert

Before I start gambling, I'm hoping for a win. I'm thinking that maybe today will be my day. – Joel

I'm thinking about the horses I am going to back and what prices they will be. I'm wanting to win. – Glen

What is crucial here is that problem gamblers HOPE that they will win money. Even though they have experienced years of losing and they know that they are unlikely to win, problem gamblers enjoy feeling hopeful that something good might happen to them. Gambling gives them hope and they are prepared to ignore past experience to get that feeling again.

Another common response of gamblers is that they gamble to escape.

I gamble because I am lonely. – Joan

I gamble to get away from feeling depressed. I know eventually it makes me feel worse, but it helps me to get away from feeling down, even if it's only for a short while. – Don

I gamble because I'm bored, then I lose and my life is even more boring. – Tom

In this sense, gambling is used as a way to escape from unpleasant feelings, rather than as a punishment. Even though in the long run, gambling causes even more negative feelings, in the short run, the easy option is to get away from everything by gambling.

How gambling traps you

If people gamble because they feel hopeful about winning and to avoid unpleasant feelings, continued heavy gambling starts to make a bit more sense. Roy's story can give us some insight:

I started gambling when I was 19 or 20. It was fun. I won a few times, but I never bet very much. I looked forward to gambling. It was a chance to make some money. In my early 20's, things started going well at work. I was promoted and I started to make good money. More money meant I could do more of the things I wanted. I bought a CD player and clothes. I was able to borrow money for a car. I was able to gamble more. I had the money to play more often and for longer. I started betting bigger, hoping that I'd win more. The losses were bigger, but they didn't hurt me too bad. I was single and living at home. Things were easy.

When I was 26, Mum and Dad retired and moved up the coast. I moved in to my own place. Things were OK at first, but I was pretty lonely there. I started to go to the pub three or four times a week, just to break the boredom. I was losing more, because I was playing more often. Soon the bills started to mount up and I was finding it more and more difficult to pay them. I borrowed more and more against my credit card. The more financial trouble I got in to, the more I gambled. The less money I had, the less able I was to go out with my friends or do fun things. I was even more bored and I began to feel depressed.

These feelings just made me want to gamble more. I wanted a big win to get out of trouble fast and I wanted to get away from feeling down.

Within a year or so, as soon as I got paid, I'd go and gamble. It felt like it was my only escape and my only way out of trouble. The debts got bigger and bigger, as I lost more and more. I was so stressed and depressed. I couldn't think straight. I started to drink heavily. I'd borrow money from friends and not pay them back. I'd lie, I'd make up stories, anything to get money. My family and friends wanted nothing to do with me. My isolation, however, just made me gamble more.

I hit rock bottom one night after I lost all of my wages. I drank two bottles of bourbon and woke up in hospital. The psychologist there put me in touch with the gambling clinic and I started the slow road to recovery.

Roy's story is typical. The gambling begins harmlessly enough. It is understandable that people would be drawn to gambling when the gambling industry spends \$500 million on advertising. However, as circumstances change, the impact of gambling becomes more severe and gamblers become trapped. You gamble to win money and to escape. You lose money. This makes your financial position worse. You feel more depressed and stressed. You think gambling is a good way to get out of the mess and to get away from everything. You gamble more. Once in a while, you win. This reinforces that gambling is a good thing to do. It feeds in to your feelings of hope about gambling. It makes you think it is possible for gambling to give you what you want. You gamble more. You lose. Your financial position worsens. Your gambling is now causing significant problems in other areas of your life. These

problems make you feel even more stressed and depressed. You start to think that gambling is now the only way out of trouble. You gamble more. You lose. And so on and so on. The following diagram demonstrates this trap.

The Heavy Gambling Trap

HEAVY GAMBLING CAUSES:



CONSEQUENCES:

*Financial problems
Relationship problems
Employment difficulties
Social problems
Isolation*



FEELINGS:

*Worry
Anxiety
Depression
Low self-esteem
Fear
Panic*



THOUGHTS:

*Gambling is a good way to escape
A big win will get me out of trouble
I'll just put \$20 in and see what happens
I'll get away from everything for a while
A win will give me some extra cash to
pay all my bills*



GAMBLE:

*As play, forget about problems for a
while. Feel distracted and hopeful*

WHEN YOU LOSE:

*Makes consequences worse
as financial problems increase.
Makes feelings worse as related
problems intensify*

WHEN YOU WIN:

*Reinforces positive
thoughts about gambling.
Makes gambling seem
more appealing.*

Is controlled gambling an option?

So how do you get out of the trap? Many gamblers think that if only they could control their gambling, they would avoid getting in to the trap in the first place. Often when gamblers seek help, they ask whether controlled gambling is a possibility. They hope that they can learn a safe way to gamble that some how avoids the associated problems. However, there is very little evidence to support

controlled gambling as a treatment option. Once at a venue, gamblers find it extremely difficult to think rationally and to stay in control of their emotions. There's an old racetrack saying that goes "You walk through the gate and it's off with the head, on with a pumpkin". Robert's testimony demonstrates this point well:

Every pay day I'd tell myself "Just put in \$50 and see if you can win a couple of hundred. If you lose the fifty, then go home". I'd play and lose the fifty straight away. I'd think "Another fifty won't hurt." Then I'd lose that and think "The machine's got to pay soon. I'll put another fifty in." I'd lose that too, and suddenly I'm starting to worry. I'm thinking "I can't afford to lose \$150. I'll have nothing left when I pay all my bills. I'll put a hundred in. That will give me a fair go. I'll get back to losing a hundred and then stop." Of course, I'd lose that, too and now I'm panicking. I can't even pay my bills now. I'm thinking that the only way out is a big win, so I put another hundred in. When that's gone, I stop caring. I feel numb and blow the rest of my pay. I look back afterwards and I don't understand how it happened. I really wanted to bet \$50, but once I start playing, all that goes out the window.

Robert's testimony is all too common. He had every intention of controlling his gambling on the day, but ended up losing everything. How does this happen?

When you are gambling, you experience a roller coaster of emotions. You feel hope, anger, despair, elation, disappointment, worry, joy, relief, panic and fear, all in a very short period of time. These powerful feelings make it difficult to think rationally

and, as you lose more and more, your thinking becomes less and less rational. Staying in control becomes almost impossible.

There is also very little in the gambling environment to help you stay in control. For example, have you ever noticed how difficult it is to collect money from of a poker machine? The machines have the technology to take your notes, but for some unexplained reason, they do not pay you in notes! We know that the technology is available. ATM's with this technology are often situated in the venues themselves, usually near the door so you see them or near the machines themselves. It's also interesting that nearly every gambling venue provides alcohol, often at discounted prices. With money and alcohol so readily available in the venues, it is very difficult for problem gamblers to become controlled gamblers. This means that giving up gambling completely really is the only option.

Why can't you just stop?

Many gamblers find it frustrating that they can't stop gambling. They find it easy to stop gambling when they have no money. The withdrawal symptoms from ceasing gambling are minimal compared to those experienced by smokers, drinkers or drug users. So why is it so difficult to stop?

If you've only been playing the pokies heavily for two years, its likely that you have pressed the button on the machine around 200,000 times!!! Whatever your gambling type, the thoughts, feelings and behaviors associated with gambling have been repeated over and over again. This repetition means that the behavior has become a deeply engrained habit.

A good way to understand this is to think of a champion tennis player or golfer. They do not have to think about how to hit the ball. After years of practice, they just see the ball and hit it. It's the same with driving a car. When we accelerate, brake or change gears, we don't really give much thought to putting our feet on the pedals. We just respond automatically to the situation. Gambling is similar. Gamblers have practiced the thoughts, feelings and behaviors associated with gambling over and over again. As soon as gamblers receive some money, they immediately think about gambling. They feel hopeful as soon as they think about it. If they feel stressed or down, the automatic response is to think about going to gamble. They have trained themselves in gambling and have become experts at it!

Now if gambling is so deeply engrained, you will need more than just willpower to stop. When smokers give up smoking, their bodies immediately start repairing themselves. As the body recovers, the craving is easier and easier to deal with. The longer that their body is free of nicotine, the easier it is not to smoke. However, gambling is not a pharmacological addiction from which the body recovers. Rather it is more like a psychological addiction. Your body won't really help you very much. To break a psychological addiction, you will need to learn some special skills.

The skills approach

Put simply, gamblers get trapped in a pattern of problem gambling. They gamble to win and to escape from problems. After a period of time, their losses mount up, leading to financial and other difficulties. They think that the best way to cope with these difficulties is to gamble some more. They lose again and their financial

difficulties worsen, so they gamble again and the pattern goes on and on. To break this pattern, gamblers need to learn the following eight skills:

The first skill you will need can be termed **self-motivation**. It's hard to break a deeply engrained habit. It will require some hard work. You won't do this work unless you really believe that it is worth while and you really want to change. Chapter 2 teaches you how to motivate yourself to give up gambling.

The second skill is **self-education**. There is very little in the gambling environment to actually educate you about gambling. There's advice on how to play and signs telling you how much you will win. In some states, there are even signs that tell you the game's percentage return. However, there is nothing that explains exactly why it is impossible to win at gambling in the long run. Chapter 3 teaches you why you do not and cannot win at gambling in the long run.

The third skill is called **cognitive therapy**. Gamblers THINK that they might win at gambling. They THINK that gambling is a good way to escape from problems and negative feelings. Chapter 4 teaches you how to change the way you think about gambling, in order to break the entrapment of gambling.

The fourth skill concerns finding **alternative responses to gambling**. To break a habit, you need to replace the damaging behavior with a range of healthy and useful behaviors. When the urge to gamble arises, you can then respond with a different behavior to gambling. Chapter 5 teaches you how to find these alternative responses.

The fifth skill is **problem solving**. Gambling is often a response to problems and a cause of further problems. Chapter 6 teaches you how to solve these problems effectively without gambling.

The sixth skill is **emotion management**. Gambling is often caused by and a cause of unpleasant feelings. Chapter 7 teaches you techniques to cope with negative and unpleasant feelings without gambling.

The seventh skill is called **relapse prevention**. Stopping gambling requires one set of skills. Staying off gambling for good requires another set. Chapter 8 teaches you how to identify, avoid and deal with high-risk situations that may cause you to return to gambling.

The eighth skill is **self-esteem building**. Many years of gambling destroys a gambler's beliefs about their worth as a human beings. These beliefs can undermine recovery or result in a return to gambling. Chapter 9 teaches you how to re-build your self-esteem.

Your first task

By identifying the thoughts, feelings and situations that occur before and during a gambling session, you can start to understand the causes of your gambling. This knowledge is important if you are going to break your gambling habit, as you need to know exactly what triggers each episode. The self-monitoring exercise can help you to collect this information.

Think about your last gambling session. Try to remember what was happening before you gambled. Where were you? What were you feeling? What were you thinking? Then try to remember what was happening when you made the decision to gamble. What situation were you in? How were you feeling? What were you thinking? Now try to remember the actual gambling session. If you were losing, how were you feeling? What were you thinking? If you won, how did you feel? What were you thinking? What did you do next? Using a self-monitoring sheet can help you in this task. I have provided some examples to show you what to do. Note that you work down the sheet towards the bottom of the page.

Self-monitoring sheet - Examples

	Date	<i>4 April</i>	<i>20 May</i>	<i>30 November</i>
Before you gambled:	What was the situation?	<i>Bad day at work. Driving past the pub.</i>	<i>Pay day. I was in the pub having a drink.</i>	<i>At home by myself.</i>
	What were you feeling?	<i>Stressed, tired and angry.</i>	<i>Drunk.</i>	<i>Bored and lonely.</i>
	What were you thinking?	<i>Just put \$20 in.</i>	<i>I always lose. Surely I'm due for a win.</i>	<i>Gambling won't hurt. It's a good escape.</i>
When you decided to play:	What were you feeling?	<i>Hopeful.</i>	<i>Happy.</i>	<i>Excited.</i>
When you were gambling:	Were you winning or losing?	<i>Losing \$300</i>	<i>Winning \$200</i>	<i>Losing heaps.</i>
	What were you thinking?	<i>I can't afford to lose. Machine must pay soon</i>	<i>I'm on a roll. Bet up.</i>	<i>Who cares if I lose?</i>
	What were you feeling?	<i>Panic. Scared.</i>	<i>Excited.</i>	<i>Depressed.</i>
	What did you do next?	<i>Lost another \$200 chasing after the \$300.</i>	<i>The roll ended and I lost everything.</i>	<i>Went home and felt even more bored and lonely.</i>

Now you have got the idea, fill in the self-monitoring sheet for the last three times that you gambled. If you can't remember the last three sessions, write answers for some sessions that you stick in your mind.

Self-monitoring sheet

	<i>Date</i>			
<i>Before you gambled:</i>	<i>What was the situation?</i>			
	<i>What were you feeling?</i>			
	<i>What were you thinking?</i>			
<i>When you decided to gamble:</i>	<i>What were you feeling?</i>			
<i>When you were gambling:</i>	<i>Were you winning or losing?</i>			
	<i>What were you thinking?</i>			
	<i>What were you feeling?</i>			
	<i>What did you do next?</i>			

These monitoring sheets will provide you with important information for the coming chapters, so keep filling them in whenever you gamble. Looking back over the monitoring sheet, do you notice any patterns in your gambling? Did any common situations or feelings trigger gambling sessions? What sort of thoughts allowed you to gamble?

Now that you have some insight in to the causes of your gambling, you are ready to begin learning the skills that you need to give up. The first skill is self-motivation.

Chapter 2 - Self-motivation

How to motivate yourself to stop gambling

Every day I thought about why I wanted to stop and how my life was getting better without gambling. It all snowballed from there. - Peter

It took me six months, but finally whenever the urge to gamble came up, I would immediately think about the damage it was causing, instead of thinking about just going and putting \$20 in. - Rosanne

In order to stop gambling, you will need to work hard. If you have already made the commitment to stop gambling, this chapter will help you to stay motivated, especially when things get difficult. If you are unsure whether to stop gambling, this chapter will help you to make up your mind.

Introduction

I wish there were an easy way to stop gambling. Unfortunately, there isn't. If you have tried to stop before, you will know that there is no magic pill that will

immediately take away the urge to gamble. There is no simple strategy that will change your gambling overnight.

Remember that you have worked hard at gambling over the past few years. You have pressed the button on the poker machine thousands of times. You have spent hundreds of hours gambling in the TAB or the casino. You are so good at gambling that you barely have to think about what you are doing when you play. You have practiced it so much, it has almost become an automatic behavior, like driving a car or reading or writing. This means that you will have to work hard at practicing some new ways of thinking and behaving to stop the old habits from returning. Hard work isn't fun and learning new skills can be difficult. It's a little like trying to write with your left hand if you are right-handed. It feels uncomfortable and unnatural at first and you often go back to using your right hand without even thinking about it. However, as you practice and practice, writing left-handed becomes easier and easier.

So if stopping is going to be hard work, you will have to be motivated. Your motivation is your responsibility and you will have to work on it. To help you, here are six motivational skills that many gamblers have used very successfully. Give them a try.

Skill 1: Believe that you can stop gambling

I'm sure there have been plenty of times when you have lost all of your money gambling and you pledged to yourself that you would never gamble again. You manage not to gamble for a few days and start feeling pretty good about things, but

then you get paid or you borrow some money to pay some bills and you think, "I'll just put \$20 in". Before you know it, your pledge is forgotten and you've lost \$200 chasing after the initial \$20 while thinking that the machine has got to pay soon or that a big win will get you out of trouble. Many gamblers feel extremely discouraged when this happens. They start to believe that they have no discipline, that they are impulsive and that they are out of control. Worst of all, they give up on giving up. They feel that there's no point trying to stop because they don't believe that they can do it.

If this is how you feel, remember what we discussed in the introduction. It can be difficult to stop gambling on your own and you will need to learn some new skills. It makes sense that you couldn't stop when you didn't have the skills that you needed. But many, many people have given up in the past and more will give up in the future. There is no reason why you cannot give up, too. The only requirements for success are the desire to stop and the willingness to learn some new skills. If you have these, you can stop gambling.

If you are having doubts about whether stopping gambling is what you really want to do, the next few skills should steel your resolve.

Skill 2: Calculate how much money you have lost gambling

For many gamblers, the most serious consequence of their gambling is financial. An excellent way to motivate yourself to stop gambling is to complete an honest appraisal of how much money you have lost over the past year. This can be calculated quite easily. Work out how much you lose on a typical week. Multiply this

amount by 52 for the number of weeks in the year. For example, if you normally lose around \$300 per week, you multiply \$300 by 52 weeks and find a total gambling loss of \$15,600. The following table will help:

On average, how much do you lose per week: _____
Multiply this answer by 52: **x 52**
Total amount lost gambling: _____

If the amount shocks you, don't be disheartened. It simply means that now is the time to do something about the problem before it gets any worse. There is hope. There are many problem gamblers who have lost millions of dollars and have been able to re-build their lives using the techniques presented in this manual. There is no reason at all why you cannot stop, too.

Skill 3: Calculate the amount of time you have spent gambling

Gamblers don't only lose money. They also lose time. Another good way to motivate yourself is to calculate the amount of time you have wasted gambling. Firstly, estimate how many hours you gamble on an average week. Of course, this often depends on how much money you have and how long it lasts, but try to come up with an average figure. Then carry out a similar calculation as you did in Step 2. For example, if you spend 10 hours a week gambling multiply 10 hours by 52 weeks to get 520 hours spent gambling. That's over 21 days of non-stop gambling!!

On average, how much time do you spend gambling per week: _____
Multiply this answer by 52: **x 52**
Total amount of hours lost gambling: _____

You might like to think about how much money you could have earned if you had worked during those hours at the average wage (about \$15 an hour). Think about what you could have done with that time. Think about the projects you could have completed, the courses you could have done, the friendships you could have made. Think about whether the time has come for you to stop gambling and get your life back.

Again, don't be disheartened if these figures shock you. Even some of the most severely dependent gamblers have been able to stop gambling and re-build their lives. There is always hope if you commit yourself to stopping.

Skill 4: Look back and look forward

Another good way to motivate yourself is to remember what your life was like before you started to have problems with gambling. Ask yourself how much debt you were in? What was your financial position? How happy were you back then? Many gamblers say that they weren't in debt, that their financial position was sound, and that they were reasonably happy.

Now assess your current circumstances. Many problem gamblers are heavily in debt, have serious financial troubles and often feel stressed, depressed and anxious. The downward trend is very obvious.

Now think about what your future will be like if you don't stop gambling. Again, ask yourself whether the time has come to stop gambling and arrest this trend. Now

imagine a future without gambling. What positive changes can you see? What will your life be like? Think about how your mood will improve. Think about how your financial position will recover.

Skill 5: The Decisional Balance Sheet

Another way to get motivated to stop gambling is to complete a Decisional Balance Sheet. The Decisional Balance Sheet helps you to weigh up the pros and cons of gambling using the table below. Try to be as honest and thorough as possible. Ask yourself "What do I like about gambling?" Then consider all of the different areas in your life that have been effected by gambling. Ask yourself, "What is it about gambling that is really negative?" To give you some guidance, the balance sheet of one of my clients is included below. As you can see, the number of disadvantages far outweighs the advantages. Note that the advantages such as excitement are often short-term and transitory, but the disadvantages such as debts have a much longer impact.

Decisional Balance Sheet

Advantages of gambling

Escape from problems for a while

Might win some money

Disadvantages of gambling

Financial problems

In trouble with the police

Can't pay bills

Caused problems at work

Caused my relationship to fail

Embarrassed borrowing money

Never have any money to go out

Never feel like I get anywhere in life

Always juggling bills

Depressed and stressed

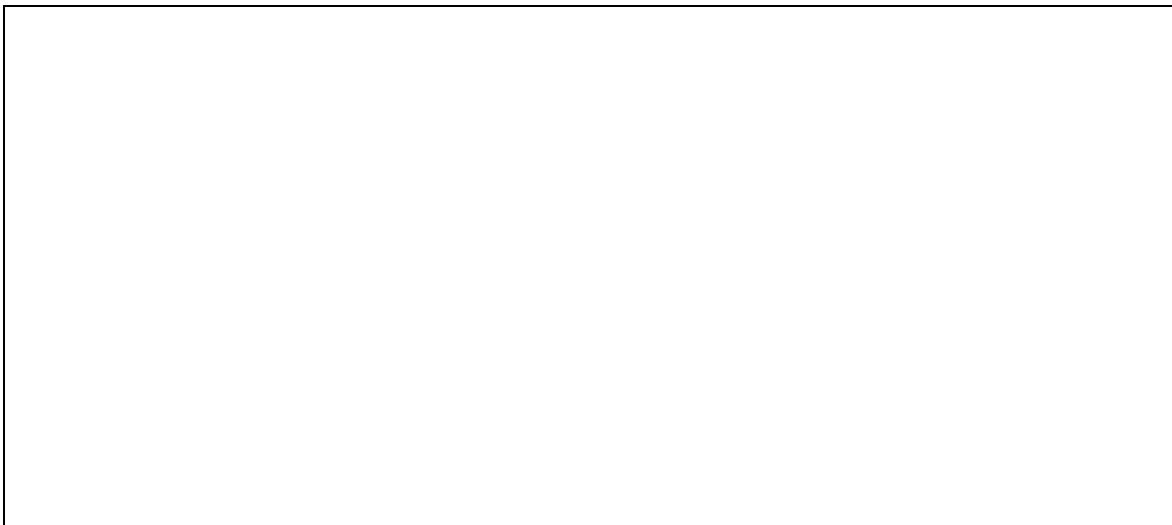
Lie to people about what I've been doing

Now fill out the balance sheet on the following page for yourself and decide whether the advantages of gambling outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa. Looking at the balance sheet and assessing your answers, can you make a commitment to try to stop gambling and to attempt the ideas in this manual?

Decisional Balance Sheet

Advantages of gambling

Disadvantages of gambling



Skill 6: Make a commitment!

Many gamblers make a promise that they will stop gambling. Unfortunately, they struggle to keep this promise because they often don't have the skills that they need. So as well as making a promise to stop gambling, commit yourself to the following:

- 1) Make stopping gambling the number one priority in your life right now. Decide that you will not be half-hearted and you will not place anything else above this goal.
- 2) Practice the new skills presented in this manual for at least 30 minutes every day. Decide that you will become an expert at these skills.
- 3) Work through every chapter in this manual. Decide that you will give the ideas in this manual every chance to work.
- 4) Stay positive. Decide to keep trying, even if the new skills seem difficult at first or if you bust out.
- 5) Choose a day to be your "stop gambling day", the sooner, the better!

If friends, families or partners know about your problem, you might like to share this commitment with them. If you are doing this on your own, congratulate yourself for taking this step.

What now?

To this point, you have admitted that you have a problem, you have motivated yourself, and you have made a commitment to work on the problem. Congratulations! You have taken three very important steps.

I mentioned earlier that giving up gambling would require some hard work. So although you are motivated to work hard right now, it is possible that your motivation may begin to wane as you continue to struggle with gambling. We also know that relapse is very common amongst gamblers. To keep their motivation high, every day many recovered gamblers write down the reasons why they want to stop gambling. You can complete this task for yourself by filling out the worksheet below.

Why do I want to stop gambling?

By not gambling, my life will improve in the following ways:

You are probably wondering why you have to do this task every day. However, remember all the times that you looked forward to gambling and felt hopeful that you would win. These thoughts are deeply set and come quickly to mind whenever you get the urge to gamble. If you are going to fight of these urges, you will need some ammunition. By completing this task every day, you will have some prepared responses ready whenever the urge arises. Writing out your answers is important, too. The best way to learn anything is by repetition. By writing the answers down, you can entrench the answers in your mind, as if you are preparing for an exam. And, as you know, stopping gambling is more important than any exam.

Summary

- * if you are going to stop gambling, you will need to work hard**
- * hard work requires motivation**
- * you need to motivate yourself every day**

Daily Homework

- * write out every day how gambling has damaged your life and how your life will improve when you stop gambling**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?

Chapter 3 - Self-education

Why you can't win at gambling

Whenever I got the urge to gamble, I just kept telling myself, 'The 85 percent return means that you can't win in the long run, so don't even bother playing!' Thinking this over and over again kept me off gambling for good. – Donald

I gave up the dream that I could win on the horses and that I could find a system to beat the game. That's when I stopped gambling and rebuilt my life. – Geoff

Gambling is caused by the hope of winning money. Gambling can only be stopped if this hope is given up. In this chapter, you will learn why it is impossible to win at gambling.

Introduction

Many problem gamblers will skip this chapter. Many of my clients say, "I know you can't win. I don't gamble to win money. I gamble to relax, to get away from

everything.” They say, “I gamble for the thrill. The money’s irrelevant.” It is certainly true that people do gamble to escape from their problems or for the excitement. However, gambling is a very complex behavior and you need to dig a little deeper if you are going to understand the problem.

What's exciting about a poker machine or a horse race? If you don't bet money, the games on a poker machine are not that interesting. People do not spend hours and hours watching others gamble on poker machines once their own money has run out. People do not get addicted to poker machine games that come with computer software packages. The only difference between the computer games and poker machines is that you are hoping to win some money on the poker machine. Similarly, people do not get addicted to standing around watching horse races on which they have not bet. So why do people gamble? At some point, either before you begin gambling or during your gambling session, you are hoping that you will win. If you thought otherwise, you would not be gambling.

An example will help explain what I mean. Yannick started playing poker machines with his mates when he was studying law at University. He never gambled heavily and the occasional win gave him a buzz. When he finished his degree, he was employed as a solicitor by a large legal firm. His work was extremely stressful, requiring long hours at the office. He began to gamble more regularly, nearly always by himself. It helped him to forget about his caseload for a while. Eventually, he was gambling every day, losing between \$500 and \$1000 a session. When he came to me for help, he had serious legal problems. He'd illegally taken money from a client's trust account to help pay his gambling debts.

When I questioned Yannick about his gambling, he was adamant that he knew that he could not beat the 85% return on a poker machine. He insisted that he gambled to relax and that he was too intelligent to play to win. When I asked him what was relaxing about gambling, he stated that it distracted him from his problems at work. I then asked him, "How is gambling distracting? What do you think about as you press the button? What do you think about as you watch the symbols appear on the screen?" He looked at me, his face reddening with embarrassment, and said, "I'm thinking about whether I won or not. I'm thinking about how much up or down I am." I pushed him a little further and asked, "Why did you choose a poker machine to help you relax, rather than choosing to play a computer game which obviously doesn't cause the same sort of problems? What's the difference between the two?" He replied quietly, "You can't win money on a computer game. I like the feeling when I play. I like feeling hopeful that something good might happen, that I might win."

This discussion was vital in helping Yannick understand his problem. Clearly, part of the reason he gambled was an attempt to deal with his work-related stress. However, just as clearly he was choosing to relax using a poker machine because he hoped he would win. For Yannick, feeling hopeful about winning money was much more appealing than feeling stressed about work. Once he started to convince himself that he could not win, he stopped playing poker machines and started to choose more helpful and less damaging methods of stress relief.

You cannot win at gambling in the long run

It is almost impossible to stop gambling if you think you can win, yet every gambler hopes at some point that they will win. It makes sense to gamble if you think you can win. A big win is exciting. Winning lots of money is a fabulous feeling and everyone likes to win. In fact, if you really believe that you can win, it would be stupid for you to stop gambling.

However, the laws of mathematics mean that you cannot win at gambling in the long run. I will say that again. THE LAWS OF MATHEMATICS MEAN THAT YOU CANNOT WIN AT GAMBLING IN THE LONG RUN. Yes, I know that you have had the occasional win, but these wins just encourage you to gamble more and more. The occasional win makes you think that your luck has turned and today will be the day you get something back. The occasional win gives you more ammunition to gamble. It makes you think that gambling might be a positive past time. It keeps you feeling hopeful that something good might happen. However, if you are going to stop gambling, you have to let go of that hope right now.

Gambling games are designed to make sure that you lose

I am often amazed at how little my clients know about the design of gambling games, especially considering the thousands of hours they spend playing them. Then again, the gambling promoters probably don't have that much interest in educating gamblers about the real workings of their games. Sure, they will tell you about the rules of the games, the possible pay outs and how to place bets. But they do not promote the simple fact that gambling games are designed to ensure that continuous play will result in a long run negative return on investment for the

gambler. Put simply, the more you gamble, the more money you lose. The following sections discuss how this principle applies to the major gambling types.

Poker machines are designed to make sure that you lose

Most gamblers know that by law poker machines in New South Wales must return at least 85% of their takings to the gambler, but not many understand exactly what this means. In fact, most gamblers experience the machine's return as 0% and find it hard to believe that the machines return anything like 85%.

An 85% return means that for every dollar invested in a poker machine, 85 cents must be returned to the gambler. Now, obviously you don't put one dollar in the machine, press the button, and receive 85 cents. Rather this return is achieved over a long period of play. If this is true, then how come you nearly always end up with nothing? The following example will help to explain how this works.

Imagine you are playing a poker machine. You start with \$500 and play one line at \$1 a press. The table below sets out the typical progress of play. Imagine that the left column is the credit meter on the poker machine. Looking at the first line, you start with 500 credits. You play for a while, losing 200 credits as shown in the Lose column. You are now left with 300 credits as shown in the next line of the Credits column. You then get a pay of 150 credits as shown in the Win column, giving you a total of 450 credits as shown in the next line of the Credits column. As you can see, play continues with various wins and losses, until the inevitable occurs and the credit meter shows zero.

Credits	Lose	Win
500	200	
300	¿	
		150
450		¿
	150	
300		150
450	300	
150		300
450	250	
200		200
400	200	
200		300
500	250	
250		100
350	150	
200		100
300	50	
250		150
400	150	
250		50
300	50	
250		100
350	100	
250		250
500	200	
300		150
450	200	
250		150
400	150	
250		100
350	50	
300		100
400	150	
250		50
300	100	
200		50
250	200	
50		250
300	200	
100		100
200	100	
100		50
150	150	
0		
TOTAL	3350	2850

RETURN	85.1%	
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Now, although you have started with 500 credits and ended up with nothing, incredibly you have received a return of 85%. You can calculate this for yourself by adding up the amounts in the win column and dividing the total by the total of the amounts the loss column. This gives you 3300 divided by 3800. When you multiply the result by 100, you come up with 85%, which is the machine's percentage return.

These calculations demonstrate a very important point. As long as the machines are set to provide a return of less than 100%, there is no possible way to win in the long run. Continuous play means that you will not only lose in the long run, but you will end up with no money. This is a simple mathematical law, just like 12 times 12 always equals 144. When you walk in to a club or pub, the laws of gravity and the laws of physics still apply. If they didn't, you would be floating around and the building would fall down. In the same way, the laws of mathematics do not suddenly change when you are in the pub or club. The 85% return means that you must lose in the long run and you must end up with nothing the longer you play.

The 85% return is built in to the machines in a very simple way. Depending on the machine, the odds of getting 5 jackpot symbols, is at least 330,000:1. However, at best, the pay out is only 10,000:1. The same principle applies across all the combinations on the machine. The 85% return means that you are always being paid less than the fair odds.

If you are still struggling to understand the 85% return, think about gambling as a business where you buy milk for \$ 1 and sell it for 85 cents or where you buy cars

for \$10,000 and sell them for \$8,500. How long do you think a business like this could survive? It is like you are playing a game of heads or tails with the owner of the poker machine. If the coin comes down heads, you pay the owner \$1. If it is tails, the owner pays you 85¢. You might get ahead early in this game, but in the long run you will lose.

Chasing your losses on a poker machine is futile

The above example also explains why gamblers chase their losses. You put \$500 into the machine, end up with nothing and think, "This machine owes me money. It hasn't paid yet. It must be due to pay soon. I'll put some more money in." You are not recognising the fact that the machine has actually paid out your rightful return. It's just that you keep re-investing this return. So you take more money out of your account, lose again and feel even more strongly that the machine has to pay soon, still not seeing that the machine has paid the appropriate return. So this pattern continues. You lose more and more money, thinking that a big pay has to come, until all of your available resources are gone.

At this point, gamblers often say, "But I have often put \$10 in and received no pays at all. How does the 85% return then? Surely the machine has to pay." However, in one year a typical poker machine earns about \$80,000 for and turns over \$1,000,000 in bets. Your \$10 or even \$100 is insignificant compared to this turnover. You do not know the machine's full pay out history, nor do you know how the machine has been programmed for the future. For all you know, the machine may have paid out all of its major jackpots. The jackpot might happen on the next button press or it might happen in another million button presses. The return is

programmed over the life of the machine. There is simply no way that you can predict what will happen next based on your own limited experience of the machine.

Still not convinced? Here are some more facts about poker machines that you should keep in mind.

A bigger gambling bank means bigger losses.

It's interesting that many of my clients will not bother gambling if they only have \$10. They will only gamble if they have a reasonable amount, believing that they have a better chance of winning if they have a larger amount of money to bet with. However, having a larger betting bank does not increase your chances of winning. Remember the press reports about Kerry Packer's alleged \$34 million losses at an American casino in August 2000? Mr Packer has one of the biggest banks of any gambler in the world, yet it doesn't give him any more chance than you. It doesn't allow him to gamble his way out of trouble, because the 85% return operates regardless of bank size. If you return to the example above and change 500 credits to 5,000 or 50,000 credits, the 85% return still applies. It will just take you longer to lose all of your money. Remember, the reason that you are losing is because that's what's meant to happen. The machines are designed to take your money. A bigger bank just means bigger losses.

Free spins are not free

Many gamblers prefer to play machines with features that provide free spins when a certain combination of symbols appears. They believe they are getting something for nothing. However, free spins are not free. They are included in the 85% return. You are paying for them. However, instead of being paid in credits which you could cash in, you are paid with free spins which are not redeemable. This suits the machine owners because they know the 85% return means that they can't lose, especially if they don't even physically give you your wins in actual credits that you can collect.

There are no professional poker machine players

Although there are a small number of professional horse racing and casino gamblers, there are no professional poker machine players. It is impossible to make a living out of playing poker machines or any gambling medium when the return is less than 100%.

The myth of the social gambler

Many problem gamblers walk into pubs telling themselves that they will only bet \$20 and then stop playing, just like everyone else. They wish that they could control their gambling just like all of the social gamblers that they think they see around them. However, it is a myth that there are hundreds and thousands of people who happily play poker machines and never get into trouble. More and more research suggests that social gamblers gamble for longer than they intended and that they lose more money than they expected. Social gamblers may not gamble as

frequently as problem gamblers, but many experience loss of control over their gambling, just like problem gamblers.

Stop paying other people's taxes!

Poker machines make money for the governments, clubs and pubs. They are a gold mine. In 1999, the NSW government raised \$1.3 billion through gambling or close to 15% of its revenue. In Victoria, the figure was \$1.45 billion. Poker machines keep taxes down. They mean that a small portion of the community pay a substantial amount of extra tax. Consider this: if there were no poker machines, petrol would need to be 15¢ to 20¢ a litre more expensive to make up the tax revenue shortfall. This would be a burden that the whole community would share, rather than just the poker machine players. To put this more simply, every time you play a poker machine, you are paying tax for someone else.

I don't believe that gamblers are stupid for not seeing that winning on poker machines is not possible or that chasing losses is futile. There are no handouts in pubs or clubs that explain the complicated mathematics involved in poker machine play. Rather there are usually lots of signs proclaiming the joys of winning, or pointing out how big the jackpots are or how much money has been paid out. There are no signs saying "Come in and lose all of your money here!" or "There is no way to win in the long run, but come and play anyway!" The pubs and clubs are probably not interested in you knowing the truth. So don't beat yourself up for not knowing the truth. Rather, use these facts to motivate yourself to stop. Use this new knowledge to fight of the urge to gamble when it arises.

Why you lose betting on horses and dogs

Although not as common as poker machine problem gamblers, there are still many people who experience significant problems from betting on horses and dogs. These forms of gambling are slightly different to poker machines in that the gambler chooses which horse or dog to bet on. This gives gamblers the belief that it might be possible to win at gambling in the long run if only they could consistently pick winners. However, the percentage return on these forms of gambling make this task impossible for every day gamblers.

The major proportion of horse and dog betting in Australia is wagered through totalisator agency boards (TAB'S) owned either fully or partly by state governments. TAB's return around 86% to the gambler, depending on the betting form. As with poker machines, this means that for every dollar invested on a race, 86¢ is returned to gamblers in the form of dividends. Rather than betting fixed odds on a race like bookmakers, totalisators simply add up the total amount bet on the race, take out 14% for the totalisator operator, and distribute the remainder to the winning gamblers. A three horse race can be used to explain this return.

In the following race, \$1000 has been bet on the race, meaning that the government takes a 14% share equaling \$140 out of the pool. This leaves \$860 to be distributed to those punters who bet on whichever horse wins. This remainder is divided up proportionally according to the amounts bet on each horse. For example, as \$500 was bet on Horse A, \$1.72 should be returned for each dollar bet on the horse. This is calculated by dividing the total amount bet on the race after the TAB's take by the total amount invested on the horse, that is, dividing \$860 by \$500. The result of

\$1.72 is known as the dividend. Interestingly, the TAB rounds down dividends to the lowest ten cents, so the actual dividends paid are \$1.70 for horse A and \$3.40 for horses B and C. This rounding down just makes it even more difficult to win in the long run.

Horse	Amount bet	TAB take	Return if wins	Dividend
A	500	70	860	1.72
B	250	35	860	3.44
C	250	35	860	3.44
OUTLAY	1000	140	860	

Now if you bet on every horse in the race to collect the same amount, as the following table shows, you will lose money whichever horse wins. The total outlay to back every horse to collect the same amount is \$1000, but whichever horse wins the punter collects only \$850, for a net loss of \$150. This is how the TAB ensures that it cannot lose on any race.

Horse	Rounded dividend	Bet	Collect if wins
A	1.70	500	850
B	3.40	250	850
C	3.40	250	850
TOTAL OUTLAY		1000	

When betting on a totalisator, you can never be sure what dividend you will receive until all of the bets on the race have been made. By contrast, bookmakers operate quite differently, betting fixed odds. This means that the dividend you receive is fixed at the time you make the bet. However, bookmakers always attempt to frame

their markets to ensure that they take more money in losing bets than the total amount they have to pay out in winning bets. In a sense, they ensure that the percentage return to the gambler is less than 100%. Bookmakers who cannot do this do not survive.

Gamblers must lose in the long run betting in markets where less than 100% is returned, unless it is possible to find a way to overcome the TAB's or the bookmaker's take. This can be done by betting on horses whose odds are much higher than their real odds of winning. For example, if a horse's real odds of winning a race is 2/1 (a dividend of \$3), it means that over three theoretical runnings of the same race, the horse will win once and lose twice. Now if you bet on this horse at even money (1/1; a dividend of \$2), over three theoretical runnings of the race, you will lose \$100. You will win \$100 when it wins and lose \$100 on each of the two occasions it loses for a net loss of \$100. However, if you can back the horse at 3/1 (a dividend of \$4), over three theoretical runnings of the race, you will win \$100. You will win \$300 when it wins, and lose \$100 on each of the two occasions it loses. Therefore, the key to winning on horses is to be able to bet on horses at prices that are higher than their true odds of winning. This is termed "getting value" or "overs betting".

Is it possible to get value betting on horses? Up until the early 1990's it probably was. Many uneducated punters and bookies were unable to calculate a horse's true chance of winning a race. Smart professional punters and bookmakers took advantage of these uneducated players. They made money by backing horses at prices higher than their true odds and laying them (taking bets) at under their true odds. However, eventually the uneducated either went broke, stopped betting on horses and started playing pokies, or simply became educated about value. This

resulted in the betting market becoming very accurate. If a horse was being bet at 3/1, its true chance of winning was 4/1. If it was being bet at 12/1, its true chance of winning was 15/1. Now there are very few mistakes in the market and subsequently the number of professional punters in Sydney has dropped from around 30 eight years ago to about 9 or so now. These few remaining professionals employ many staff to feed information into expensive computers and to watch hours and hours of videotapes in order to win a minuscule percentage of their massive turnovers. It is quite likely that their time and capital would produce better returns in nearly any other marketplace.

If you do not have the resources necessary to survive as a professional punter, then there is no way you can win betting on horses and dogs in the long run. However, if you still aren't convinced, go through the table of leading jockeys in Sydney and pick out the ones who have been suspended by stewards for not giving their mounts every possible chance of winning. The list of offenders is quite shocking. For dog punters things look even worse given the recent charges of corruption laid against the head steward at the greyhounds in Sydney. So even if you can correctly assess the true chances of a horse or a dog and you can find a bookmaker or TAB market that will bet you over the odds, you still may not be able to win because the race may not be run fairly.

If you are wondering why you have struggled to win on these mediums, then the mathematics of betting, the accuracy of the markets, and the history of corruption give you your answer.

Sports betting's no better bet

Sports betting is one of the fastest growing gambling mediums in Australia. The major newspapers are now giving it significant coverage, providing tips, form and odds for all of the major sports. It is only a matter of time before a substantial number of gamblers get into serious trouble betting on this medium.

The same principles that apply to horse and dog racing apply here. The sports bookmakers set their markets to provide a return of between 90% and 95%. This ensures that the bookmaker wins in the long run. The only way to beat the bookmaker's take is to be able to find mistakes in the market. That means finding bookmakers who, for example, are betting 2/1 about a sports team who are really an even money chance. Sports bookmakers rarely make this sort of mistake, because they employ experts in each sporting field to provide them with accurate information about the chances of each team. Unless you are prepared to work harder than the bookmakers and their staff, you are not going to find the edge you need to win in the long run.

Recent revelations of corruption have made the gambler's task even more difficult for sports gambler. Major sports such as soccer and cricket have faced significant scandals in recent years with concrete evidence of match fixing being uncovered by authorities. It is hard to bet with confidence on any sport when Hansie Cronje the captain of one of the world's best cricket teams admits being involved in match fixing. Who is to say what is still to be uncovered?

Blackjack - keeping the casino's shareholders rich

At first glance, blackjack seems to be a reasonable betting option. If your hand is higher than the dealer's hand, you win. If it is lower, you lose. If it is the same, you push, meaning that your money is returned. However, the casino gains its edge when both you and the dealer bust. In this situation, the dealer wins your money. This results in a return over the long run to the player of between 92% and 99%, depending on the quality of the play. As I stated in the previous sections, if the return is less than 100% to the player, there is no way to win in the long run. The following table demonstrates this more fully:

Player's hand	Dealer's hand	Result
17	20	Player loses
20	17	Player wins
17	17	Push (money back)
Bust	17	Player loses
17	Bust	Player wins
Bust	Bust	Player loses

Some gamblers attempt to beat the casino's advantage by counting cards. This technique involves keeping a running total of the number of high cards and low cards that have been played in order to determine the proportion of high cards remaining in the deck. If there is a high proportion of high cards remaining, the deck is regarded as "rich". In this situation, it makes sense to bet larger amounts and for the player not to take any cards when they reach 12 or more. The advantage to the player in this situation is that the rules of blackjack allow the player to sit on 12, whereas the dealer must keep taking cards until reaching 17. Obviously if there are many high cards left in the pack, you are more likely to bust if you take another card

on 12, 13, 14, 15 or 16. This technique gives the player a 1% to 2% advantage over the house when the deck is rich.

Unfortunately, this technique has some problems. Firstly, card counting is illegal and it is extremely obvious to the dealers and pit bosses when a player is counting. Professional card counters are continuously being thrown out of casinos and usually have to work in teams or wear disguises to beat the casino's security. Secondly, casinos now place a death card three quarters of the way through the pack. When the death card is reached, the deck is re-shuffled and any advantage the player may have received from the rich deck is immediately lost. Both these problems make it very difficult to beat the casino in the long run. Again the time and capital would be better invested elsewhere.

Roulette - the wheel of misfortune

The odds don't get any better for roulette players. At the simplest level, you can choose to bet on black or red. There are 18 black numbers and 18 red numbers. If you choose the correct color, you are paid at even money or 1/1. However, the odds of choosing the correct color are not 1/1 but 19/18 because there is also a green zero included on the wheel. The green zero makes the return on the game 97% and, as with all the other gambling forms, if the return is less than 100%, then there is no way to win in the long run.

Interestingly, many players attempt to use systems where they record all of the numbers that have come out. They then bet on the numbers that have not come out recently believing that they are more likely to appear. In this case, gamblers are

misunderstanding the true nature of probability. If you toss a fair coin 10 times and it lands on tails 10 times in a row, the probability that the next toss will be heads is still 50:50. That is to say, every toss of the coin is independent of any other event. The past tossing of the coin cannot influence future events, because the coin does not have a memory. The same principle applies to roulette. If red occurs ten times in a row, the chance of it being black on the next game is still 18 out of 37. The roulette wheel does not have a memory. It does not know what colors or numbers have come out previously. No system can beat the 97% return. Why do you think the casino provides you with pencils and paper to write down the numbers that have come out? Why do they advertise the numbers that have come out on displays? Do you really think that they want you to win? Or does the casino want you to think that there is a way to beat their game?

What now?

It is very difficult to give up gambling if you believe that you have a chance of winning. If you think you can win, you would be crazy not to play. However, the mathematics of gambling mean that you cannot win in the long run. To put it simply, if a gambling game returns 85%, you are playing heads or tails with the owner of the club. If it comes down heads, you give him \$1. If it's tails, you win 85¢. In the long run, you must lose.

The 85% return also means that all of the money that you have lost up until now is gone for good. There is no way to get it back. There is no "gambling karma" or gambling god that will let you get your money back. You are not due for a win,

because losing was what was meant to happen. You must accept that your money is gone for good and the only way to win at gambling is to stop.

If you are still not convinced, you need to read the relevant chapters again and then have another look at your gambling history. I don't have to prove to you that you can't win. Your history of losing has already done that for you.

Get rich slow

Gamblers are often in debt and are desperate to find a quick solution to their financial problems. They look to gambling as a way of getting out of trouble quickly. The media constantly bombards us with images of wealth and schemes that encourage us to get rich quick. Advertising tells us that if we win money gambling, all our problems will be solved. These messages are extremely hard to challenge when you are in financial trouble.

So here is the secret to getting rich. The way to create wealth is to spend less than you earn and invest the difference wisely. If you are currently in debt, this principle will get you out of debt. You simply need to be patient. By focussing on getting out of debt slowly and then getting rich slowly, you can turn your financial position around. This is not a popular message, but for normal wage and salary earners, it is the truth. If you spend less than you earn, you will get out of debt and begin to generate wealth. However, it will take time and patience. One thing is for sure. Gambling will never help you get out of debt nor will it help you generate wealth.

Summary

- * **The mathematics of gambling mean that you cannot win in the long run.**
- * **The mathematics of gambling mean that there is no point chasing your losses. You need to give up any hope of getting your losses back.**
- * **You cannot stop gambling if you do not accept that you cannot win.**
- * **You can get out of debt and generate wealth by spending less than you earn and investing the difference wisely.**

Daily Homework

- * **Continue to write out every day the "Why do I want to stop gambling?" worksheet. It's important to keep motivating yourself.**
- * **Re-read the section on your preferred form of gambling. Write out a summary of that section and read it every day. Remember the importance of repetition.**
- * **If you can, find a friend or family member and convince them that it is impossible to win at gambling.**
- * **Every time you get the urge to gamble, think about how you cannot win and that when you lose, you will feel depressed, angry and stressed. Gambling will not help you to escape or to relax if this is how it will make you feel.**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?

Chapter 4 - Cognitive Therapy

The way you think makes you gamble

Everytime I gambled, I made up some excuse to let myself do it. I'd say "I'll only put \$50 in", but it never turned out that way. - Toni

I changed my attitude to gambling. It was the only way I could stop. - Rex

Irrational thinking is at the heart of the urge to gamble. By identifying and challenging your irrational gambling thoughts, you can fight off the urge to gamble.

Introduction

Cognitive therapy is one of the most effective techniques available for stopping gambling. The idea behind this technique is straightforward: thinking irrationally causes you to gamble. Put simply, you will gamble if you talk to yourself in a manner that ignores the truth about yourself and about gambling. If you can learn to successfully challenge your irrational thinking, you will take control of your

gambling and your life. It all sounds too easy, doesn't it? Let me expand on this and you will see how this powerful technique can work for you.

Irrational thinking leads to gamble

Recent scientific research has discovered that gamblers think irrationally both before and during gambling sessions and that this way of thinking can cause gambling to escalate to problem levels. Peter's account of his gambling gives a good demonstration of this fact:

"If I had just been paid and I started to get the urge, I'd tell myself, 'Just put \$20 in and see what happens.' Of course, that twenty would be lost pretty quick, so I'd put another twenty in, because I didn't get a fair go. If I started to win, I'd think, 'Today's the day I finally get something back. Maybe today I'll be lucky.' However, pretty soon, I'd be losing again and when I'd lost the second twenty, I'd start thinking, 'This machine's gotta pay soon. I'm due for a win'. I'd put another forty in and lose that. Now, I'm losing eighty and I'm pretty pissed off. I'm thinking, 'The machine's gotta pay me soon'. I put in another eighty and I win back a little of what I lost and I enjoy myself for a while, but then I have a bad run and I lose the eighty. Now I'm down 160 and I'm starting to feel stressed and a bit panicky. I'm thinking, 'I can't afford to lose 160, I'll put in another 100.' I go through that pretty quick, because I play maximum credits thinking the machine has to go off soon. Now I'm 260 down and I don't give a shit any more. I think 'If I've done 260, I may as well do the lot. My only hope now is a big pay'.

I take the last 200 from my account and lose that too. Now I can't talk. I'm furious with myself for losing everything again. I call myself a loser and every filthy name under the sun. Then I feel depressed and think that I'll never get anywhere in life and I start to panic about all of the bills that I can't pay. I spend the next week broke, unable to go out or do anything. And so the next time I get some money, I think 'If I could just win a little bit more, I can pay some of these bills and maybe do some things. I'll just put twenty in', and it starts all over again."

Peter's nightmare is one that many gamblers experience. As you can see, Peter's irrational thinking allowed him to start gambling. Once he had started, his irrational thinking let him continue every step of the way until he had lost all of his money. If we examine his thinking carefully, we can see the role that his irrational beliefs play.

The urge to gamble arose when Peter got paid. However, simply having money didn't make Peter gamble. Money is just paper. It can't make you do anything. Rather, Peter's irrational belief that he could just put \$20 in and stop allowed him to gamble. If you like, it was his excuse to go and play. Experience should have told him that he has never been able to just put \$20 in and stop. When this irrational, dysfunctional and unhelpful thinking goes unchallenged, you will gamble and you will lose all of your money, just like Peter did.

Once Peter lost the first \$20, he thought that he didn't get a fair go and he put in another \$20. If we examine the thought "*I didn't get a fair go*", we can see that it is problematic. We know from the previous chapter that poker machines don't give you a fair go. We know that the machines are designed to take your money. Peter's expectation that he would get a fair go was irrational.

When he started to win, he thought *'Today's the day I finally get something back. Maybe today I'll be lucky'* and so he continued to play. Again, his thinking was irrational. Luck has nothing to do with gambling. The machines obey the laws of physics and mathematics.

After he lost the second \$20, he thought *'This machine's gotta pay soon. I'm due for a win'*. In this situation, Peter failed to see that he had received all of the money that was due to him as he played. He wasn't thinking about how it is impossible to predict when a machine is going to pay, regardless of how much money you have lost.

Having lost \$160 thinking much the same type of thoughts about winning, Peter started to panic and thought *'I can't afford to lose 160, I'll put in another 100'*. Peter's thinking was quite confused at this point. If he can't afford to lose \$160, he definitely can't afford to lose another \$100. He believed that chasing his losses was a valid strategy when he was in trouble. However, as the machines return 85%, there are no valid chasing strategies.

Having lost the \$100, the irrational thinking continued with *'If I've done 260, I may as well do the lot. My only hope now is a big pay'*. Unfortunately, the only real hope for problem gamblers is to stop gambling. You may think that hoping for a big win is not irrational and that it really will solve Peter's problems. However, if you came in to my office and I gave you \$1000, I'm pretty sure that you would come back the next week to see if I was going to give you another \$1000. It's the same with gambling. A win might get you out of trouble in the short run. However, it's extremely likely that you will turn up again the next day hoping to win again. Many

of my clients have won huge jackpots on poker machines. None have kept the money for longer than three weeks before they lost it all again. Short-term wins simply encourage more gambling which results in long-term losses. The 85% return makes this unavoidable.

Peter's story provides a very clear account of how irrational thinking causes you to gamble. Peter was eventually able to give up gambling by identifying and challenging his irrational beliefs and replacing them with more rational, functional and helpful beliefs. Whenever, he thought "I'll just put \$20 in", he challenged it by saying, "I know that I never just put \$20 in. I know that I will lose in the long run, so just don't play." This took a lot of practice, but eventually he became good at recognising the irrational thoughts and fighting them off with more rational thoughts. The new way of thinking soon became as automatic as the thoughts that led him to play in the first place.

How to use cognitive therapy

If you think this very powerful and effective technique can help you, then the first step is to identify the irrational thoughts you have about gambling. A good way to do identify these thoughts is to complete the Irrational Thoughts Checklist on the following page. The checklist contains many of the irrational thoughts my clients have used over the years to justify their continued gambling. Go through the list carefully and tick off the ones that you have used.

Irrational Thoughts Checklist

- I can win gambling.
- I gamble because I am bored.
- I've got some money, gambling a little won't hurt.
- All favourites are winning today. I'll back the next favourite.
- I don't think about my problems when I gamble.
- Gambling is exciting.
- If I win, I'll pay all my debts back.
- Five blacks have come up in a row. The next roll must be a red.
- Gambling is a good way to overcome boredom.
- I'll bet \$50 and see what happens.
- Gambling is fun.
- All favourites are winning today. A roughie is due.
- Gambling is the only way to get a rush.
- Gambling will help me to forget about everything.
- I can't bet another \$50 and not win.
- When I feel down, gambling helps.
- I might win a jackpot.
- It can't take another \$20 and not pay.
- The feature hasn't come up for a while. It must be due.
- This machine has got to pay soon.
- I've put \$800 in. A big pay is just around the corner
- I'll just play for a little while and see what happens.
- This machine is due to pay.
- I'll just put \$20 in.
- I haven't gambled for a while. I've been good. Its OK to gamble.
- I'll relax for a while by gambling.
- I'll see if I can double my money.

- ___ I've lost \$400, what difference does another \$100 make?
- ___ You have got to be in it to win it.
- ___ I need some money. I'll gamble to make more.
- ___ The last four favorites have won. The next favorite can't win.
- ___ I'm losing heaps. This machine has got to pay soon.

I would be very surprised if you haven't had some of these thoughts before you started a gambling session or while you were gambling. Another good way to identify your irrational gambling thoughts is to review your self-monitoring sheets from Chapter 1. If you have completed them accurately and honestly, I'm sure you will have identified a whole range of irrational thoughts about gambling. If you are still struggling to come up with some irrational thoughts, go back to the Decisional Balance Sheet you filled out in Chapter 2. The advantages of gambling that you identified are likely to be irrational and will need to be challenged if you are going to stop.

Common irrational gambling thoughts

When you start to examine your gambling thoughts, you may feel a little overwhelmed at first. There may be many thoughts that seem quite logical to you on the surface, but you know that they keep you gambling. An easy way to decide whether your gambling thoughts are irrational is to see whether they fit into one of the categories discussed below. Most irrational thoughts about gambling can be classified into one of these categories. By reading through and remembering each

category, you will have a powerful tool that can help you identify, challenge and change your gambling thoughts.

Believing you can win

Many gambling episodes begin with thoughts about winning. Sometimes gamblers really believe that they have a good chance of winning. Some are just hoping for a win. A few are desperate and believe that the only way that they can solve their problems is by winning some money. Some examples of this type of thinking are:

I'll see if I can double my money

I'll just play for a little while and see what happens

I can win gambling

If I win, I'll pay all my debts back

I might win a jackpot

I don't have enough money, I'll gamble to make more

All of these thoughts show that the gambler believes or at least hopes that it is possible to win at gambling. These type of thoughts make gambling seem more appealing than it actually really is. They make you feel hopeful as you anticipate gambling. Your focus is on the possible positives of gambling, rather than the damage that it causes. Your focus is short-term self-deception, rather than long-term truths about gambling. Your focus is on the fantasy world promoted by gambling agencies, rather than reality.

These type of thoughts arise from the same fundamental premise, that being, that it is possible to win at gambling. The challenge to these thoughts is to recognise that this premise is wrong and to tell yourself that it is not possible to win in the long run and even if you win in the short run, you will not walk away. When you think about it, when you do win, how do you feel? Happy, perhaps? How long does this feeling last? Do you have a sense of pride or achievement when you have won? You were simply lucky at the expense of your fellow gambler. The lucky ones who do win are usually back the next day playing again and losing. Some examples of how to challenge these thoughts about winning follow:

Thought: I'll see if I can double my money.

Challenge: It is not possible to win at gambling in the long run. The 85% return means that in the long run I will lose.

Thought: I'll just play for a little while and see what happens.

Challenge: I know what will happen. I will lose. Even if I get ahead early, I will eventually put it all back in.

Thought: I can win gambling.

Challenge: The 85% return means that I cannot win at gambling.

Thought: If I win, I'll pay all my debts back.

Challenge: If I win, I'll come back tomorrow and gamble again. I'll lose all my money and my debts will be even bigger.

Thought: I might win a jackpot.

Challenge: The chances of winning a jackpot are at least 500,000/1. That means my chances of not getting a jackpot are 500,000 to 499,000. I have a 99.9998% chance of not winning a jackpot, so don't bother trying.

Thought: I don't have enough money, I'll gamble to make more.

Challenge: Gambling will just make my financial position worse when I lose and that is the most likely outcome.

Irrational beliefs about winning encourage you to start gambling. They make you feel hopeful and excited about gambling. If you challenge these thoughts and think realistically about gambling, you then have a chance of stopping. This section can be summarised as follows.

Core irrational belief: It is possible to win at gambling.

Core challenge: Mathematical laws make it impossible to win at gambling.

Believing that you are closer to a win because you have been losing

If beliefs about winning often cause you to start gambling, then beliefs about losing keep you gambling. It is a mathematical reality that the longer you gamble, the more money you are likely to lose. Yet strangely, the more money you lose, the more you gamble. Why? Many gamblers believe that the more money they lose, the closer they are to a win. It's as if they believe in a type of gambling karma, where everything will balance out in the long run. They believe that somewhere the gambling machines or authorities are keeping some sort of running total of how

much they have lost and because of this they are somehow due for a win. Some examples of this type of thinking are:

I'm losing heaps. This machine has got to pay soon.

I've put \$800 in. A big pay is just around the corner.

I can't bet another \$50 and not win.

When you think like this, you are ignoring the way gambling games work. Many are designed to make sure that you lose, while making you think that a win is just around the corner. Very occasionally, a gambler will be losing heavily and then fluke a big win to get out of trouble. I'm sure you can remember a number of gambling episodes where chasing has paid off. However, the mathematics of gambling mean that chasing is a flawed strategy. You may get away with it once or twice. However, the large majority of times you will not. You will lose all of your money. You can challenge chasing thoughts in the following ways:

Thought: I'm losing heaps. This machine has got to pay soon.

Challenge: I'm losing because gambling games are designed to make sure that I lose. Losing is what is meant to happen. Chasing the losses is a waste of time. Losing doesn't make me any closer to winning.

Thought: I've put \$800 in. A big pay is just around the corner.

Challenge: I've lost \$800. A win is no closer now than when I first started. Chasing the \$800 is pointless. I've received my rightful return and re-invested it. There is no point hoping for a miracle.

Thought: I can't bet another \$50 and not win.

Challenge: Gambling is about losing. It is irrational of me to expect to win. Losing money does not make me closer to winning.

Core irrational belief: The more I lose, the closer I am to a win.

Core challenge: Losing is what was meant to happen when you gamble. If I chase, I will lose more money.

Believing you can predict gambling outcomes

Recent scientific research tells us that many problem gamblers do not understand the random nature of gambling games. Poker machine players believe that if they just miss out on a jackpot or a feature, then the machine is getting ready to pay. Roulette players believe that if red has come up five times in a row, the next roll is much more likely to be black than red. Horse punters believe that if the favourite has won the first five races, then the favourite in the next race is much more likely to get beaten. This irrational thinking reflects the core belief that observing past events can provide you with enough information to predict future events.

A good way to explain this point is to imagine a coin being tossed. When you toss a coin, the chance of it landing on tails is 50/50. There is a fifty percent chance that it will land on tails and a fifty percent chance that it will land on heads, assuming that the coin is fair. If you toss the coin ten times in a row and it lands on heads every time, then the chances of it being tails on the next toss is still 50/50. Why? Well, think about the factors that determine the outcome of a coin toss. The important factors are how high and how quickly the coin is thrown, the weight and size of the coin, how quickly the coin is spinning, the density of the surface it lands on and the

coin's actual trajectory. What has happened previously is irrelevant. Have a look at a coin. A coin does not have a memory nor does it have a computer chip recording the outcome of previous tosses. A coin doesn't know that it has come up ten heads in a row. It is simply obeying the laws of physics. When you watch a coin being tossed, you do not have all of the information you need to predict how the coin will fall.

The same principles that apply to the coin toss apply to many gambling games. You simply do not have all of the knowledge you need to make predictions about the outcomes of the games. If six blacks in a row come up when playing roulette, the chance of the next roll being red is still 18/19 (remember there is a green zero that stops the chance being 50/50). The ball does not have a memory. It does not know that it has landed on six black numbers in a row. Where the ball lands is dependent on the speed and trajectory at which it is thrown, the speed of the wheel and the wear and friction within the wheel itself. This information is simply unavailable to the gambler. Previous outcomes are irrelevant.

Many gamblers object at this point. They say that a poker machine is different to coin tosses and roulette because by law it has to give a certain return. Therefore, they argue, if you have lost a large sum without getting a jackpot, then the machine must be due to pay soon and a jackpot is just around the corner. It is an interesting and convincing argument, but it is flawed because it is impossible for the gambler to know a poker machine's full history. You do not know how much the machine has paid out before you played or what the machine's program holds in the future. The size of your loss is insignificant when compared to the \$1,000,000 annual turnover of one machine. Remember that you cannot read the programmer's mind. This means

that you simply have no way of knowing what is going to happen on the next button press regardless of how much you have won or lost.

Similarly, many horse racing gamblers argue that it is possible to predict winners by careful study of the past form. However, predicting how a race will be run is extremely difficult. Jockeys can change their usual riding tactics. Horses lose and gain fitness from one race to the next. Track conditions differ over time and can even change during a meeting. Horses can be carrying injuries unknown to the general public. All of these factors make it extremely difficult to predict the outcome of races at a frequency that will ensure an ongoing profit.

The following examples demonstrate some of the common mistakes made by gamblers when trying to predict future events:

Thought: I'm losing heaps. This machine has got to pay soon.

Challenge: The machine does not have to pay soon. Even though I have lost a lot of money, this does not mean that I know the history of the machine. I do not know how many jackpots it has paid. There is no way to predict when it will pay next and this is not dependent on how much I personally have lost.

Thought: The feature hasn't come up for a while. It must be due.

Challenge: The fact that I have been losing for a while does not predict when the feature will come up. It is impossible for a gambler to predict when a feature will come up.

Thought: Five blacks have come up in a row. The next roll must be a red.

Challenge: Landing on black or red is not dependent on what has already occurred. Where the ball lands is dependent on the laws of physics. There is no way I can predict where it will land. The ball does not have a memory. What has happened in the past is irrelevant and does not make me any more knowledgeable about what is going to happen next or any more likely to win.

Thought: The last four favorites have won. The next favorite can't possibly win.

Challenge: What will determine the outcome of the next race will be each horse's ability, its fitness, track condition, riding tactics and a whole range of other factors that I do not know. I do not have the ability to combine all of these factors together to predict the outcome of the race. Trying to use the previous race as a guide is irrational and is proof to me that I don't really know what I am doing.

Core irrational belief: By observing what has happened in the past, I have enough information to predict what will happen in the future.

Core challenge: It is not possible to gain all the knowledge required to accurately and consistently predict the outcome of gambling games.

Believing that you can control your gambling

One of the most damaging thoughts a gambler can have before a session is "I'll just bet \$20." So many problem gamblers tell themselves that they will only bet a small amount and that they will be able to stay in control. Sadly, it never works out that way. Sometimes gamblers only take a small amount to the gambling venue hoping that this will ensure that their gambling is controlled. They lose this, go home and

get some more money, lose that, and repeat this process until all of their money is gone. What goes wrong? Why aren't these good intentions kept?

Once a gambling session begins, two things typically happen. Either you start losing, feel stressed and disappointed, you chase after your losses and lose all of your money, or you start winning, feel excited, think "Today's the day I win", rather than quitting while you are ahead, and lose all of your money chasing after your initial winnings. Either way, once the gambling has started, the thoughts about control are forgotten. They are over-whelmed by the emotional roller coaster experienced while gambling. It's almost like gambling is like stepping on to a waterslide. Once you start, there is no getting off until you hit the bottom. Unfortunately, losing all of your money is at the bottom of the slide.

This loss of control is not that surprising. Gambling venues and gambling games are designed to encourage you to gamble. They have no interest in encouraging you to control your gambling. Poker machines display their jackpots in large numerals at the top of the displays. There are no clocks or windows in many casinos, so that you lose track of time and gamble for longer than you intend. TAB's now have saturation coverage of race meetings from around the country, so that you have as many gambling options as possible, rather than giving you the time to calm down and think about whether you really want to keep losing money.

On the surface, the thought "I'll just bet \$20" seems quite harmless. If you only lost \$20, gambling would be a fairly harmless past-time. However, if you have problems with gambling, it is extremely difficult to stop once you have started. This means that it is vital that you challenge these thoughts before they allow you to start gambling. You can challenge these thoughts by reminding yourself that once you

have started gambling, that the gambling environment and your feelings will overwhelm you, and you will not be able to control your gambling, as the following examples demonstrate:

Thought: I'll just put \$20 in.

Challenge: I never just put \$20 in. The games are designed to take my money.

Once I lose that \$20, I'll feel disappointed and angry and I'll put more money in because I won't be thinking straight.

Thought: I'll bet \$50 and see what happens.

Challenge: I will lose that \$50 and I will start to chase and lose all of my money.

Thought: You have got to be in it to win it.

Challenge: Once I start gambling, I will lose control. Even if I win, I will get over-excited, keep gambling and lose all of my money.

Core irrational belief: I can control my gambling. I can bet small amounts and walk away.

Core challenge: The nature of gambling means that betting small amounts will turn into betting big and losing large amounts. I cannot kid myself that I will stay in control.

Believing gambling is an escape

Many problem gamblers use gambling as a way to escape from feelings that they find difficult to cope with. When they feel lonely, stressed, depressed, anxious,

angry or tired, they look to gambling to get away for a while from their uncomfortable and unwanted feelings. Gambling works very well as a short-term escape. When you gamble, you are distracted. You are thinking about gambling and you are not thinking about your problems. You are feeling hopeful about winning, rather than feeling bad. After many months of using gambling in this way, it becomes an automatic response. Whenever you experience an unpleasant feeling, you immediately think about gambling as an escape. Ironically, the losses that result from gambling start to cause serious financial and emotional problems that make the desire to escape even stronger.

Thoughts about escaping can seem very simple and harmless, such as "I'll just go down the pub and put a few dollars through to get away from things for a while" or "When I feel down, gambling helps me to forget about everything". It can be quite difficult to challenge these thoughts, because, in the short run, gambling does help people forget their problems. However, this is short-term thinking. The first way to challenge these thoughts is to recognise that in the long run gambling will create more problems than it will solve. The more you gamble to escape from problems, the more financial trouble you will get in to and the more you will want to gamble to escape. This pattern will never cease until your life is ruined. The second way to challenge these thoughts is to recognise that there are better ways to deal with these feelings and problems. You will learn some of these techniques in future chapters. Have a think about the following examples:

Thought: I'll relax for a while by gambling.

Challenge: Gambling does not relax me. When I am gambling, I am distracted from my problems. However, when I am finished the problems are still there and I feel even more stressed because I will have lost all of my money.

Thought: When I feel down, gambling helps.

Challenge: I feel down because of my gambling. Gambling will just make things worse. There are lots of other things I can do when I feel down.

Thought: Gambling will help me to forget about everything.

Challenge: I can't gamble forever. I need to deal with these problems now. If I don't throw away all of my money gambling, I could pay someone to help with the problems I am experiencing.

Core irrational belief: Gambling is a good way to escape.

Core challenge: Gambling won't help me to escape. It will cause me more and more problems in the long run. There are better ways to deal with these problems and feelings.

Believing that gambling is exciting

Many problem gamblers report that they gamble because they find gambling exciting and that gambling helps them to relieve boredom. The gambling industry and the government certainly spend large sums of money promoting gambling as an exciting past-time. Certainly, if you think you can win or you wish to escape from problems, it's easy to understand why you might believe that gambling is exciting.

Believing that gambling is exciting and that it can relieve boredom is another style of short-term thinking. Think ahead to how you usually feel after you have finished gambling. Typically, you have lost all of your money. This is not exciting. It is

depressing. Feeling angry with yourself is not exciting. Having no money to pay your bills is not exciting. Having no money to spend on leisure activities creates boredom. Sitting at home because you are broke is boring. Is a few short hours of excitement really worth a lifetime of financial hardship?

To challenge the thought that gambling is exciting, you need to take gambling off its pedestal and see gambling for what it really is. You have to confront your short-term thinking and start thinking about the long-term, as demonstrated by these examples:

Thought: Gambling is exciting.

Challenge: In the short-term it might be exciting, but it is not exciting to lose all of my money. When I am broke, I will be extremely bored. I need to think in the long-term.

Thought: Gambling is a good way to overcome boredom.

Challenge: It is one way to overcome boredom, but it is not a good way. After I have gambled, I feel worse than I did than when I was bored.

Thought: I gamble because I am bored.

Challenge: Feeling bored can't make me gamble. I can choose how I respond to this feeling. There are many things I can do that will relieve my boredom and that do not have the negative consequences of gambling.

Core irrational belief: Gambling is exciting.

Core challenge: The consequences of gambling are not exciting. Losing money creates boredom.

What now?

I am sure that many of these thinking styles are familiar to you. However, there is quite a lot for you to understand in one reading. I suggest you re-read this chapter and use a pen to highlight the thinking styles that are relevant to you.

I have talked quite a lot about how the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that are associated with gambling are repeated over and over again until they become habitual and automatic. I have also talked about how breaking the habit will require learning some new responses to the urge to gamble and that like any new skill you will need to practice hard to become good at it. In order to become expert at challenging your gambling thoughts you will have to practice thinking differently about gambling.

The first way to do this is to try to remember the six types of irrational beliefs and memorise how they can be challenged. A good way to try to memorise them is to write them down a few times so that they become embedded in your mind. By revising the challenges every day, you will be prepared to challenge the irrational thinking associated with the urges to gamble. The challenges are presented again in the table below:

Challenges to gambling thoughts
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1) Winning: You can't win. Mathematical laws make it impossible to win at gambling.
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2) Losing: Chasing is pointless. Losing is what was meant to happen when you gamble. If I chase, I will lose more money.

3) Prediction: It is not possible to gain all the knowledge required to accurately and consistently predict the outcome of gambling games.

4) Control: Controlled gambling will not work. The nature of gambling means that betting small amounts will turn into betting big and losing large amounts. I cannot kid myself that I will stay in control.

5) Escape: Gambling won't help me to escape. It will cause me more and more problems in the long run. There are better ways to deal with these problems and feelings.

6) Excitement: The consequences of gambling are not exciting. Losing money creates boredom.

Your second task is to complete the Challenging Irrational Thoughts Worksheet. The worksheet lists a number of irrational gambling thoughts and asks you to classify each thought according to the six categories we discussed above. Note that it is possible that the thoughts fit into more than one category. Once you have classified the thought, write out some of the reasons why the thoughts are irrational.

Challenging Irrational Thoughts Worksheet

Examples

Thought: I can win gambling.

Type: *Winning*

Challenge: *It is impossible to win at gambling in the long run. Gambling is designed to produce a negative return on investment. I cannot win.*

Thought: I gamble because I am bored.

Type: *Escape*

Challenge: *When I lose all of my money, I will feel worse than I feel now. There are lots of other activities I can do besides gamble.*

Thought: I've got some money, gambling a little won't hurt.

Type: *Control*

Challenge: *I can't kid myself that I can bet small amounts. Once I start gambling, I will keep gambling until all of my money is lost.*

Exercises

All favorites are winning today. I'll back the next favorite.

I don't think about my problems when I gamble.

Gambling is exciting.

If I win, I'll pay all my debts back.

Five blacks have come up in a row. The next roll must be a red.

Gambling is a good way to overcome boredom.

I'll bet \$50 and see what happens.

Gambling is fun.

All favorites are winning today. A roughie is due.

Gambling is the only way to get a rush.

Gambling will help me to forget about everything.

I can't bet another \$50 and not win.

When I feel down, gambling helps.

I don't have enough money. Maybe I can win some.

I might win a jackpot.

It can't take another \$20 and not pay.

The feature hasn't come up for a while. It must be due.

This machine has got to pay soon.

I've put \$800 in. A big pay is just around the corner

I'll just play for a little while and see what happens.

This machine is due to pay.

I'll just put \$20 in.

I haven't gambled for a while. I've been good. Its OK to gamble now.

I'll relax for a while by gambling.

I'll see if I can double my money.

I've lost \$400, what difference does another \$100 make?

You have got be in it to win it.

I need some money. I'll gamble to make more.

The last four favorites have won. The next favorite can't possibly win.

I'm losing heaps. This machine has got to pay soon.

Your third task is to challenge your own reasons for gambling. Remember the advantages of gambling you came up with for the Decisional Balance Sheet in Chapter 2? Write them out again here, classify them according to the six categories

discussed above and write out challenges to them. Write down any other thoughts you have either before you start gambling or when you get the urge to gamble and classify and challenge them.

Advantages	Type	Challenge
<i>E.g Win money</i>	<i>Winning</i>	<i>85% return means you cannot win</i>

Summary

- * Gambling results from irrational thinking**
- * Identifying and challenging irrational gambling thoughts can help fight off the urge to gamble**
- * Irrational gambling thoughts are habitual and occur automatically. Rational gambling thoughts need to be worked on daily so that they become the habitual, automatic response to the urge to gamble.**

Daily Homework

- * Revise tasks 1, 2 and 3 above. Become an expert at challenging irrational gambling thoughts.**
- * Revise the "Why do I want to stop gambling?" worksheet from Chapter 2.**
- * Revise the appropriate section of Chapter 3 concerning your preferred gambling type.**
- * Whenever you get the urge to gamble, challenge the associated irrational thinking.**
- * Start thinking like a non-gambler.**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?

Chapter 5 - Alternative activities to gambling

Do something else!

"Get busy" was my mantra when I stopped. If I sat around doing nothing, I'd end up gambling for sure. - Ronnie

I didn't just stop gambling. I re-built my life to make sure gambling wouldn't come back. - Anthony

Having a range of alternative behaviors can help you fight of the urge to gamble and stop you from returning to gambling once you have stopped.

Introduction

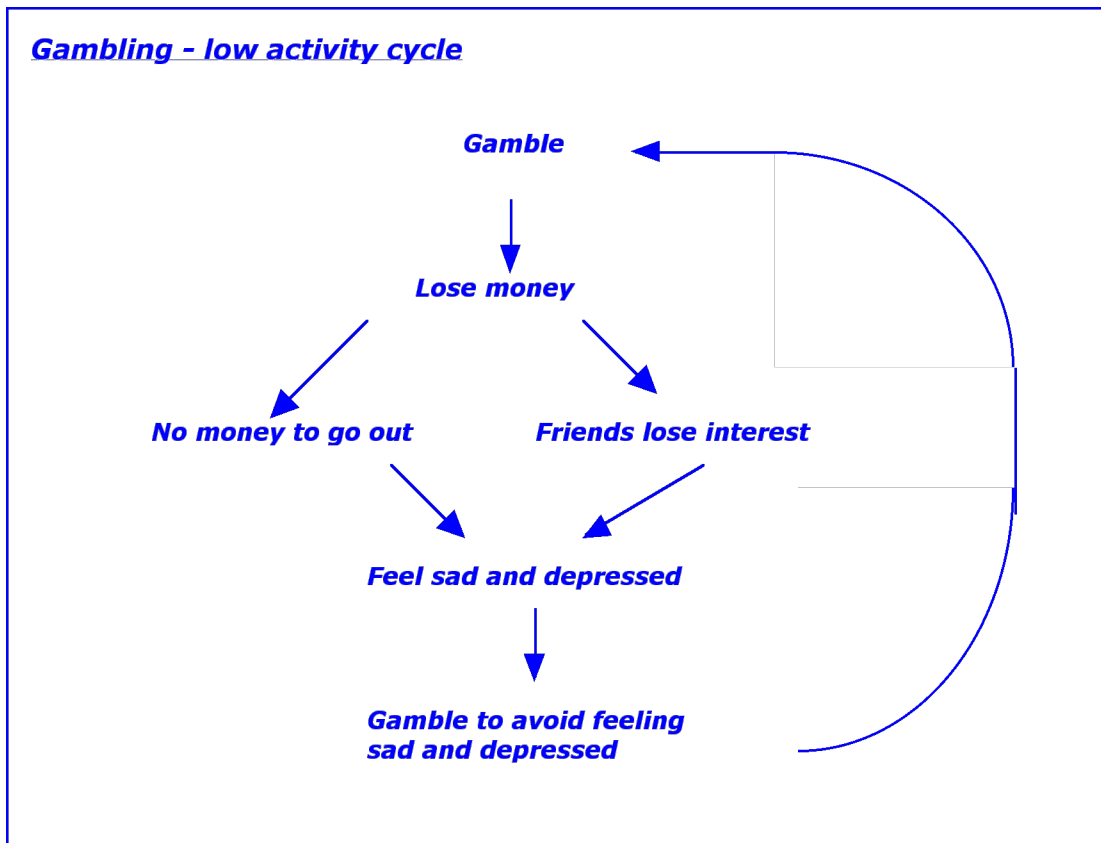
The key to breaking a bad habit is to replace it with healthy, useful habits. When problem gamblers try to stop gambling, they often struggle to generate any ideas about what might take the place of gambling in their life. Even when they are able to stop gambling for a short period, they often find that they have too much time on their hands and they end up gambling again. In order to avoid this happening to you, this chapter will focus on helping you to find alternative activities to gambling.

How gambling takes over your life

Many problem gamblers report that they have very few social activities apart from gambling. They do very little exercise, they eat poorly, they drink too much and they smoke heavily. Sadly, they often have few friends. It is not uncommon for a gambler to claim that they work, they gamble when they have money, and the rest of the time they do very little. How do gamblers end up in such a mess? Rupert's story can give us some insight.

Gambling really wrecked my life. It's only now that I've stopped that I realise what a mess my life had become. Basically, I would get paid and gamble all of my money in one or two days. I would be so broke that it was all I could do to scrounge the last few dollars out of my bank accounts to get the train to work. Until I got paid again, I'd go to work and then I would do nothing in the evenings because I never had any money. I'd feel so embarrassed, so angry with myself, so down, that I wouldn't feel like seeing anyone. Eventually my friends gave up on me because I never called them. I never had the money to do anything anyway. I stopped playing football. I stopped doing any exercise. I felt lonely and even more depressed. It was like gambling was the only thing left in my life. For me, the biggest part of stopping gambling was rebuilding my life, rebuilding my friendships and finding new things to do with my spare time. I took up golf, I did an evening course and met some new people, and I started to exercise every day. I made sure I stayed busy and that I had lots of other things to do besides gambling. Now gambling is the last thing I ever think about when I am bored.

Unfortunately, Rupert's story is very common amongst problem gamblers. He got trapped in a repeating cycle of gambling that made his life a wasteland. The more he gambled, the more he lost. The more he lost, the less able he was to do fun things. The less fun things he did, the more down he became. The more down he became, the less he felt like doing fun things and the less his friends felt like hanging out with him. He would gamble because he felt like he was doing something social, even though gambling is anti-social. As must happen, he would lose again and the whole cycle would keep spiralling downwards.



Breaking this cycle can be difficult. Even when you have stopped gambling, it can take quite some time for your financial position to recover to the point where you can afford your usual leisure activities. This means that you will have to be creative! You will find that there are many affordable and fun leisure activities if you look around and you are willing to try some new things. The first step is to convince yourself that increasing your leisure activities is a good idea.

Getting active

There are many good reasons to increase the number of leisure activities in your life:

- 1) When the urge to gamble arises, doing other activities will help to distract you until the urge passes.
- 2) Increasing leisure activities helps overcome feeling down and depressed.
- 3) Loneliness can be overcome by participating in new activities with others.
- 4) Your self-confidence will improve as you try new activities.
- 5) Leisure activities, especially exercise, can help you to relax.
- 6) You will begin to value and enjoy other activities besides gambling. Your life will become more balanced.
- 7) The more activities you do, the more you will feel like doing.
- 8) Leisure activities involving exercise will help you to become fitter and stronger both physically and mentally.

What to do

No one activity will take the place of gambling in your life. It is important to have a whole number of options available to you when the urge to gamble arises. You can think about this in terms of building up a menu of leisure activities from which you can pick and choose depending on your circumstances and your mood. Below is an example of an activity menu generated by Rupert, one of the clients at St Vincent's Hospital.

ACTIVITY MENU	
<i>Play golf</i>	<i>Practice golf</i>
<i>Go for a walk</i>	<i>Go swimming</i>
<i>Visit family</i>	<i>Visit friends</i>
<i>Do a TAFE course</i>	<i>Indoor cricket</i>
<i>Go to pictures</i>	<i>Go to theatre</i>
<i>Go to museum</i>	<i>Visit art gallery</i>
<i>Bushwalking</i>	<i>Watch videos</i>
<i>Go to the beach</i>	<i>Rock climb</i>
<i>Write resume</i>	<i>Look for a better job</i>
<i>Run</i>	<i>Go to football</i>
<i>Go to cricket</i>	<i>Practice yoga</i>

As you can see, Rupert's menu is broad and varied. Importantly, most of the activities are either free or are not very expensive. Some of the activities can be done alone and some can be done with other people. Some require a lot of effort, some are very easy to do, even if tired or stressed.

The first place to begin your own menu is to think about the activities that you used to do before gambling became a problem. Can you return to some of these activities

now? Think about what may stop you and generate positive ways to overcome these difficulties. Remember, it is up to you to deal with your gambling problem. By staying positive you can overcome some of the hurdles that you face.

Rupert provides a good example here. He had been a member of an expensive golf club before his gambling problems devastated his financial position. When he stopped gambling and started to rebuild his life, he wanted to take up golf again. He knew he couldn't afford to re-join his old club, but instead of becoming despondent and giving up golf all together, he joined a golf social club for \$30 and played every Sunday morning. It wasn't as good as his old golf club, but he knew that it was better than going back to gambling and he hoped that when his finances improved, he would be able to go back to his old club.

The second part of building your activity menu is to think about activities that you would like to do but haven't done because of gambling. Again, think about what may stop you and be creative in generating solutions to these problems. Add each activity you think of to your own menu.

ACTIVITY MENU

List alternative activities to gambling:

If you are struggling to come up with ideas, don't give up! It can be difficult to think of new things to do when gambling has dominated your life for a long time. Many problem gamblers in this situation have found it useful to fill out an activity questionnaire. This questionnaire lists a large number of activities that are popular and enjoyable and that you may not have considered. It then asks you to rate whether you would like to try the activity. Why not fill it out now?

ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire lists a number of activities that many people find enjoyable. Circle the number that reflects your desire to do this activity over the next three months.

- 1 I do not want to do this activity
- 2 I am unsure about whether I want to do this activity
- 3 I would like to do this activity

Abseiling

1 2 3

Acting		1	2	3
Become involved in church activities		1	2	3
Become involved in political activities		1	2	3
Become involved in social justice issues	1	2	3	
Begin a university course		1	2	3
Bird watching	1	2	3	
Bushwalking		1	2	3
Camping		1	2	3
Contact friends		1	2	3
Cooking		1	2	3
Dancing		1	2	3
Design a website		1	2	3
Do aerobics		1	2	3
Do volunteer work		1	2	3
Drawing		1	2	3
Explore the internet	1	2	3	
Fishing	1	2	3	
Flower arranging		1	2	3
Football		1	2	3
Get a massage		1	2	3
Get a pet		1	2	3
Go on a picnic	1	2	3	
Go out for dinner		1	2	3
Go to a ball		1	2	3
Go to a cafe		1	2	3

Go to a concert		1	2	3
Go to a dance	1	2	3	
Go to a party	1	2	3	
Go to a play		1	2	3
Go to a sports event	1	2	3	
Go to lectures or talks		1	2	3
Go to the art gallery	1	2	3	
Go to the library		1	2	3
Go to the movies		1	2	3
Go to the museum		1	2	3
Go to the opera		1	2	3
Go to the theatre		1	2	3
Go to the zoo	1	2	3	
Have a BBQ		1	2	3
Have a dinner party	1	2	3	
Have a sauna	1	2	3	
Horse riding		1	2	3
Invite family over for lunch	1	2	3	
Jogging		1	2	3
Join a gym		1	2	3
Join a political movement		1	2	3
Join a social club		1	2	3
Join a sporting club	1	2	3	
Knitting		1	2	3
Landscaping		1	2	3

Learn a new skill		1	2	3
Learn a second language		1	2	3
Learn to meditate		1	2	3
Listen to music		1	2	3
Listen to the radio		1	2	3
Making repairs		1	2	3
Model making	1	2	3	
Painting		1	2	3
Photography		1	2	3
Play board games		1	2	3
Play chess		1	2	3
Play cricket		1	2	3
Play golf		1	2	3
Play indoor cricket		1	2	3
Play lawn bowls		1	2	3
Play netball		1	2	3
Play Nintendo / Video games		1	2	3
Play pool or snooker	1	2	3	
Play soccer		1	2	3
Play squash		1	2	3
Play tennis		1	2	3
Playing a music instrument	1	2	3	
Pottery		1	2	3
Practice tai-chi		1	2	3
Practice yoga	1	2	3	

Reading		1	2	3
Redecorating the house		1	2	3
Restore furniture		1	2	3
Restore furniture		1	2	3
Rock climbing	1	2	3	
Rock climbing	1	2	3	
Rollerskating / Rollerblading	1	2	3	
Sailing	1	2	3	
Sculpt		1	2	3
See an exhibition		1	2	3
Sewing		1	2	3
Sight seeing		1	2	3
Singing		1	2	3
Sitting in the park		1	2	3
Snow skiing		1	2	3
Stamp collecting		1	2	3
Surfing		1	2	3
Swimming		1	2	3
Take a holiday		1	2	3
Take a TAFE course	1	2	3	
Tapestry		1	2	3
Ten-pin bowling		1	2	3
Visit a neighbor		1	2	3
Visit an amusement parks	1	2	3	
Walk on the beach		1	2	3

Walk the dog	1	2	3
Walking		1	2 3
Watch a video or DVD		1	2 3
Watch TV		1	2 3
Water skiing		1	2 3
Wind surfing		1	2 3
Woodwork		1	2 3
Write a letter	1	2	3
Writing novels	1	2	3
Writing poems		1	2 3

Go back over the questionnaire and add each of the activities that you would like to do to your activity menu. For the activities you were unsure about, call an expert or a friend who has done the activity and find out as much as you can about it. Be in a position to make an informed choice about the activity, before you add it to your menu.

Turning "want" in to "action"

Often our good intentions don't turn in to actions. We say will we exercise but we never get around to it. We say we will call that old friend, but somehow it doesn't

seem to happen. However, turning the "want" in to "action" is not as hard as you think, if you go about it the right way.

The first step is to motivate your self. Go back to the reasons we listed for "getting active". Remind yourself that finding new activities is vital if you are going to stop gambling.

Secondly, get a diary that breaks each day in to separate hours and schedule the activities in to specific time slots. By scheduling activities in to your diary you are saying, "This is what I am going to do and this is when I will do it." You are setting a goal and making a specific plan, rather than making a vague statement that never seems to be followed through. Rupert's diary below provides a good example.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7 am	Gambling homework	Gambling homework	Gambling homework	Gambling homework	Gambling homework	Gambling homework	Gambling homework
9am	Work	Work	Work	Play golf	Shopping	Go to cricket	Sleep in
11am	Work	Work	Work	Play golf	Washing	Go to cricket	Bushwalk
1pm	Work	Work	Work	Play golf	Clean house	Go to cricket	Bushwalk
3pm	Work	Work	Work	Work	Swim	Go to cricket	Bushwalk
5pm	Swim	Swim	Indoor cricket	Work	Cinema	Go to cricket	Visit parents
7pm	Theatre	Out with friends	Indoor cricket	Work	Cinema	Dinner at friends	Visit parents
9pm	Read	Out with friends	Watch video	Work	Read	Dinner at friends	Visit parents

Notice that Rupert has scheduled time every day to work on his gambling problem. It was only by working on the problem every day that he was able to stop gambling.

The third step is to stay busy and take it easy. Although that sounds contradictory, what I mean is, try to avoid having big empty spaces in your diary where you have nothing to do. These can be the danger times where you will go and gamble. However, don't be so busy that you burn yourself out. Although Rupert's diary is full, he has scheduled a lot of relaxing activities, such as visiting his family, reading and sleeping in. This ensured that his schedule doesn't cause him so much stress that he doesn't return to gambling as an escape.

It's also important that you don't set yourself up to fail by setting unrealistic goals. Build up the number of activities you do slowly. Don't try to walk ten kilometers a day if you haven't done any exercise for a long time. Begin with short walks and slowly build up your fitness. Also make sure you have a physical check up with your doctor before you try anything too strenuous.

Remember, stick at it! It will take time to find some new activities. It may be hard at first, but if you persevere, the rewards will come.

Summary

- * Breaking a habit requires replacing the damaging behavior with a range of more healthy and useful behaviors**
- * Doing other activities can distract you until the urge to gamble passes**
- * Increasing leisure activities can help you overcome feeling down, lonely and stressed**
- * Using a diary is an effective way to increase your activity level**

Daily Homework

- * Work on your activity menu every day and think about what new activities you might add to your list**
- * Schedule leisure activities in to your diary every day, especially on the days when you are most likely to gamble**

Weekly Homework

- * Continue to revise the "Why do I want to stop gambling?" worksheet from Chapter 2.**
- * Continue to revise the appropriate section of Chapter 3 concerning your preferred gambling type.**
- * Continue to revise tasks 2 and 3 from Chapter 4. Become an expert at challenging irrational gambling thoughts.**
- * Whenever you get the urge to gamble, challenge the associated irrational thinking and find an alternative behaviour.**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?

Chapter 6 - Problem Solving

How to deal with problems that cause gambling

Gambling was only half the story. I was avoiding some big issues in my life by gambling. - Pauli

When I finally faced up to my problems, my gambling changed. - Rebecca

Some people gamble to escape from their problems. Learning skills to effectively deal with these problems can help you to stop gambling.

Introduction

It is rare for gambling to occur in a vacuum. There are usually some fairly serious problems in the background of a gambler's life. These problems are many and varied. They can be relationship problems or work difficulties. Sometimes the gambler feels socially isolated. Often the problems are financial. Whatever the problem, the associated feelings are often so uncomfortable and so unpleasant, that gambling is seen as the best way to escape from everything for a while. Unfortunately, avoiding the problem won't make it go away. Gambling simply makes

things worse, as the inevitable losses mean that there is now no money to deal with the original problem.

In previous chapters, you have learnt how to challenge thoughts like, "I'll gamble to get away from things for a while". You have also learnt about the importance of finding alternate activities to gambling. Obviously, these skills are very important. However, another helpful skill is to learn how to effectively solve the problems that are producing the urge to gamble in the first place. This chapter will teach you some of these skills.

Jane's story

I was so sick of my husband, John. He would come home from work, have a couple of beers, and fall asleep in his chair. We didn't have a relationship. We were just flatmates who occasionally had sex. I couldn't stand it. This wasn't what I wanted. I was so angry and disappointed. I'd end up at the club every night, rather than stay home and fume at him. I started losing so much that he lost respect for me and we became strangers. I was mad at him. He was mad at me. He drank more. I gambled more. One night, I came home late after losing all my wages again. He was still awake and very pissed. We had a screaming match. One of the neighbors called the police. At that point, we both realised that something had to change. The next week, we went to a relationship counsellor and it saved our marriage. It was hard at first, but we learned how to communicate. We learnt how to appreciate each other and we learned how to solve our problems

without drinking or gambling. Things are never perfect, but we try to respond positively when we have a problem, rather than gambling to avoid facing up to things.

For Jane, the resolution of the background problems in her life played an important role in her recovery. Her gambling was a direct result of her inability to deal with her relationship. When she faced up to and dealt with the problem constructively, she was able to stop gambling.

Six steps to problem solving

Six-step problem solving is a very simple, yet highly effective technique for dealing with problems. It is taught across a wide range of clinical presentations and is commonly used by organisational psychologists in business and corporate settings. Like many of the techniques in this book, it's easy to learn, but requires practice to perfect. I will use Jane's story to help explain each step.

Step1 – Timing: Choose a time to solve the problem when you are feeling calm and relaxed. If this is difficult, at least choose a time when your level of distress is contained and you can think reasonably and rationally. It can sometimes be a good idea to enlist the help of a friend or a family member in this process, so try to choose a time when everyone involved is ready to contribute positively.

For Jane, the time to solve the problem with her husband was not when he was drunk or when they were screaming at each other. The next morning, she

approached her husband when she was calm and asked him if they could sit down and talk about what was happening to them.

Step 2 – Define the problem: Try to identify the exact problem. What is it that is really bothering you? What is it that needs to change so that you no longer feel the way you do? Be as specific as possible.

This is an important step. Often, people will want to jump in with solutions before everyone has agreed on what the problem actually is. In Jane's case, it was quite difficult to identify the problem. Her husband John believed that there would be no problems if Jane stopped gambling. Jane thought John's drinking was the problem. Things started to get heated again and they realised that the real problem was that they were rarely able to communicate with each other without fighting. Neither knew how to communicate without losing control. They were never really relating.

Step 3 – Brainstorm solutions: List as many solutions to the problem as you can. Do not judge or evaluate them at this point. A good tip is to think about what other people have done when they have been faced with similar problems.

Jane and John identified that they needed to learn how to communicate. At this step, they tried to generate a whole range of solutions to the problem. By not making any evaluations, they were able to think laterally. They were able to bounce ideas off each other and think up creative and original ideas. Their brainstorming produced the following possible solutions:

Break up

Have a short break

Go on holiday together

See a relationship counsellor

Buy a self-help book for couples and work through it together

Try harder to communicate better

Move to a new city and start fresh

Step 4 – Evaluate the solutions: Go through the pros and cons of each possible solution that you generated at Step 3. Listen carefully to the ideas of other people involved in this process to ensure that everyone feels heard and valued. It can help to give each solution a mark out of ten or to try to order the solutions from most appealing to the least.

This step was difficult for Jane and John, as it required some of the communication skills that they lacked. They agreed that breaking up or having a break of any kind would be an effective solution to the immediate problem, but it was the least appealing option and communication would still be a problem in their future respective relationships. They could see that trying harder had a lot of positives, but they did not know what to try. Although they thought having a holiday might help, their financial position was not very good and a trip would be expensive. They also thought that a fresh start in a new city would help, but would cause too many problems with their respective families.

This left two solutions with which they both felt comfortable: seeing a relationship counselor and using a self-help book.

Step 5 – Implementing the solution: Work out the concrete details of how you will carry out the solution. Answer the questions what, when, who, how and where.

Be very clear about what you are actually going to do. Decide when you are going to carry out the solution. Determine who you are going to do it with. Identify how and where you are going to do it.

John and Jane decided to initially try the self-help book and if they felt that this wasn't working, then they would see a relationship counselor. They decided to go to a large bookshop in the city so that they would have a wide choice of books. They decided to buy the book the next day and work on the skills in the book at home every evening after work for a three-month period.

Step 6 – Follow-up: Give the solution a reasonable amount of time to work and then evaluate whether the problem has been solved to your satisfaction. If it hasn't, think about what went wrong and what you can do to make the solution work. If this is unsatisfactory, start the problem solving process again, or implement one of the other solutions that you generated.

After three months, John and Jane felt the skills that they learned from the self-help book had helped improve their communication skills. Their arguments occurred only once a month on average, instead of daily, and as the relationship improved, they were both able to bring their respective addictions under control.

Another example of problem solving

So that you can get a good understanding of how this technique works, I have provided a second example of successful problem solving by a client from St Vincent's.

Sandra was having difficulties at work. She was 28 years old and employed as an administrative assistant at one of the big universities. She coordinated an undergraduate course in one of the big departments. This meant that she had to help students with course inquiries, organise rooms for lectures and tutorials, arrange teaching and marking for the academics and negotiate with the University administration, all the while making sure she stayed within her budget. Although she was busy, the work was unsatisfying intellectually and her contact with students and academic staff could be quite stressful. She felt unsupported by the head of department whenever there was a dispute and she also felt unsure about the possibility of promotion. She also felt like she wasn't doing a good job and that she should have handled the stress better. She would often go gambling straight after work to escape from her stress.

Step1 – Timing: Sandra decided that the best time to address this problem was over a long weekend at the end of semester. There would be no work pressure and she would have some quiet time to do some thinking.

Step 2 – Identify: When she really thought about it calmly, Sandra knew that she was a hard and competent worker and that she was good at handling stress. Instead of blaming herself for not getting everything done at work, she began to see that there was simply not enough time in the day to do everything asked of her.

Step 3 – Brainstorm: Once she identified the problem, Sandra was able to generate a number of possible solutions.

Talk to the head of department about getting a second administrative assistant or reducing the workload of the job.

Find a similar job outside of the university

Apply for a similar position in the department or within the university

Approach the union about her work conditions

Learn stress and time management skills to cope better with current job

Step 4 – Evaluate: In this stage, wrote out the pros and cons for each possible solution to help her make her decision.

Talk to the head of department about getting a second administrative assistant or reducing the workload of the job.

Pros: Extra staff would make a big difference

Cons: No room in budget for more staff. I would look like I was not coping well with the job if I asked for help. This might effect my reference when I leave.

Rating: 2/10

Find a similar job outside of the university

Pros: Less stress. Better pay. More possibility for advancement.

Cons: Less security. Hard to get a new job.

Rating: 6/10

Apply for a similar position in the department or within the university

Pros: May be less stress. I know the job and how the system works.

Cons: Might be just the same as where I am now.

Rating: 7/10

Approach the union about her work condition

Pros: Chance that the conditions might change.

Cons: Get labeled a trouble maker. May take a long time for anything to change.

Rating: 1/10

Learn stress and time management skills to cope better with current job

Pros: Will make job easier

Cons: I already have good skills in this area. Difficult to see what more I could learn.

Rating: 4/10

Step 5 – Implement: Sandra decided to look for similar work within the university system. She decided that within the next week, she would update her curriculum vitae and send it to the human resources departments at relevant universities. She set a goal of having a new job within the next three months. If the new job ended up being just as stressful as her current job, she would then look outside the university system.

Step 6 – Follow-up: Sandra was able to find a similar job in a different department. It ended up being much less stressful, but her departure became a catalyst for her old department to review their administrative procedures. Once she started to enjoy her work, the urge to gamble lessened and Sandra's life recovered as the gambling stopped.

Exercise

Try to think of a problem that might be contributing to your gambling and work through the six steps below:

Step 1 - Timing

Step 2 - Identify the problem

Step 3 - Brainstorm

Step 4 - Evaluate solutions

Step 5 - Implement solution

Step 6 - Follow-up

What if there is nothing I can do about my problem right now?

Sometimes problems can take a while to solve. You may not be able to solve some problems, like a chronic illness, for example. If you are in this situation, you will need a way to cope with the stress, sadness and distress caused by the problem. This is especially important if you have been using gambling as a way of dealing with these feelings. In the next chapter, we will look at some techniques that can help.

Summary

- * The negative feelings associated with unresolved problems can cause you to gamble.**
- * The six-step technique is an effective method for solving problems.**

Daily Homework

- * Use the problem solving technique on unresolved problems that trigger gambling episodes.**
- * Continue to schedule leisure activities in to your diary every day.**

Weekly Homework

- * Continue to revise the "Why do I want to stop gambling?" worksheet from Chapter 2.**
- * Continue to revise the appropriate section of Chapter 3 concerning your preferred gambling type.**

*** Continue to revise tasks 2 and 3 from Chapter 4. Become an expert at challenging irrational gambling thoughts.**

*** Whenever you get the urge to gamble, challenge the associated irrational thinking and find an alternative behaviour.**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?

Chapter 7 - Emotion Management

How to cope with strong negative feelings

Any time I felt bad, I'd gamble. - Sarah

When I learnt to deal with me and how I was feeling, I began to get a handle on my gambling. - Colin

Strong negative feelings often trigger gambling episodes. They also interfere with the rational thinking that challenges gambling thoughts. Techniques that control negative feelings can be an effective tool for controlling the urge to gamble.

Introduction

For some problem gamblers, the urge to gamble is associated with strong negative feelings. Feelings of sadness, loneliness, stress or anxiety can become so unpleasant that gambling is turned to for relief. Even though gambling will create even stronger negative feelings in the long run, this knowledge is often put aside. The hope of a win and the desire for a quick and easy escape is much stronger.

In previous chapters, we talked about how to change the way you think about gambling and the importance of finding alternative activities to gambling. These two skills will help you to deal with strong negative feelings. However, when these feelings are so overwhelming that you are unable to challenge your thoughts or find alternative activities, you will need some further techniques to help you fight off the urge to gamble. This chapter will teach you some of those techniques.

Acknowledge and accept how you feel

When our feelings are very strong and unpleasant, our natural tendency is to try to escape. No-one likes these feelings, so we try to make them go away as quickly as possible. This is typically attempted in unhealthy ways, such as gambling, drinking, smoking, using drugs and over-eating. Although these behaviors provide some short-term relief, the unpleasant feelings have not been dealt with. When it returns, you need to escape again because you never learned how to adequately cope with the feeling.

There are a number of simple steps that you can take to help you cope better with negative feelings without having to turn to destructive behaviors. The first step is to recognise that the feelings are a normal part of life that everybody experiences at some time. These feelings are part of being human and they will not hurt you if you acknowledge them and deal with them appropriately.

The second step is to identify what it is that you are actually feeling. Are you feeling sad, angry, frustrated or disappointed? Are you stressed, anxious or worried? Do

you feel hurt, lonely or scared? Stay with the feeling and think about what it actually is and where you are feeling it in your body.

The third step is to figure out what triggered the feeling. What were you doing before the feeling arose? Did something happen that caused you to feel this way?

The fourth step is to let yourself feel the feeling. Simply stay with the feeling, rather than avoid it. Feel it through and trust that it will eventually go away.

Finally, think about how you can react positively to the feeling right now. Is there anything constructive you can do about the cause of that feeling? How do other people react when they feel this way?

Talk to somebody

When you feel overwhelmed by your feelings, simply talking to a friend or family member can provide great relief. They are often more ready to listen than you think. Often the other person can provide a fresh perspective on what is happening and can offer solutions to problems that you may not have considered. If you can't talk to someone close to you, you might consider contacting one of the agencies listed in the Appendix. They have trained professionals who can really help you get through this.

Learn to relax

When we experience negative feelings like stress, anxiety or anger, we often behave irrationally. We might shout at a work mate or a family member. We might gamble or drink to escape from the feelings. We often do things that we later regret, even though at the time we know it is wrong. Many gamblers report that they know that they shouldn't gamble, but they feel compelled to play. The strength of the feelings overwhelm their rational thoughts.

A good way to gain control of your feelings in these situations is to do some simple relaxation. Lowering your level of arousal allows you to think rationally about the situation. You can then respond appropriately and avoid destructive responses such as gambling.

There are many excellent courses that can teach you relaxation skills. Often these courses teach techniques that take between 20 to 30 minutes to complete. However, sometimes gamblers find that they do not have the time to complete such long practices. They also find that they are in situations such as the workplace where it is inappropriate to do a long relaxation. This is where the short relaxation practices described in the following sections may be useful.

The exercises ask you to tense and relax various muscles in your body. If you feel any physical pain at all, stop the exercise and seek medical advice. If you are on any medications, check with your prescribing doctor as to whether relaxation exercises are appropriate.

Slow and deep breathing

Breathing deeply and slowly is a very powerful way to lower your arousal levels and can be practiced in nearly any situation. You can do it while you are sitting on a bus or while you are working or even while you are with friends. It's quite unobtrusive and very simple to learn.

- 1) Breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose so that you feel your lungs and stomach expand.
- 2) Hold the breath as you slowly while counting "one and two".
- 3) Breathe out slowly through your mouth, counting "three and four".
- 4) Repeat steps 1 to 3 for a few minutes.

Face rub

Probably the major way we reveal our emotions is through our facial expressions. When we get stressed or angry, the muscles in our faces become tense. A good way to get rid of this tension is the face rub exercise. Again, like the breathing exercise, this is a very quick and simple exercise that can be done almost anywhere (make sure you take your glasses off and watch out for your make up).

- 1) Rigorously rub the palms of your hands together until you generate a fair bit of heat between your palms.
- 2) Place the palm of your hands on your forehead and slowly and firmly drag your hands down the front of your face. Feel as though you are dragging the tension out of your face.
- 3) Repeat steps 1 and 2.

Jaw waggle

The jaw waggle operates on the same principles as the face rub. Our tension levels are often reflected in our mouth and jaw. By stretching and relaxing the muscles in these areas we can lower our tension levels.

- 1) Open your mouth and rotate your jaw in a circular motion. Imagine that you are drawing circles with your chin.
- 2) Make five rotations with your jaw in a clockwise direction.
- 3) Rotate your jaw five times in an anti-clockwise direction.

Screw up your face

This exercise attempts to relax as many muscles in the face as possible. Like the jaw waggle, this technique probably should be done while no-one is looking, as you might look a bit odd while you are doing it!

- 1) Screw up all the muscles in your face as tightly as you can. Close your eyes tightly, clench your teeth, push your tongue on to the roof of your mouth, and push your cheek and jaw muscles together. While you are doing all of this, try to breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose.
- 2) Release all of the tension in your facial muscles as you breathe out slowly through your mouth.
- 3) Repeat steps one and two three times.

Shoulder shrug

Another area where people experience stress is in their shoulder muscles. When we are sad or disappointed, our shoulders sag. When we are tense, anxious or angry, the shoulder muscles tighten up. A simple way to relax these muscles is the shoulder shrug.

- 1) As you breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose, shrug your shoulders. Imagine that you are trying to touch your earlobes with your shoulders.
- 2) As you breathe out slowly through your nose, let your shoulders relax.
- 3) Repeat this exercise five times.

Step counting

Another good technique to have in your feeling management repertoire is step counting. When you are feeling very distressed, distracting yourself by walking for a short time can help you to calm down and then think through the situation rationally.

- 1) Walk slowly and easily, with your arms relaxed by your side.
- 2) Count each step as you slowly walk along.
- 3) Notice how your feet feel inside your shoes. Notice how your shoes feel on the ground. Do they feel cold or warm? Do they feel tight or relaxed? Are you walking on your toes, your heels, the side of your feet or the whole foot?
- 4) As you walk, try to breathe deeply and slowly and count each step you take.

Applying these techniques

These techniques can be used to help control your emotions when the urge to gamble is strong or when you feel overwhelmed by your feelings. When you apply these techniques effectively, you can challenge your gambling thoughts and respond with positive, healthy behaviors. However, like every other new skill, these techniques will take time to learn. By practicing every day, you will be able to master many of these techniques and be able to control your emotional life more effectively.

Feeling suicidal or feeling like hurting yourself

It is an unfortunate truth that some gamblers feel so down about their lives that they believe that suicide is the only option. They feel hopeless, unable to see any solution to their problems. Sometimes they have lied about their gambling and it is no longer possible to hide the truth. Some have committed crimes that are about to be discovered. For some, a partner has left, finally tired of the gambling ruining their life. Others just can't see a way out of their financial mess.

No matter how bad you might feel, there is always hope. No matter how desperate the situation, there is always an answer if you are patient and you seek some help. Remember, many problem gamblers have hit rock bottom, but have been able to rebuild their lives with professional help. If you are having serious thoughts of suicide, there are many people and organisations that you can contact for help. I have provided a list of these in the Appendix and it is important that you contact some of

these organisations as soon as possible. They employ trained professionals who will be able to help you deal with these feelings and problems.

Summary

- * Strong negative feelings such as stress, anxiety, anger, sadness and loneliness can trigger gambling episodes.**
- * For negative feelings to be dealt with adequately, they need to be acknowledged and accepted as a normal part of life, rather than avoided by carrying out self-destructive behaviors.**
- * Relaxation techniques are an effective way of dealing with negative feelings.**

Daily Homework

- * Practice one of the techniques described in this chapter every day.**
- * Continue to schedule leisure activities in to your diary every day.**
- * Whenever you get the urge to gamble, challenge the associated irrational thinking and find an alternative behavior. Use a relaxation technique to further assist you to control the urge.**

Weekly Homework

- * Use the six-step problem solving technique on an unresolved problem that has triggered gambling episodes.**

- * **Revise the "Why do I want to stop gambling?" worksheet from Chapter 2.**
- * **Revise the appropriate section of Chapter 3 concerning your preferred gambling type.**
- * **Revise tasks 2 and 3 from Chapter 4.**
- * **Remember to be patient and perseverant! Don't get lazy around the weekly homework, just because you have done it once or twice before. You can only learn these skills by constant repetition.**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?

Chapter 8 - Self-esteem Building

Rebuilding your self-esteem

I not only lost my money. I lost me. - Caroline

I felt like such a loser. I hated myself when I gambled. -

Pedro

Gambling has a devastating effect on self-esteem.

*Rebuilding self-esteem is an important part of recovery and
can significantly reduce the risk of relapse.*

Introduction

As you will have noticed by now, stopping gambling requires some hard work. If you are struggling with the workload, this may be because your self-esteem has suffered after long periods of heavy gambling. You may have quite negative beliefs about yourself and you may even think that you are not worth giving up for. For some gamblers, the desire to escape from feelings of low self-esteem can in itself be a trigger for gambling episodes.

In this chapter, we will examine how gambling damages your self-esteem and then learn a number of techniques that can help you to rebuild it.

What is self-esteem?

Put simply, self-esteem is the judgement or evaluation you make about yourself. It is the beliefs that you hold about your value as a human being. These beliefs are very important, as they are at the core of many of our thoughts, feelings and behaviors. If our self-esteem is high, we value ourselves for who we are, rather than what we do, what we own or how we appear. We acknowledge that our personal characteristics and our personality are more important than our achievements. We recognise that we have intrinsic value simply because we live and breathe and feel. By contrast, when our self-esteem is low, we compare ourselves to others according to our achievements. We have no compassion for ourselves and our mistakes define who we are.

How gambling destroys your self-esteem

If self-esteem is the judgement you make about yourself, gambling is probably the perfect behavior to help make that judgement as negative as possible. Martha's story is a good demonstration of this fact.

Every time I gambled, I told myself that I'd given in to the urge and that I was weak and undisciplined. Then I'd lose all my money and call myself an idiot. Then I'd sit around all day doing nothing because I was

broke, so I'd sit there and tell myself what a loser I was. I never called my friends because I felt so useless. I never had any money to go out anyway, so why bother? I hated my job, I hated my partner, I hated my life. I didn't think I could make things any better. Every time I went gambling, I hoped that something good might happen, but I would nearly always lose and make everything worse. It would just prove to me what I always thought, that I was a loser. I'd try to stop gambling and fail at that as well. And so it went on, week after week. I was in hell.

Like many gamblers, Martha's judgements of herself were scathing. She couldn't find anything positive about herself. Every dollar she lost was a sign of how bad she was as a person and what a loser she was. Even when she tried to stop gambling, she would feel so bad about herself that she would gamble to escape those feelings. In therapy, Martha's biggest challenge was to change these very critical self-judgements.

Challenging the negative self-judgements: What you do is not who you are

Many problem gamblers believe that they are bad people because their gambling has damaged themselves and their families. They believe that their gambling proves that they are weak, that they are undisciplined, that they are compulsive, and that they are losers. They believe that gambling is a sign of a deep character flaw. Fundamentally, they believe that what they do is who they are. Fortunately, all these beliefs are wrong.

What you do is not who you are. Let me explain what I mean here. A child who doesn't do their homework is not a bad child, rather the behavior is bad. It is important that the behavior is changed and that the child is supported to do this, but the child is not a bad child because they have made a mistake. In fact, research tells us that children who are labeled as "bad" end up with very low self-esteem and have poor outcomes as adults. Everyone makes mistakes and to become healthy people we need to be given room to learn from our mistakes and to overcome our problems.

Gamblers can find this message difficult to accept because they feel like they make the same mistake over and over again when they gamble. However, it is not easy to give up gambling. As you have learned from this manual, the skills you need to stop are quite specialised. We are not born with them and they take time to learn and to perfect. I don't have to tell you that gambling games suck you in. They make you believe that you can win, even though you are losing. They make you believe that gambling is a good way to escape from your problems while it creates more problems and destroys your life. Sure, you fell for it, but so did thousands of others. The gambling industry spends \$500 million advertising. You are not a bad person, a weak person or any other negative label you can think of because you were sucked in by the hype.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am not saying that you do not have to take responsibility for your actions because gambling hooked you in. You do. You have a responsibility to do something about your gambling problem. You have a responsibility to repair the damage your gambling has inflicted on yourself and on others. However, you are not a bad person simply because you have a problem.

Challenging the negative self-judgements: The danger of comparing your self to others

Comparing your self to others can be very destructive to your self-esteem. When you value yourself by superficial qualities such as money, appearance and possessions, you will always struggle with your self-esteem, because you will always be able to find someone who has more of the quality that you value. There will always be someone who is richer, who is better looking or has more possessions than you.

The most common comparisons made by problem gamblers concern control and money. Problem gamblers often compare themselves to other gamblers asking, "Why can't I control my gambling like everybody else does?" Apart from causing feelings of distress and disappointment, this comparison often causes gamblers to bust out. They go back to the gambling venue determined to prove they can be in control "just like everybody else". Of course, the inevitable happens and they are unable to control their gambling. Their self-esteem plummets even further.

This comparison needs to be confronted. How can you tell whether other people are in control of their gambling? Are other people really telling you the truth about their gambling? How would you know? Do you tell other people that your gambling is out of control? Recent research has revealed that very large proportions of social gamblers lose control of their gambling and that the actual numbers of problem gamblers is extremely high. It really is a myth that everyone else is in control of their gambling. If they were really in control, they wouldn't gamble at all.

The second common comparison made by problem gamblers concerns money. They compare their financial position and their possessions to other people, believing that they should have made more progress. This kind of comparison creates feelings of jealousy and inadequacy and can often result in gambling episodes as they seek a quick fix to the problem. This leads to more financial problems and further negative comparisons.

It is important to challenge these comparisons. The first step is to remind your self that gambling will not make this situation any better. Go over in your mind the reasons why it is impossible to win at gambling. You may like to revise Chapter 3 at this point. Secondly, remember to be patient. Remind yourself that if you don't gamble, your financial position will recover and that you will eventually get the things that you want. Finally, challenge the idea that your self worth is dependent on how much money you have or how many possessions you have. Sure, money and possessions can make things more comfortable, but they do not determine your worth as a human being.

Self-esteem building exercises

Many gamblers have found the following exercises useful for rebuilding their self-esteem. Like the other exercises in this manual, practice will increase your competence and make you are ready to use them when you really need them.

Exercise 1: Positive personal qualities list

Our real worth as people is our personal characteristics and our personalities. However, when we think about our worth, we often focus on our possessions, our achievements and our appearance. This exercise simply asks you to acknowledge the things about your self as a person that you like.

Examples:

I am friendly.

I am kind.

I am a loyal friend.

I try my best not to hurt people.

I am honest.

I try to be a good parent.

Exercise 2: Challenge the negative judgements

Think back over the past few weeks and write down below the judgements that you have made about yourself because of your gambling, then use the ideas presented in the above sections to challenge these judgements.

Eg.

Judgement: I am a loser for gambling.

Challenge: Gambling was the wrong way to deal with how I was feeling at the time, but that doesn't make me a loser. I am working on these problems and that's a real positive behavior.

Judgement:

Challenge:

Judgement:

Challenge:

Judgement:

Challenge:

Judgement:

Challenge:

Exercise 3: Turn around the negative comparisons

A good way to challenge negative judgements is to keep a record of all of the negative comparisons you make between yourself and other people during a day. At the end of the day, write down a positive personal quality or characteristic that counteracts the comparison.

Example

Negative comparison: Paul has more money than me. I'm such a loser. If I didn't gamble I'd be well off.

Positive comparison: Paul may have more money than me, but I am a kind person and this matters more than money. I'm working on my gambling and these comparisons are not helping me.

Negative comparison:

Positive comparison:

Negative comparison:

Positive comparison:

Negative comparison:

Positive comparison:

Negative comparison:

Positive comparison:

Negative comparison:

Positive comparison:

Exercise 4: Stop the abuse

There's an old wives tale that a good rollicking is good for you. It doesn't work. If you abuse someone, they will resent you. If you call someone names, they will reject you. In the same way, calling yourself names simply promotes self-loathing and self-resentment. Worse still, the language we use towards ourselves is often much worse than we would ever consider directing towards someone else. One thing is for sure. It won't stop you from gambling.

Make a commitment now that you will not use abusive language towards yourself, whatever the situation. When you notice yourself using abusive language, stop and think about how you are feeling. Are you feeling angry or disappointed? Are you

feeling stressed? Instead of dealing with the feeling in an abusive way, use the techniques we discussed in Chapter 7 to help control the feeling. Abuse won't make the feeling go away.

Exercise 5: Forgive yourself for the past

Gamblers often struggle to re-build their self-esteem because they feel guilty about the past. Even if they have a reasonable amount of time free from gambling, they still find it hard to forget all of the big losses or all of the lies that they told. They are haunted by the people they hurt and the relationships they damaged. These memories are distressing and sometimes cause a return to gambling.

The first step in dealing with these distressing memories is to accept that everyone makes mistakes. When the guilt-producing memory comes up, breathe deeply and slowly and forgive yourself. Remind your self that human beings are not perfect and it is unreasonable to think that you will go through life without making mistakes.

The second step is to make amends where you can. Perhaps you can talk to the people that you have hurt. Perhaps there is a way you can repair some of the damage that your mistakes have caused. If this is not possible, then make changes that will help you avoid making the same mistakes again. When the distressing memory comes up, breathe deeply and slowly, tell yourself that you forgive yourself and remind yourself that you have taken these actions and there is nothing more that you can do.

What now?

Some of the concepts in this chapter are difficult. The exercises ask you to be compassionate towards yourself and to accept that you have intrinsic worth because of your personal qualities and characteristics, rather than because of your achievements, your possessions, your appearance or your past. This is probably different to the way you have been judging yourself up until now and is very different to the way much of society judges itself. It will be easy for you to slip in to the old way of thinking, especially with the ever-present influence of the media. Therefore, to keep your self-esteem strong, revise the principles presented in this chapter and practice the exercises. No-one will build your self-esteem for you. Only you can do it.

Summary

- * Self-esteem is the judgement you make about yourself. Self-esteem is the beliefs that you hold about your value as a human being.**
- * Gambling destroys self-esteem by destroying your finances and your belief in yourself.**
- * Low self-esteem is a result of valuing yourself by what you do, your achievements, your possessions, your appearance and your past.**
- * Strong self-esteem is a result of valuing your intrinsic worth. Strong self-esteem is based in compassion for yourself and recognises that you are worthwhile simply because you are human. It values your personal characteristics and who you are, not what you do.**

Daily Homework

- * Complete the self-esteem exercises and revise them daily.**
- * Continue to practice the feeling management techniques described in Chapter 7.**
- * Whenever you get the urge to gamble, challenge the associated irrational thinking and find an alternative behaviour. Use a relaxation technique to further assist you to control the urge.**

Weekly Homework

- * Use the six-step problem solving technique on unresolved problems that trigger gambling episodes.**
- * Schedule leisure activities in to your diary.**
- * Revise the "Why do I want to stop gambling?" worksheet from Chapter 2.**
- * Revise the appropriate section of Chapter 3 concerning your preferred gambling type.**
- * Revise tasks 2 and 3 from Chapter 4.**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?



Chapter 9 - Relapse Prevention

High-risk situations and avoiding lapses

I don't count the days any more. Who cares how long I go without gambling if I end up busting out? -Joan

I try to focus on one day at a time. I look for the danger times each day and deal with them. – Don

A gambling episode can be triggered after a period of abstinence by gamblers unwittingly placing themselves in high-risk situations. By identifying and avoiding these situations, problem gamblers can ensure that they do not return to gambling.

Introduction

A problem gambler can go for weeks, months and even years without gambling. Finances improve, work is easier, relationships get better. Life slowly begins to return to normal. Yet something will trigger a return to gambling and, with each bust, the gambling is heavier and the consequences more severe. Friends and family will accuse the problem gambler of not really wanting to stop. The gambler

can feel weak and undisciplined. The cause of the bust is difficult to identify and the gambler can lose the motivation to ever give up.

I would give up for a month or so and then I would tell myself that I was in control and that I didn't have to think about gambling anymore. Before I knew it, I'd be gambling again. After the last bust, I gave up trying to stop. I felt so pathetic. – Dougal

Unfortunately, Dougal's story is common one. As soon as he let his guard down, the gambling returned. Stories like these tell us that if gamblers are going to give up for good, they must always be aware of the high-risk situations that might trigger gambling. This chapter will teach you to how identify and avoid these high-risk situations.

High-risk situations

High-risk situations are places, feelings, thoughts and events that lead to gambling. They are situations that shift your thinking away from abstinence and towards gambling. Dougal provides a good example of this.

I would go to the club without having any intention of gambling. Once I was there, I could see and hear the poker machines. I'd start to watch the punters play and I'd think about putting a few dollars in. I'd play for a while and a few dollars would become twenty dollars which would become a hundred. I'd begin to chase my losses and end up losing everything. Then I'd go home, borrow some money, and go back and

gamble again and lose. The next day I'd go back again, determined to win my money back. I'd lose again and all of a sudden my gambling's a problem again. I'd look back and think, "How the hell did that happen? I didn't even want to gamble in the first place." It all started with walking in to the club.

For Dougal and many other gamblers, going to a club is dangerous. Once in a club, there is nothing to stop you from gambling. Gambling is actively encouraged. Hence, a high-risk situation can be defined as a situation where you find it very difficult to fight off the urge to gamble. In the following sections, we will examine the most common high-risk situations and learn how to avoid them.

Gambling venues

Interestingly, a recent study reported that 50% of problem gamblers who had stopped gambling were able to do so by simply staying away from gambling venues. It is very difficult to gamble if you don't go in to a gambling venue. Unfortunately, they are everywhere and avoiding them can be difficult. However, the following recommendations can help:

- 1) Make a commitment to yourself now that you will not go inside any gambling venues.
- 2) If you have to go near or inside gambling venues for any reason, make sure that you are not carrying any money or credit cards.
- 3) Arrange to meet with friends in places where you cannot gamble, such as restaurants or coffee shops.

Money

It's obvious that if you don't have money, then you can't gamble. This means that money is a major high-risk situation. Many gamblers report that they never think about gambling while they are broke or if someone else is looking after their money. However, as soon as they get money, they immediately start thinking about gambling. Although they might try to challenge the thoughts, the urge to gamble is overwhelming and they give in.

If this scenario is familiar to you, then try the following steps:

- 1) Swallow your pride and accept that having money is a high-risk situation. Challenge any thoughts that tell you that you should be able to walk around with money, just like everyone else. Everyone has challenges to face. Yours is to do everything you can to make sure that you do not gamble.
- 2) Only carry the money that you need. Do not carry credit cards or key cards. So often gamblers carry around extra cash or their keycards or credit cards in case of an emergency. It's hard to understand why? What emergency? If there is an emergency, call 000 or call a friend or a family member. All you need is money for a phone call and for your daily expenses.
- 3) When you receive money, dispose of it immediately. Pay your bills and put the remaining money in a savings account that is difficult to access. Do not leave money lying around in easily accessible bank accounts.

- 4) On the days that you will receive money, spend more time than usual working on the homework tasks that have been set in this manual. Remind yourself about why you want to stop gambling. Remind yourself about how it is impossible to win at gambling and the review the thought challenging sections.
- 5) Plan other activities on the days that you receive money. Revising Chapter 5 will help you with this task.
- 6) If the urge to gamble is overwhelming, ask someone else to look after your money. If you are committed, it is very easy to stop gambling by using this option. However, at some point in the future, you will want to take control of your money again. When this occurs, I recommend that you gradually take more and more responsibility for your money, rather than taking full control immediately. Taking full control often leads to gamblers busting out almost immediately, because they haven't really learned how to fight off the urge to gamble. In the first instance, get used to carrying around small amounts of money without gambling. As you learn to fight off the urge to gamble, you can gradually increase the amount of money you have available to you until you have full control of your money.

Alcohol

Gambling and alcohol don't mix. Many gamblers report that some of their worst gambling binges have occurred while they have been drinking. We know that up to one-third of problem gamblers have a drinking problem and that these gamblers find

it significantly more difficult to give up gambling. This means that if you are going to get on top of your gambling problem, you may also need to look at your drinking habits.

A safe level of alcohol consumption for men is three to four standard drinks a day, with at least two alcohol-free days a week. For women, a safe level is two to three standard drinks a day, with at least two alcohol free days a week (Note that a standard drink is a middle of full strength beer, or a glass of wine, or a nip of spirits). If you are drinking consistently more than this, then I would recommend that you seek professional assistance. Your local community health centre should be able to help you find appropriate alcohol counselling.

However, recent studies have demonstrated that even safe levels of drinking can lead to uncontrolled gambling behaviors. This is quite understandable when you look at the way alcohol acts on the brain. When you drink, the mechanisms in the brain that inhibit behavior no longer work normally. You feel uninhibited. You think that you can do things that you would never try if you were sober. You start thinking that you can win at gambling and that if you bet small, you will stay in control. Of course, this rarely happens. The gambling binge is often completely out of control.

These facts do not mean that you have to give up drinking if you want to stop gambling. However, drinking alcohol is a high-risk situation and avoiding a bust out may require the following:

- 1) Do not drink alcohol in places where you can gamble. This isn't as bad as it sounds. You can still drink at home, at friends' houses and in restaurants.

However, if you go from these places to gambling venues to gamble, then it is likely that you will need to seek professional assistance for your drinking.

- 2) If you must drink in places where you can gamble, only take enough money for drinking.
- 3) Whenever you drink, make sure that you do not have access to significant amounts of money.
- 4) Avoid drinking alone.

Feeling bad

Another high-risk situation is the experience of strong negative feelings. Many gamblers relapse after a period of abstinence because they are struggling with feelings of stress, anxiety or sadness. When they bust, their negative feelings grow stronger and more difficult to cope with, resulting in further gambling.

Occasional bouts of feeling bad are a normal and unavoidable part of life. However, for gamblers, these bouts are real danger times. When you experience these feelings, it is important that you respond to them appropriately.

- 1) Use the skills we discussed in Chapter 7.
- 2) If you are struggling to cope with the feelings, make sure that you do not put your self at risk of gambling. Don't carry around cash and don't go to places where you might gamble. Try not to use alcohol to deal with the feelings.
- 3) If you find that the feelings are overwhelming and that you are not coping, seek professional help.

Feeling good

After a period of abstinence, gamblers often start to feel good. The financial situation is improving. Things are better at work and at home. Life is back on track. Ironically, feeling good is also a high-risk situation for many gamblers. When things start to go well, it can breed over-confidence. Gamblers seem to forget the damage gambling has done to their life. They think that they are in control now and a small bet won't hurt. Sometimes, they get away with gambling a couple of times without doing too much damage. Alternatively, they might get lucky and have a small win. Both these outcomes encourage further gambling and help breed the false confidence. Eventually a session will come where they lose more than they can afford and they start to chase. Before they know it, they are gambling heavily and their lives head towards financial and emotional ruin again.

Avoiding relapse requires that you remind yourself that there is no safe level of gambling for problem gamblers. Unfortunately, there is not some point when you will be "cured". If you have been a heavy gambler in the past, even playing small will bring back all of the old thoughts and feelings. Accepting that gambling cannot be part of your future may be a little difficult at first. However, given everything that we have discussed about gambling up until now, are you really going to miss it? If you are unsure about this, go back to Chapters 2 and 3 and look at your motivation again.

Testing yourself

Some gamblers report that they bust out because they were trying to test themselves. They would go to a gambling venue and prove to themselves that they were cured from gambling by either not gambling or by gambling small amounts. Of course, they would fail the test. As we discussed in the "Feeling good" section, as soon as you begin gambling, the old thoughts and feelings associated with heavy gambling quickly return. It is very difficult to fight off these thoughts and feelings when you are in the gambling environment and heavy gambling typically ensues.

The most obvious way to avoid this situation is to not test your self. The only test you face is to not gamble. That is all you have to prove to yourself or anyone else.

Hoping for a win

Even after years of losing, some gamblers are still hoping for a win. They still hope that they can go to a gambling venue and something good will happen to them. Even when these gamblers have been abstinent for a many months, they often bust out because they want to win money. The deeply engrained thoughts about winning don't seem to go away just because they haven't gambled for a while.

If part of the reason that you gambled was to win money, then these old gambling thoughts can come back and put you at risk of relapsing. The only way to overcome them is to continually review the material in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Even if you haven't gambled for six months, I would still recommend that you go through the homework tasks set in this manual at least once a week. They will only take you an hour or so and your life is worth this small sacrifice.

Developing a balanced lifestyle to avoid lapsing

When gambling is very heavy, it is easy for the gambler to get in to bad habits around eating, exercising and relaxing. For some, gambling is given priority. For others, these activities are no longer affordable because of gambling. Others simply feel too down to get it together in these areas. Once gambling ceases, it is important to prioritise these areas. Eating well and exercising regularly keep your mind and body healthy and this will make it much easier for you to fight off any temptation to gamble. If you do not know how to go about this, there are many excellent books on the topic or your local GP can help.

What should I do if I bust?

I hope that all of the techniques in this manual help you to stop gambling and that you never bust out. However, gambling is a very insidious problem and unfortunately, some gamblers experience the occasional lapse. If this happens to you, the following steps will help you to get back in control.

Step 1- Don't panic. If it were easy to give up gambling, I wouldn't be writing this book. The new skills will take some time to learn and perfect.

Step 2 – A lapse is not a relapse. Recognise that just because you have busted, you do not necessarily have to go back to the bad old days of heavy gambling.

Step 3 – Learn. Instead of beating yourself up for gambling, try to learn from the experience. Try to examine objectively the reasons for the bust. Were you in a high-risk situation? Had your motivation dropped off? What were you thinking before you gambled? How were you feeling? What can you do the next time that you are in that situation to make sure that you do not gamble again?

Step 4 – Go back to basics. Go back and review the fundamental. It is important to stick with the program. The fundamentals of stopping gambling are to:

- * motivate yourself (Chapter 2)
- * accept that you cannot win (Chapter 3)
- * challenge the thinking that allows you to gamble (Chapter 4)
- * find alternative activities (Chapter 5)
- * deal with feelings and problems that trigger gambling (Chapters 6 & 7)
- * re-build your self-esteem (Chapter 8)
- * avoid high-risk situations (Chapter 9)

Exercise

Try to identify your own high-risk situations and write down how you will avoid or deal with them. Imagine your self in the high risk situation fighting off the urge. By practicing your response in advance, you will be ready to cope when these situations arise.

Summary

- * Gambling episodes after a period of abstinence can be triggered by high-risk situations.**
- * By identifying and avoiding these situations, problem gamblers can ensure that they do not return to gambling.**

Daily Homework

- * Think about your own high-risk situations and respond to the suggestions made in this chapter.**
- * Continue to practice the feeling management techniques described in Chapter 7.**
- * Whenever you get the urge to gamble, challenge the associated irrational thinking and find an alternative behavior. Use a relaxation technique to further assist you to control the urge.**

Weekly Homework

- * Complete the self-esteem exercises and revise them daily.**
- * Use the six-step problem solving technique on unresolved problems that trigger gambling episodes.**
- * Schedule leisure activities in to your diary for each day of the week.**
- * Revise the "Why do I want to stop gambling?" worksheet from Chapter 2.**
- * Revise the appropriate section of Chapter 3 concerning your preferred gambling type.**
- * Revise tasks 2 and 3 from Chapter 4.**

The Final Task

Go back over the chapter you have just read. Write down what you got out of it. What was important? What did you learn?

Chapter 10 - Review

Consolidating what you have learnt

In the previous chapters, we covered a lot of new material to help you to stop gambling. Many of the skills will be new to you and you will need to practice diligently to develop your expertise. This chapter reviews these new skills and helps you to consolidate what you have learnt.

The fundamentals of stopping gambling

This manual has presented eight fundamental skills that can help you to stop gambling. If you are able to master each of these skills, you will have made considerable progress towards overcoming your gambling problem. Let's look at each skill again.

Skill 1 – Motivating yourself to stop gambling

You will only stop gambling if you really want to stop. You can motivate yourself to stop by:

- 1) Believing that you can do it.
- 2) Calculating how much money you have lost gambling in the last year.

- 3) Calculating how much time you have lost gambling in the last year.
- 4) Looking at your life five years ago and comparing it to now.
- 5) Completing a decisional balance sheet listing the advantages and disadvantages of gambling.
- 6) Making a commitment to stopping gambling.

Looking back now, which of the techniques were the most effective? Why did they work for you? Write down your answers here.

Skill 2 – Accepting that it is impossible to win at gambling

People gamble because they hope that they might win money. Acknowledging that it is impossible to win is a critical step in giving up. The mathematics of gambling mean that winning is impossible in the long run.

Reviewing the material from Chapter 3, write down why it is impossible to win. Present as convincing a case as you can, as if you are the therapist presenting the material to a gambler.

Skill 3 – Challenging the thoughts that produce gambling

The way you think has a significant influence on the way you behave. Your thinking can become habitual and automatic. As soon as you have money or you feel a negative emotion, you think about gambling. Giving up gambling requires learning how to challenge these gambling thoughts as soon as they arise. The key irrational thoughts about gambling are:

- 1) Believing that you can win.
- 2) Believing that the more you lose, the closer you are to a win.
- 3) Believing that you can predict the outcomes of gambling games.
- 4) Believing that you can control your gambling and that you will only bet with small amounts of money.
- 5) Believing that gambling is an effective way to escape.
- 6) Believing that gambling is an exciting past-time.

Thinking about these thoughts, write down why each belief is irrational. Again, go in to some detail. It is important that you get good at this.

Skill 4 – Finding alternative behaviors

Breaking a habit requires replacing the damaging behavior with a number of helpful and constructive behaviors. By finding a range of new leisure and social activities, you not only have an alternative response to the urge to gamble, but you become physically and mentally stronger. The key elements to finding alternative behaviors are to:

- 1) Recognise the benefits of finding new social and leisure activities.

- 2) Develop a menu of activities, so that you have a wide range of options depending on the circumstances.
- 3) Schedule activities in to your day by using a diary.
- 4) Create a balanced lifestyle.

Write down a list of the new activities that you have attempted since you started to work on your gambling. How has your life improved as a result of these activities?

Skill 5 – Problem solving

Gambling is often a response to problems. Some see gambling as a way of solving problems. Others see it as a way of avoiding them. By solving problems effectively, you will have a powerful technique for dealing with some of the triggers for gambling. The six steps of problem solving are:

- 1) Timing
- 2) Define the problem
- 3) Brainstorm
- 4) Evaluate solutions
- 5) Implement a solution
- 6) Follow-up

Think about a problem that you have solved using this technique. How has the resolution of the problem assisted you to stop gambling?

Skill 6 – Dealing with negative feelings

Many gamblers use gambling as a way of escaping from unpleasant feelings such as stress, sadness and loneliness. Gambling distracts the gambler from these feelings for a short while. However, it is also often the cause of these feelings. By coping well with negative feelings, the urge to gamble can be more easily controlled and will become less frequent. Negative feelings can be dealt with in the following ways:

- 1) Recognise that negative feelings are a normal part of life.
- 2) Identify what it is that you are actually feeling.
- 3) Identify what triggered the feeling.
- 4) Feel the feeling and trust that it will eventually pass.
- 5) Do something positive about the cause of the feeling.
- 6) Relax.

Think about the type of feelings that trigger your gambling sessions. Write down how you are coping with these feelings now.

Skill 7 – Self-esteem building

Self-esteem is the beliefs that you hold about your worth as a person. Many people judge their worth by their achievements, by their possessions, by their relationships and by their actions. Gambling has a devastating impact on all of these areas, leaving the gambler's self-esteem in tatters. You can rebuild your self-esteem by:

- 1) Recognising that you are intrinsically valuable because you live and breathe, rather than your achievements, possessions, appearance or past actions.
- 2) Acknowledging that what you do and what you have done is not who you are.
- 3) Challenging the negative judgements you pass on yourself.
- 4) Stopping the self-abusive statements.
- 5) Listing your positive personal characteristics.

Compare your self-esteem now to how it was before you started to work on your gambling problems. Why has your self-esteem changed? Which techniques worked best for you?

Skill 8 – Avoiding relapse

Stopping gambling is one thing, but staying off gambling for good is quite another. Gamblers bust out after periods of abstinence because they are unable to cope with high-risk situations. The most dangerous high-risk situations are:

- 1) Going to gambling venues.
- 2) Having access to large amounts of money.
- 3) Drinking alcohol, especially in gambling venues.
- 4) Feeling bad.
- 5) Feeling good or over-confident.
- 6) Testing one's self.
- 7) Hoping for a win.

If you bust out, follow these four steps:

- 1) Don't panic!
- 2) Remember that a lapse is not a relapse.
- 3) Learn from the bust. What went wrong? How can you make sure the bust is less likely to occur again?
- 4) Go back to basics. Revise the fundamental skills that you have learned in this manual.

What to do if you are still gambling

A few gamblers find that even though they have worked through all of the skills in this manual, their gambling is still out of control. If you feel you are in this situation, it is time to seek professional help. It may be that your problem is very severe and requires a more intensive program. It may be that the cause of your gambling is quite specific to your situation and this manual does not cover the specific skills that you need. Whatever the cause, do not despair! Don't give up just because this approach didn't work. If you keep looking for a solution, you will find the right one for you.

A professional, such as a clinical psychologist, can thoroughly assess your problem and develop a treatment program specific to your situation. Your confidentiality is guaranteed and you will receive caring, competent and effective help for your problem. At the back of this manual, I have listed the details of a number of referral agencies that can assist you.

Finishing up

If you have stopped gambling, congratulations! I hope that the skills you have learned will hold you in good stead in the future. However, it is important that you continue to revise and practice these skills. Even if you have not gambled for a long time, I would recommend daily reflection on the skills that worked well for you. Remember that gambling is a deeply learned habit that can return if the right set of high-risk situations re cur. So be diligent!

One of the best ways to avoid relapse is to really enjoy the benefits that come from not gambling. So celebrate your life now that you are gamble free! You've worked hard and you deserve it!

Chapter 11 - For partners and families

How partners and family members can help

Introduction

Gambling has devastating consequences for problem gamblers. Their gambling results in severe financial, emotional, occupational, legal and social problems. However, these consequences can be just as devastating for the partners and families of problem gamblers. Jill's story gives us some insight:

I was a little bit worried about Warren's gambling when I first met him. My Dad had been a gambler. He always provided for us, but he and Mum used to argue about money all the time. Warren said that his gambling was under control because he only went once or twice a week. He said he was only losing what he could afford. I believed him after a while. He always seemed to have money and so I forgot about it.

We got married and everything was fine until the birth of Dougal. He started to come home late from work, two or three times a week. He claimed that he was working back. I didn't think much of it at the time, but he became moody. He said that he was just tired, but he seemed irritated and distracted. I was busy with Dougal. I probably should have made more of it, but I had my hands full and Warren wasn't much

help. Anyway, I looked after the baby, he handled the money side of things.

When Dougal was about two years old, odd things began to happen around Warren and his money. He would come home one week and say his pay hadn't gone in this week or there had been a stuff up and he'd been under-paid. He would claim that he had lost his wallet on the way home from the bank. Overdue bills would arrive that he said he had paid. He would pretend that he had forgotten to pay it or that there had been some sort of mistake. A couple of times I came home in the middle of the day and found him outside the house going through the mail when he should have been at work. He would say he was just passing through. I now realise he was trying to get the bills before I saw them. The moodiness was getting worse, especially after these "nights working back". I never put two and two together. I just didn't think he was gambling. Why would I? I trusted him. He said that he loved me. Why wouldn't I believe him?

This strange behavior around money went on for about a year or so until one day I left work early because Dougal was unwell and had to be picked up from day care. I got the mail as it arrived and noticed that one of the envelopes had "Last notice" on the outside. I opened it and discovered that the car that I thought we owned outright was about to be re-possessed and that we still owed \$25,000. I thought it must have been a mistake. There was a Telstra bill and I opened it. We owed \$2300 and hadn't paid anything for three months. They were about to cut off our phone. I was in shock and my hands started to shake. I was

crying. Something was horribly wrong. I called Warren at work. He came home straight away and admitted everything. He'd been gambling heavily since I'd known him. He said he was relieved that finally everything was out in the open and he didn't have to live the lie he'd been living anymore.

I wasn't feeling relieved. I just felt stupid, angry, betrayed. I didn't know what to do. The bills I saw were only the tip of the iceberg. He owed \$30,000 on credit cards and another \$50,000 in personal loans. We were ruined. After some soul searching, I gave him another chance. I had to for Dougal's sake. I took on a second job. We didn't have a second child as we had planned. We couldn't afford to. We had to move to a suburb where the rent was cheaper. Dougal struggled at school, probably because there was so much stress at home. Warren eventually sought help and he stopped gambling, but it took us six years of hard work to get out of debt. It's taken even longer for me to trust him again.

As you can see, Warren's gambling had a massive impact on the people closest to him. In one day, Jill's life was turned up side down. She went from believing that her life was all going to plan to being over \$100,000 in debt with nothing to show for it and an uncertain future with a man that she wasn't sure she really knew.

This chapter is designed to help the partners and family members of problem gamblers. Initially, it explains the causes of problem gambling and how to identify the warning signs that a family member's gambling is out of control. It then explains

how family members can help the problem gambler and how family members can look after themselves.

Why does your family member gamble?

The hardest part is to understand why. Why is your partner gambling? Why has he been lying about it for so long? Why didn't she tell you she was in trouble? Why did he keep gambling when he was in so much trouble? Why would she betray you like this? When a gambler has destroyed their life and indirectly wrecked havoc on your own life, it is hard not to take it as a personal attack. It's natural to think that the gambler's lies and deceptions indicate that the gambler has no respect for you. It's hard to believe that the gambler still really cares for the relationship after the damage they have done to themselves and to you.

If you can understand what causes problem gambling you will see that the gambling is not a personal attack on you. Gamblers do not intend to hurt anyone by their gambling. They are not deliberately trying to ruin you or their relationship. Usually, the intention of the gambler is to produce something positive. However, it all goes horribly wrong.

Gambling is prolific in Australia. It is almost impossible not be exposed to gambling in some form or another. For the gambler, it usually begins quite harmlessly. A few dollars through the pokies after work. A couple of bets on the ponies with a few mates. A bucks night out at the casino. It seems fun and exciting at the time. The chance of winning gives the gambler a buzz. The losses are small and seem insignificant when put in to the context of a night's entertainment.

The gambling slowly becomes more frequent. When gamblers play, they feel hopeful. The hope that they can win some money. They hope that they can turn a small amount of money in to a large amount. They enjoy that feeling of hope, of feeling positive, of feeling excited and expectant. They start to look forward to gambling. They have the occasional win which reinforces their beliefs that it might be possible to win at gambling. They also start to learn that gambling is a good way to get away from everything and that it is a good distraction. They learn that feeling hopeful while gambling is better than feeling stressed about their work or any other minor problems they might be having. They learn that gambling is an easy, harmless escape and that a big win might even solve some of their problems.

These positive thoughts and feelings about gambling results in more frequent gambling over longer periods of time with larger amounts of money. As the gambling becomes heavier, the size of the losses slowly increases. They begin to struggle to meet their financial commitments and they borrow money from credit cards believing that a big win is just around the corner. They believe that the more they lose, the closer they are to a win. This isn't as stupid as it seems as there is nothing in gambling venues to make you think that this is not the case. In fact, the gambling industry spends \$500 million a year on advertising to encourage gambling. The industry knows that the mathematical realities of gambling mean that the more you gamble, the more you must lose.

As gamblers get further in to financial trouble, they start to panic. They feel stressed, depressed, angry, worried and scared. They are embarrassed that they have got in to trouble. They are so stressed that they find it difficult to make logical decisions. They are looking for a solution to their problems and they want to escape

from their feelings of stress and anxiety. Gambling will solve both problems, they hope. Of course, it doesn't, as they continue to lose. The panic has set in now. The debts are unmanageable. They feel isolated. They feel like they can't tell anyone about how stupid they have been. They start to believe that the only way out is a big win to pay all of their debts. Then they will give up and no-one will be the wiser. The occasional win encourages further gambling, but the big win never comes. Hopelessness sets in. They can't tell anyone. They can't get out of the mess. Gambling seems like the only option and the pattern goes on and on, as summarised by the following diagram.

The Heavy Gambling Trap

HEAVY GAMBLING CAUSES:



CONSEQUENCES:

*Financial problems
Relationship problems
Employment difficulties
Social problems
Isolation*



FEELINGS:

*Worry
Anxiety
Depression
Low self-esteem
Fear
Panic*



THOUGHTS:

*Gambling is a good way to escape
A big win will get me out of trouble
I'll just put \$20 in and see what happens
I'll get away from everything for a while
A win will give me some extra cash to pay all my bills*



GAMBLE:

As play, forget about problems for a while. Feel distracted and hopeful

WHEN YOU LOSE:

*Makes consequences worse as financial problems increase.
Makes feelings worse as related problems intensify*

WHEN YOU WIN:

*Reinforces positive thoughts about gambling.
Makes gambling seem more appealing.*



As you can imagine, breaking this pattern is difficult. If a problem gambler has been playing the pokies for ten years, it's likely that they have pushed the button on the machines over 1,000,000 times! This means that gambling has become a very deeply entrenched behavior. It has become an automatic response to having money. It's the first thing that comes in to their minds when they are stressed. A

good way to understand this is to think about the skills you need to drive a car. When you first start driving, you have to think carefully about every thing that you do. However, after doing the same thing over and over again, the behaviors become automatic. When you see a red light, your foot goes on the break automatically. You don't even have to think about it. In the same way, gamblers get money and think about gambling immediately. It's an automatic response. Thus, asking a gambler to stop gambling is like asking a driver to stop at green lights and to drive through red lights. It is very difficult to undo all those years of learning. Thus, gamblers need special skills to break the habit and these skills take time and hard work to learn. Willpower alone will not be enough. Even when gamblers are 100% committed to stopping, the entrenched nature of the habit makes it very difficult to change and gamblers will experience many successes and failures on the road to recovery.

It's not your fault!

The past 20 years has seen massive interest in the concept of codependency, especially among drug and alcohol workers. In fact, Codependency Anonymous is the fastest growing self-help program in the United States. Put simply, the supporters of codependency argue that a codependent partner or family member behaves in a way that enables or encourages the addict to continue their addictive behavior. For example, the partner may argue with the addict, knowing that the addict will get angry and eventually use drugs or alcohol again. The codependent partner does this because he or she is invested in the addict continuing to be addicted. By being married to an addict, the codependent's life has meaning and purpose. It gives them an identity as the partner of an addict. If the addict gave

up, the partner's life would lose all meaning. In a sense, they are as dependent on the addiction as the addict.

The widespread publicity given to this concept by TV chat shows, self-help books and 12 step groups has left many partners and families of addicts feeling guilty. They feel somehow responsible for the addiction and wonder whether their behavior has led unwittingly to their partners' problems. In recent years, the codependency concept has spread in to the gambling field. Many partners and family members are worried that their own behavior is actually causing and maintaining the gambling of the gambler.

The codependency concept is certainly interesting and worthy of further exploration. Surprisingly, however, there is very little sound empirical research to support its existence. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case. Most partners and family members either do not know the full extent of the addict's addiction or they are doing their best to help the addict. They may not know the best way to help, but their help is well intentioned.

The message here is that your partner or family member's gambling is not your fault. There is no evidence that partners or family members deliberately encourage or enable gambling for their own purposes. Furthermore, even if you were the worst partner in the world and you did everything you could to encourage gambling, the gambler still made the choice to gamble. In this sense, gamblers must take responsibility for their gambling. There are always other options to choose besides gambling, no matter what the situation, and gamblers has no right to blame anyone else for their gambling except themselves.

Danger signs that gambling is out of control

Gamblers often hide the extent of their gambling from their partners or families. Quite often, this is because they are embarrassed about their gambling and think that others will not understand their problems. For many gamblers, an understanding partner or family member can be the key to them admitting that they have a problem and seeking help. There are a number of signs that might indicate that your partner's gambling is out of control.

1) Problems with expected wages: Gamblers will often gamble as soon as they get paid. They sometimes tell themselves that they will only put \$50 in. Others think that a big bank will make a win more likely. Others haven't got enough money to pay their debts and think that a win is the only way they can get out of trouble. They inevitably lose most or all of their wages and are too ashamed to admit to what has happened. So they come up with excuses:

I lost my wallet.

The pay office stuffed up and I didn't get paid.

I had to lend money to a friend.

The car broke down. I spent \$200 to repair it. I didn't get a receipt because paying cash was cheaper.

I owed someone money years ago and he suddenly found me.

The boss had a bad week at the track. He'll pay us next week.

I forgot to put my wages sheet in.

2) Unexplained absences: Gamblers often lose track of time when they gamble or simply gamble for longer than intended chasing their losses or not wanting to leave when they are ahead. This means that they often miss appointments, come home later than expected or take an unreasonable length of time to do simple tasks because they have sneaked off for a bet. They find it difficult to call as the noise of the gambling venue will give away where they are or they don't want to stop gambling.

3) Bills going unpaid: Gamblers often prioritise gambling above paying bills or hope that they can win enough money to pay all of their bills in one hit. Either way the bills don't get paid. Late notices, claims that the billing agency made a mistake, bills going missing, and not getting receipts for bill payments are all signs that a partner's gambling might be out of control.

4) Moodiness: After losing money, gamblers often feel irritated, worried, stressed and depressed. They often think that they can't share these feelings with anyone and so appear moody and irritable for no apparent reason. They will often attribute their mood to tiredness or work problems when the actual cause is financial.

5) Lack of financial progress: Obviously we live in expensive times, but gambling hinders any real wealth generation. When an individual has a reasonable income, few possessions, no savings and heavy debts, out of control gambling may be the root cause.

6) Lack of financial openness: With a steady income, it's relatively easy to get large amounts of credit. A problem gambler's financial affairs are often a tangled web of credit cards, personal loans, goods in hock, second mortgages, unpaid bills, and

loans from family and friends. As the gambling worsens, it becomes more and more difficult for the gambler to meet their commitments. Money is shuffled from one account to another. Monthly payments are made and then re-drawn immediately to pay another debt or for gambling. Excuses are made to avoid paying debts. Gamblers learn who they have to pay and who they can put off. All of this financial chaos is hidden from partners and family members. Gamblers can't allow anyone to see the full extent of their finances for fear that it will reveal their gambling problem.

How to encourage your partner to seek help

If you suspect your partner or family member's gambling is out of control, you are in a difficult position. How do you bring the topic up? Some gamblers are often relieved that their gambling is being questioned and are pleased that they have the opportunity to bring everything out in the open. Others feel insulted. They react angrily and withdraw. Remember, there may be a perfectly reasonable explanation for your concerns, so you need to tread carefully.

Rather than confront the gambler, communicate assertively and use it as an opportunity to show that you care. Here's an example:

John, you know that I really care for you and I want what is best for you. I am worried that this is the third week in a row that you have come home without your wages, looking depressed and angry. I know how it feels when things aren't going right. It can be lonely and you can feel that no-one understands. I want you to know that if you want to talk about what's going on, I'm here for you. You've said before that

gambling is not a problem, but if it is causing problems now, the quicker you get help, the quicker everything will be back to normal. I know people who can help you if you need it.

There are a number of key steps to take in this type of communication:

- 1) Chose a time when everyone is reasonably relaxed and calm.
- 2) Speak quietly and calmly. If you feel yourself getting angry or upset, stop and return to the conversation when you are calm.
- 3) Tell the gambler that you care about them. *e.g. John, you know that I really care for you and I want what is best for you.*
- 4) Validate the gambler's experience and feelings. *e.g. I know how it feels when things aren't going right. It can be lonely and you can feel that no-one understands.*
- 5) List specifically your concerns. State the actual behaviors that concern you, rather than labeling the gambler as an addict or blaming them in some way. *e.g. I am worried that this is the third week in a row that you have come home without your wages, looking depressed and angry.*
- 6) Offer to assist the gambler to take responsibility for their problems and to find help. *e.g. I want you to know that if you want to talk about what's going on, I'm here for you. You've said before that gambling is not a problem, but if it is causing problems now, the quicker you get help, the quicker everything will be back to normal.*

7) Offer a solution. *e.g. I know people who can help you if you need it.*

Being assertive in this way is not easy. Practice what you want to say beforehand. Writing it out can help. Run it by a friend. Remember, that the idea is not to attack or blame the gambler. This will usually just lead to denial and withdrawal. Rather it is a chance to express your concern and to offer concrete help.

What you can do to help the gambler

1) Encourage the gambler to seek help, whether it is from a professional or a self-help book like this one. Point out that thousands of people have got in to trouble because of gambling and that seeking help is not a sign of madness or insanity, rather it is the sensible thing to do when you are in trouble. People see doctors when they have medical problems, so it makes perfect sense to see a psychologist when you have a behavioral problem. Point out that many people stop gambling when they seek help and that the sooner the problem is addressed the easier it is to give up.

2) Offer to assist the gambler with therapy. Although some gamblers want to keep the contents of their therapy sessions confidential, others are looking for an opportunity to talk about what happened. Talking about the issues, skills and exercises that come out of therapy sessions can be useful for the gambler.

3) Ensure that the gambler takes responsibility for their gambling. If they are in financial trouble, only lend them money if it is absolutely necessary. Make the loan

conditional on the gambler making a serious effort to stop gambling, such as using a self-help book or seeking counselling. The loan should also be conditional on the gambler providing invoices and receipts for the expenditure of money.

4) Do not encourage gambling. For example, do not lend the gambler money for gambling and refuse to go to gambling venues with the gambler.

5) Offer to help the gambler to become involved in non-gambling activities, such as those discussed in Chapter 5.

6) Help the gambler to avoid high-risk situations for gambling as discussed in Chapter 9.

7) Focus on the future, rather than the past. If the gambler is taking responsibility for their gambling problem and its consequences, there is no point reminding the gambler of their past mistakes. This will only undermine their self-esteem and slow their recovery.

How to help yourself

1) There have been a number of cases where the partners of gamblers have been held responsible for the debts of their spouse. If you think that your partner or family member's gambling will cause you financial damage, you may wish to seek legal and financial advice from a lawyer, accountant or financial counsellor. This is especially important if the gambler is unwilling to address their gambling problem.

2) Often a partner or family member will be feeling enormous resentment and anger towards the problem gambler. This is understandable given the impact problem gambling has on those close to the gambler. Even if the gambling has ceased, re-building trust can be a difficult task. Seeking help from a relationship counsellor or a family therapist can help you to work through some of these feelings and assist you to re-build your relationship with the gambler.

3) It is likely that even if the gambling has stopped, there will still be considerable stress in the relationship or family during the recovery process. Learning stress management techniques can help you effectively deal with these difficulties.

4) Seeking the support of family and friends can help you cope with the situation. There are a number of support groups for the partners and family members of gamblers that you may also find useful.

Conclusion

Remember that ultimately it is the gambler's responsibility to deal with their problem. If the gambler is not prepared to take this responsibility, your support will make little difference and you may have to think about how much longer you can provide emotional support for the gambler. When the gambler does take responsibility, you can play an important role in the recovery.

Appendix

Resources - Where to get help

Gambling

If you feel you need professional help with your gambling problems, the following agencies can be of assistance. They can either provide you with counselling or refer you to an agency who can help.

ACT & NSW

G-Line

1 800 633 635

Gambling Treatment Program

St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst

02 8382 3448

TASMANIA

Gambling Help Line

1 800 000 973

VICTORIA

Gambler's Help

1 800 156 789

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Gambling Help Line
1 800 060 757

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Amity Community Services
08 8981 8030
1 800 629 683

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

BreakEven
Gambling Counselling Service
08 9325 5133

QUEENSLAND

BreakEven
Gambling Counselling Services
07 3831 2005

Crisis Counselling

If you are in crisis, Lifeline provides a 24 hour Australia-wide telephone counselling service. Their phone number is:

Lifeline

13 11 14

Other problems

If you require help for problems that are not related to gambling, the Australian Psychological Society can refer you to a psychologist who specialises in helping people with your specific problem. Their phone number is:

APS Psychologist Referral Service

1 800 333 497

Please note that these contact numbers may change over time. Directory assistance can help you if you are having difficulties getting through.

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Biographical note

Simon Milton, BA Hons, MPsych, MAPS, is a clinical psychologist who specialises in the assessment and treatment of problem gambling. He currently runs the Gambling Treatment Program at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney and operates a private practice in Charing Cross. He also lectures in the Department of Psychology at the University of Sydney. His website is www.simonmilton.com.

Back cover

Are you struggling to make ends meet because of gambling losses? Are you in debt because of gambling? Do you use gambling to escape from problems? Are you worried about how much time you spend gambling? Is your gambling causing problems at home? Are you concerned about the impact gambling has on your life?

If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, this manual can help. **STOP GAMBLING** is a step-by-step approach to giving up gambling, offering simple and practical skills to help you take control of your life. It also provides advice for the partners and family members of gamblers.