

Gambling Addiction

Gambling addiction can bring about a number of negative psychological, physiological, and social repercussions, chiefly including depression, migraine, distress, and other problems. As with other addictions, it can result in feelings of despondency and helplessness.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), diagnostic criteria for gambling disorder are,

- A. Persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behaviour leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as indicated by the individual exhibiting four (or more) of the following in a 12-month period:
 1. Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement.
 2. Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
 3. Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling.
 4. Is often preoccupied with gambling (e.g., having persistent thoughts of reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping, or planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble).
 5. Often gambles when feeling distressed (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).
 6. After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (Chasing one's losses).
 7. Lies to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.
 8. Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling
 9. Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling

A gambling addiction can happen to anyone. No one can predict who will develop such an addiction. When gambling behaviour cannot be controlled, it becomes a problem and interferes with one's finances, relationships, and job performance. The person may not even realize they have a problem for some time.

Contrary to popular belief, people who develop a gambling addiction are mostly considered to be responsible and dependable, however, certain factors can trigger changes in behaviour:

- Retirement
- Traumatic events
- Job-related stress
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Social factors

Studies suggest that people with a predisposition to addiction may be at risk of developing another one. Genetic and neurological factors may play a role in their tendency to develop addictions. Some people affected by gambling may also experience an alcohol or drug problem, possibly due to their addiction-prone personality.

Gambling affects the person's state of mind. Gambling addiction stimulates the brain's reward system like drugs or alcohol do, causing a feeling that is equivalent to taking a drug or consuming alcohol. As the person becomes addicted to feelings awakened by gambling, they keep repeating the behaviour in an attempt to achieve the same strong and high effect. Sometimes, they go after their losses, thinking that they can win back the lost money if they keep engaging in gambling, which eventually results in the development of a vicious cycle.

The vicious cycle of compulsive gambling has four phases: Winning phase, losing phase, desperation phase and hopeless phase. During the winning phase, the person usually has money and time. They mostly engage in increased wagers, experience the excitement of winning, while fantasizing about making more money. In losing phase, compulsive gamblers start losing much more often than they win. Just like winning, losing too is a part of natural process. However, during this stage, the person tries to chase their losses, and to do that, they resort to dipping into savings, borrowing money, or taking out a loan. Eventually, they fall into default when they no longer can cover their financial setback, which leads to the phase of desperation. During this period, there are increasingly frequent signs of panic and anxiety. So, they resort to lies and deception to hide their misfortunes. After a while, however, their family and friends may realise what has been going on. When they cannot borrow money, compulsive gamblers become angry and start suffering from relational problems. They promise to stop but with transition to the desperation phase, severe consequences and irreversible may being to occur, such as dud cheques, or theft. They rationalise the situation thinking that they will recoup their losses in some way or another. They feel ashamed and guilty, after warnings from friends and family. During this phase, compulsive gamblers also neglect their physical well-being. The hopeless phase: at the point they start thinking they hit rock bottom and there is now way up. Nevertheless, they continue to gamble knowing that there's no chance of winning, but they no longer care.

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