

## Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling Fact Sheet

### ***What is problem gambling?***

Problem gambling includes all gambling behavior patterns that compromise, disrupt or damage personal, family or vocational pursuits. The essential features are 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.

### ***Isn't problem gambling just a financial problem?***

No. Problem gambling is an emotional problem that has financial consequences. If you pay all of a problem gambler's debts, the person will still be a problem gambler. The real problem is that they have an uncontrollable obsession with gambling.

### ***Isn't problem gambling really the result of irresponsible or weak-willed people?***

No. Many people who develop problems have been viewed as responsible and strong by those who care about them. Precipitating factors often lead to a change in behavior, such as retirement or job related stress.

### ***What kind of people become problem gamblers?***

Anyone who gambles can develop problems if they are not aware of the risks and do not gamble responsibly. When gambling behavior interferes with finances, relationships and the workplace, a serious problem already exists.

### ***Do casinos, lotteries and other types of gambling "cause" problem gambling?***

The cause of a gambling problem is the individual's inability to control the gambling. This may be due in part to a person's genetic tendency to develop addiction, their ability to cope with normal life stress and even their social upbringing and moral attitudes about gambling. The casino or lottery provides the opportunity for the person to gamble. It does not, in and of itself, create the problem any more than a liquor store would create an alcoholic.

### ***What types of gambling cause the most problem gambling?***

Again, the cause of a gambling problem is the individual's inability to control the gambling. Therefore, any type of gambling can become problematic, just as an alcoholic can get drunk on any type of alcohol. But some types of gambling have different characteristics that may exacerbate gambling problems. While these factors are still poorly understood, anecdotal reports indicate that one risk factor may be a fast speed of play. In other words, the faster the wager to response time with a game, the more likely players may be to develop problems with a particular game.

### ***What is the responsibility of the gaming industry?***

Everyone who provides gambling opportunities has a responsibility to develop policies and programs to address underage and problem gambling issues.

### ***Can you be a problem gambler if you don't gamble every day?***

The frequency of a person's gambling does not determine whether or not they have a gambling problem. Even though the problem gambler may only go on periodic gambling binges, the emotional and financial consequences will still be evident in the gambler's life, including the effects on the family.

***How much money do you have to lose before gambling becomes a problem?***

The amount of money lost or won does not determine when gambling becomes a problem. Gambling becomes a problem when it causes a negative impact on any area of the individual's life.

***How can a person be addicted to something that isn't a substance?***

Although no substance is ingested, the problem gambler gets the same effect from gambling as someone else might get from taking a tranquilizer or having a drink. The gambling alters the person's mood and the gambler keeps repeating the behavior, attempting to achieve that same effect. But just as tolerance develops to drugs or alcohol, the gambler finds that it takes more and more of the gambling experience to achieve the same emotional effect as before. This creates an increased craving for the activity and the gambler finds they have less and less ability to resist as the craving grows in intensity and frequency.

***Are problem gamblers usually addicted to other things too?***

It is generally accepted that people with one addiction are more at risk to develop another. Some problem gamblers also find they have a problem with alcohol or drugs. This does not, however, mean that if you have a gambling problem you are guaranteed to become addicted to other things. Some problem gamblers never experience any other addiction because no other substance or activity gives them the same feeling as the gambling does. There also appears to be evidence of family patterns regarding dependency, as many problem gamblers report one or both parents had a drinking and or gambling problem.

***How widespread is problem gambling in the U.S.?***

2 million (1%) of U.S. adults are estimated to meet criteria for pathological gambling in a given year. Another 4-6 million (2-3%) would be considered problem gamblers; that is, they do not meet the full diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling, but meet one or more of the criteria and are experiencing problems due to their gambling behavior. Research also indicates that most adults who choose to gamble are able to do responsibly. Approximately 85% of U.S. adults have gambled at least once in their lives; 60% in the past year. Some form of legalized gambling is available in 48 states plus the District of Columbia. The two without legalized gambling are Hawaii and Utah.

***Can children or teenagers develop gambling problems?***

A number of states allow children under 18 to gamble, and youth also participate in illegal forms of gambling, such as gambling on the Internet or betting on sports. Therefore, it is not surprising that research shows that a vast majority of kids have gambled before their 18th birthday, and that children may be more likely to develop problems related to gambling than adults. While debate continues on this issue, there appears to be a number of factors influencing this finding. Parental attitudes and behavior play a role. Age of exposure plays a part, in that adults who seek treatment for problem gambling report having started gambling at an early age. A number of adolescents reported a preoccupation with everything related to gambling prior to developing problems.

**Helpline – 1-800-522-4700 24/7, free and confidential**

**[www.MDProblemGambling.com](http://www.MDProblemGambling.com)**



HC DrugFree is pleased to partner with the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling. For more information about free educational programs and resources, please visit [www.hcdrugfree.org](http://www.hcdrugfree.org) or call 443-325-0040.

*\*Adapted from the NCPG and British Columbia Partnership for Responsible Gambling.*