Compulsive Gambling (Pathological Gambling)

Compulsive gambling is gambling that becomes more and more hard to resist. Compulsive gambling is done at the expense of your job and your relationships, including your family and friends. It is done in spite of financial difficulties and inability to afford it.

SIGNS OF COMPULSIVE GAMBLING

- There may be increased frequency of gambling with higher and higher stakes.
- There is a craving present which can only be satisfied by gambling again.
- You develop a "rush" or warm, satisfied feeling when you are gambling.
- There is a loss of self-esteem after you lose, yet you keep gambling to satisfy the craving.
- You may resort to illegal activities to support the habit.

STAGES OF COMPULSIVE GAMBLING

- **The Winning Stage.** This is where you win more often than you lose. It is likely a major, early win made you feel smarter than other gamblers. This winning justified your behavior. You believed you were a superior gambler or possibly even a "professional gambler."
- **The Losing Stage.** Over time, you begin to bet higher and higher amounts. You begin to lose more often than you win, but you believe it is just a losing streak. With more losses, you bet even more in an effort to win back the money you lost. You begin to borrow money for gambling and lie about losses. Others start refusing to help you out financially. Eventually, your problems become unmanageable and relationships with others begin to fall apart.
- **The Desperation Stage.** By this time, you no longer have control of your gambling. You may engage in illegal behavior, such as stealing, to try to cover gambling debts. You continue to lie about the extent of your activities and start blaming others for your problems. You may find yourself living with deep anguish. You may think about suicide as a way to stop the pain. You may be forced into recovery by family, an employer, or the criminal justice system. You might enter a self-help recovery program. You could face relapses if you do not take the treatment program seriously. You spend most of your time:
  - Thinking about gambling.
  - Planning ways to get money to gamble.
  - Gambling.
- **The Hopeless Stage.** If you do not get a strong recovery program working in your life, you may come to believe that nothing can help. You may feel like you do not care if you live or die. Depression deepens. At this time, a person either gets help or the problems could get worse, possibly ending in suicide or prison.

TREATMENT

- Compulsive gambling is a common problem. There are groups available for support, such as Gamblers Anonymous.
- Psychotherapy may also be helpful.
- Medicines are available which may help satisfy the craving to gamble.

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