

# Behavioral Health: Developing A Better Understanding

## PROBLEM GAMBLING

Gambling is perpetuated by the false perception that in time a person will be the big winner. In reality, the odds are consistently stacked against the gambler and always favoring the institution. When this pursuit of beating the odds negatively affects interpersonal relationships, financial status, and physical and/or mental health, a person is said to be addicted to gambling, or have a gambling problem. Problem gamblers experience an increasing preoccupation with gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop, "chasing" losses, and loss of control manifested by continuation of the gambling behavior in spite of mounting, serious, negative consequences. In extreme cases, problem gambling can result in financial ruin, legal problems, loss of career and family, or even suicide.

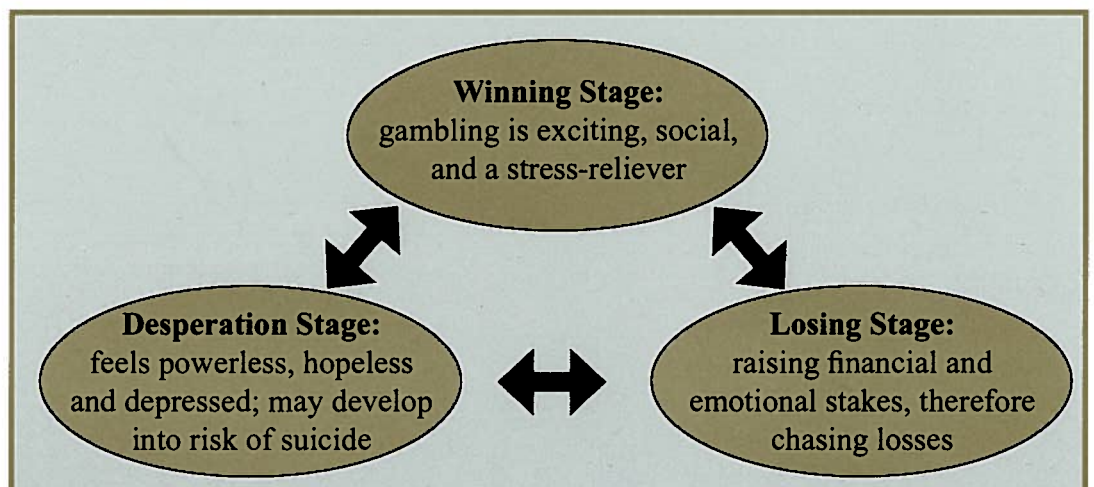
### *Expanded Gaming Comes to Ohio*

Ohio recently approved the operation of four casinos and seven racinos to open across the state. There will be casinos in Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Toledo and seven racinos scattered around the state. The casinos are full service, with table games and slots, while the racinos are based on the addition of Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs) at horse tracks. VLTs are very similar to slot machines, meaning racinos will basically mirror casinos without table games while continuing to offer horse racing.

Internet gambling cafes are also on the rise wherein players participate in games on computers to win points and more time to be used on the internet or as a phone card. The Ohio Attorney General estimates that 280 internet gambling cafes are operating in Ohio, with most of them in the northern half of the state.

A study at Cleveland State University in 2005 explains the link between opportunities to gamble and development of gambling addiction. The study estimates that approximately 3% of the adult population in Ohio was addicted to gambling prior to the surge in opportunities. If the original seven casinos had been passed, research projected an additional 109,000 residents to present with gambling addiction. With four casinos and seven racinos plus growing internet gambling venues, we might expect a similar result, with an estimated cost of \$137 million per year.

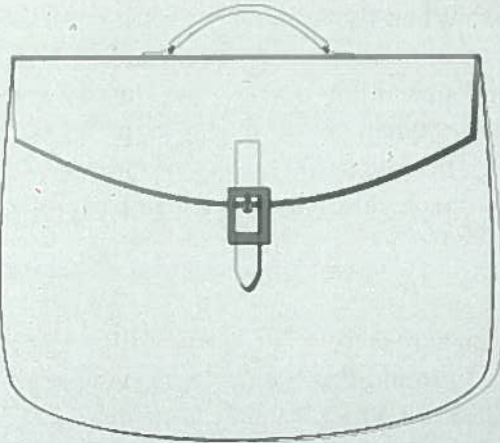
It is important to note that most individuals presenting with problem gambling also suffer from some other disorder or mental illness. The National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC) reveals 73.2% of pathological gamblers also had an alcohol use disorder, 38.1% reported a drug use disorder, and 60.4% had nicotine dependence. The survey also showed a link between pathological gambling and mood disorders (49.6%), anxiety disorders (41.3%) and personality disorders (60.8%). With this in mind, addressing problem gambling is rarely limited to just treating the problem gambling addiction.



## Treatment

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) medications and certain therapies are some of the most promising treatments for pathological gambling. There are medications that help by acting to reduce stimulation of the pleasure pathway and, therefore, the biological addiction. The most common therapies involve motivational enhancement programs in which the patient and therapist work together to create an inner desire for change. Cognitive-behavioral therapy has also been used in treating addiction by recognizing why the person chooses to gamble and then substituting a positive behavior. For example, if a person enjoys the adrenaline rush associated with gambling, a therapist might suggest he or she try rock climbing.

### SAMHSA Problem Gambling Toolkit



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has developed a *Problem Gambling Toolkit* to assist treatment professionals in their work with problem gamblers and their families. The toolkit provides information on the following:

- Treatment improvement protocols for treatment providers
- Guide for treatment professionals about understanding a problem gambler's financial issues and potential financial strategies
- Financial strategies for the loved ones of problem gamblers

**The SAMHSA Problem Gambling Toolkit is available at:**

<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//PGKIT-07/PGKIT-07-02.pdf>

## Prevention

The best way to address problem gambling is to avoid it through prevention strategies. Research has shown that by correcting misconceptions about gambling (the odds, randomization, etc.), communities have been able to decrease the likelihood to gamble in young adults, as well as to discourage concurrent use of alcohol and other drugs. These programs have been incorporated into the education curriculum at the middle and high school level. Similar prevention programs can be implemented for adults as well and often focus around responsible gaming.

### Tips for Safe Play

- Don't think of gambling as a way to make money
- Only gamble with money that you can afford to lose
- Never chase losses
- Set a time limit and don't exceed it
- Set a money limit and don't overspend
- Don't gamble if you are feeling depressed or upset
- Balance gambling with other enjoyable activities
- Don't drink alcohol while gambling

For more information about responsible gambling visit the *Ohio for Responsible Gambling* website at:

**[www.org.ohio.gov](http://www.org.ohio.gov)**

For help call the  
Ohio Problem Gambling Helpline at  
**1-800-589-9966**

It's free, it's confidential and available  
24 hours a day.

#### Sources:

Brewer, Grant, Potenza (2008) *Treatment of Pathological Gambling*  
Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Cleveland.com

Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario  
Problem Gambling Resource Guide