



A Common Story

Compulsive gambling is first and foremost an emotional disease. The reason I know is because at one point in my life there was nothing in the world that I loved more than gambling. The sickness of this addiction and disease had overwhelmed the pleasure center of my brain, resulting in very little caring for family and friends.

After 22 years of gambling, at age 40, I no longer had the resilience and fight of a younger man. It was like getting into the ring with Mike Tyson and taking a beating every day. My gambling addiction took me to places I never dreamed possible. As the Gamblers Anonymous book states, "The depths of misery are fathomless as our dream world comes crashing down." To this day, I believe the word "fathomless" best describes the despair I was feeling.



**Gambling Problem? Yours?
A friend's? A family member's?**

Call the FCCG 24-hour HelpLine
888-ADMIT-IT (888-236-4848)

Ultimately, I became numb to the rest of the world and gambling became my obsession. I began to lie, cheat and steal, and self-deception was at my core. I was leading a double life. Money was the drug I needed in order to satisfy my craving for excitement, adrenalin rush and escape from the mounting problems I was creating on a daily basis. The stress, deterioration and self-pity continued and began to manifest into self-hatred. One of the strangest experiences I can recall is looking into a mirror and being unable to see a complete image of myself. The words I was speaking out loud didn't even feel connected to my voice, leading me to believe I was becoming disconnected, psychotic or insane. I started drinking Nyquil to escape my emotional and mental pain.

"My gambling addiction took me to places I never dreamed possible."

Over time, the reality of the things I had done was weighing heavily on my mind, such as robbing my father's business, stealing cigars and drugs from a pharmacy, breaking into a house, pawning my parent's and my possessions, destroying my credit, bingeing and purging.



The despair, as well as the continued emotional punishment of gambling had finally culminated into a strong desire to self-destruct. My mind was fluctuating between robbing a bank and committing suicide. The thought of suicide actually seemed more plausible. Fortunately, I entered in-patient treatment and through the grace of God, Gamblers Anonymous, therapists and friends, I have been able to change my life. From a broken down shell of a person, I have managed to reconstruct my life. I have been married for 8 years and have a wonderful 3 year old son. I also have a strong sense of spirituality and gratefulness for the life I live today. My primary purpose in life today is attending to my family and helping gamblers who still suffer. To this end, I returned to school and attained my Master's in Clinical Psychology and am currently involved in a new program with the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling.

**Florida Council on
Compulsive Gambling, Inc.**

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Our Mission:

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. (FCCG), established in 1988, is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) educational and advocacy corporation under contract with Florida state government. The FCCG's primary mission is to help persons adversely affected by difficulties due to problem and compulsive gambling. The FCCG maintains a neutral stance on the issue of legalized gambling while seeking to assist citizens in need of support. Governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, the FCCG is an affiliate of the National Council on Problem Gambling.



Suicide – A Very Real and Growing Risk

By Paul Ashe, President and
Pat Fowler, Executive Director



The risk of suicide associated with compulsive gambling has long been a serious concern, yet remains an area where little research has been performed to date. Studies conducted within treatment seeking gamblers found as many as 75% experiencing suicidal thoughts or attempts. A recent study by University of Alberta researchers concluded that gambling addicts are 3.4 times more likely to attempt suicide than the average Canadian. While these statistics are telling, they do not necessarily reflect the true number of gamblers who, in the midst of their addiction, consider suicide as their only way out. They also do not account for completed suicides or attempted suicides resulting from intentional car accidents or other self-inflicted wounds, typically reported in other categories.

We were recently reminded of just how often suicide is contemplated as a viable option for those suffering from a gambling addiction. Upon listening to a group of recovering gamblers, we were struck by the sheer number who shared personal accounts of such circumstances. The vast majority of those present acknowledged they had personally considered, attempted, or knew someone who had committed suicide as a result of gambling. As we listened to recollections of desperation and pain, they served as another reminder that proof is not always in the research. This is not to minimize the

value of research but rather to demonstrate that self-reporting accounts of this life and death struggle are far more insightful.

It is also worthy of note that most compulsive gamblers are typically unwilling to acknowledge their suicidal ideations when responding to questions either directly or in writing but are able to discuss their experiences in a “safe place” among peers, underlining the importance of support group environments.

“...heightening awareness among the general public regarding suicide and compulsive gambling, and the importance of identification and intervention, can help those struggling with gambling difficulties.”

Finally, it is our hope that by bringing attention to this serious concern through the individual accounts of recovering compulsive gamblers themselves, professionals servicing this population will be reminded of this ever present threat. At the same time, we anticipate that heightening awareness among the general public regarding suicide and compulsive gambling, and the importance of identification and intervention, can help those struggling with gambling difficulties.

From Winning to Hopelessness

The onset of a gambling problem varies from person to person, though research has shown that the length of time it takes for a gambler to experience the onset of symptoms is often dependent upon the type of gambling in which she or he is participating.

Gamblers who experience difficulties often go through a series of cycles, or stages, before they reach the point at which they feel helpless. While some compulsive gamblers will skip a stage, the following four phases are fairly common among this population.

1. **The Winning Phase** - In the beginning, the compulsive gambler often experiences a “big win,” which results in more frequent gambling and increased wagers. This tends to enhance self-image, and the gambler begins to fantasize about winning and the wonderful and exciting future this will bring about. Unreasonable optimism develops.

Note: Some gamblers never experience this phase and skip to the following stages of progression.

2. **The Losing Phase** - During this period, the compulsive gambler thinks only about gambling. Personality changes begin to develop. Lies,

borrowing money, and cover-ups are common. The gambler can no longer control the gambling, and relationships with family, friends, and employers deteriorate.

3. **The Desperation Phase** - The gambler can no longer pay debts and looks for bailouts that could be legal or illegal. These actions are rationalized as a means of getting even or recovering their losses. As the “chase” continues, the gambler panics at the prospect that the action will stop. During this time, the gambler clings to the belief that a winning streak, which will solve all their problems, is just around the corner. There are increasing signs of depression, irritability, and thoughts of suicide may be present.
4. **The Hopeless Phase** - At this point, serious consequences begin to occur, which may seem irreversible, such as arrests, divorce, alcohol or other substance abuse problems, emotional breakdowns, and serious withdrawal symptoms. The gambler realizes that getting even or catching up is not possible, but no longer cares. Approximately 20% of the time, this type of despair may lead the gambler to attempt suicide.

Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. 888-ADMIT-IT FCCG 24-HOUR HELPLINE Confidential & Multilingual

Whether you're seeking information or help for a gambling problem, you've come to the right place.

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization that provides information, resource referrals, and support services for problem gamblers, their families, employers and others. We also offer prevention and education programs, as well as professional training for mental health, addiction and medical practitioners, gambling operators, governments, businesses, academia, law enforcement authorities, faith based organizations, and others.

Call our 24-hour confidential and multilingual HelpLine at 888-ADMIT-IT.

FCCG Unveils New Web Site

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling has launched its new, visitor friendly web site outlining all Agency programs, services and publications. The easy to navigate site has specialty areas for youth, adults, elders, health care professionals, gaming industry operators, educators and others. The web site also features a series of Online Forums, which allow visitors to post messages and receive responses from others seeking information or sharing personal experiences and insights.

www.gamblinghelp.org

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Responding to 20 Questions Can Change a Person's Life

The self-help group of Gamblers Anonymous offers the following questions to help persons determine whether gambling may be a problem. (Reprinted with permission.)

1. Did you ever lose time from work or school due to gambling?
2. Has gambling ever made your home life unhappy?
3. Did gambling affect your reputation?
4. Have you ever felt remorse after gambling?
5. Did you ever gamble to get money with which to pay debts or otherwise solve financial difficulties?
6. Did gambling cause a decrease in your ambition or efficiency?
7. After losing did you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses?
8. After a win did you have a strong urge to return and win more?
9. Did you often gamble until your last dollar was gone?
10. Did you ever borrow to finance your gambling?
11. Have you ever sold anything to finance gambling?
12. Were you reluctant to use "gambling money" for normal expenditures?
13. Did gambling make you careless of the welfare of yourself or your family?
14. Did you ever gamble longer than you had planned?
15. Have you ever gambled to escape worry, trouble, boredom or loneliness?
16. Have you ever committed, or considered committing, an illegal act to finance gambling?
17. Did gambling cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
18. Do arguments, disappointments or frustrations create within you an urge to gamble?
19. Did you ever have an urge to celebrate any good fortune by a few hours of gambling?
20. Have you ever considered self destruction or suicide as a result of your gambling?

Most compulsive gamblers will answer yes to at least seven of these questions.

What Does the HelpLine Offer?

Since the late 1980s, the FCCG has operated the State of Florida's 24-hour HelpLine. The service offers free self-help, professional treatment, legal and financial referrals, as well as special program supports. There are no requirements for calling and every contact is free and confidential. The multilingual crisis line offers services which are not available anywhere in Florida, online, or elsewhere. Specifics follow:

- Assistance, information and referrals to self-help programs, professional treatment counselors, and financial and legal supports.
- A free consultation with a trained gambling counselor in instances when callers are unable to pay. The Preliminary Assessment and Treatment Supports (PATs) Program is available to gamblers, family members, and other loved ones.



- Peer Connect appointments, which enable callers the opportunity to speak with a recovering compulsive gambler to gain insight about problem gambling and different avenues for seeking help.
- Complete directory of community organizations that can provide associated assistance.
- Assistance for professionals, whose standing in the community could be jeopardized or compromised by attendance at public self-help groups or group therapy (i.e. impaired professionals).
- Professional training for mental health, medical and addiction

professionals, gambling industry operators, and others.

- Information regarding specialized programs including but not limited to middle, high school and college students, older adults, parent and teacher organizations, college campuses, gaming facilities, medical and treatment professionals, employers, military personnel, law enforcement authorities, and others.
- Research, Florida specific.
- Free resources including the FCCG's *A Chance for Change* self-help recovery workbook series for gamblers, family members, and older adult gamblers.

If you or someone you know is seeking information or help for a gambling problem, call the 24-hour HelpLine at 888-ADMIT-IT.

Malcolm's Story

Tragedy in Early Recovery

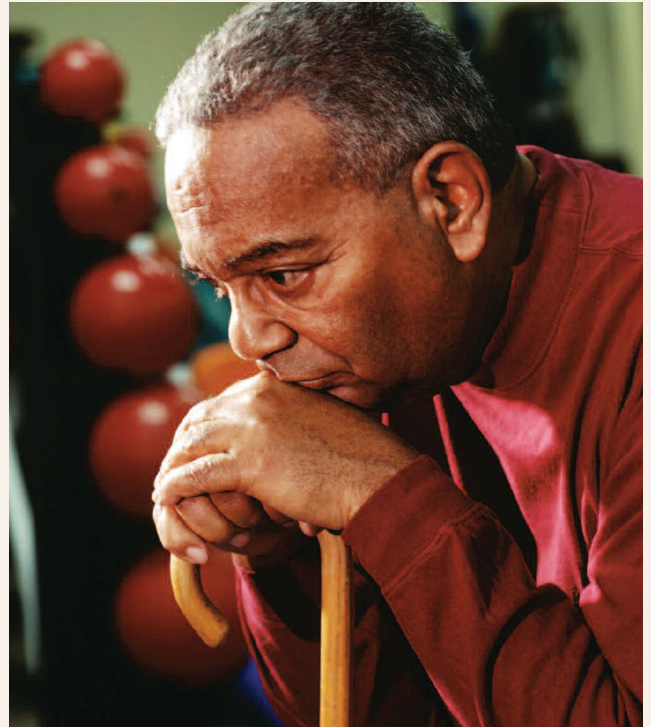
I'm telling my story because it is an important story to tell. I came into the Gambler's Anonymous (GA) 12 step program in March 1987, and since then I have attended thousands of meetings. I didn't know what to expect when I went to my first meeting, but I knew I had gambled compulsively for 26 years and I couldn't do it anymore. My first meeting was revealing. GA members were relating the same things that happened to me, they didn't know me but they were telling my story. They asked me to give the program 90 days and after the 90 days if I didn't think it was helping, the door would swing both ways.

During the meeting, a member asked me the 20 questions, a list of 20 symptoms of compulsive gambling. I answered 17 positively and could have answered all 20 yes. The last question, "Did I ever consider or attempt suicide," I answered yes. I don't think there is anything worse than contemplating dying or killing yourself. And that's why telling this story is so important for me.

At that first meeting, a member of GA stayed and spoke with me. The meeting ended at 9 p.m. and I got home at 11:30 p.m. I am sure my wife thought I was out gambling. For the next 11 months, I spent a lot of hours talking with this GA member. We shared our stories and our thoughts. He had a good heart, was easy going and cheerful. It was good to be in each other's company. Things were getting better in both of our lives. He got a job and could support his family and I was finding

myself. We were happy together and happy for each other. We became as close as brothers - we became friends.

At times, my job took me out of the area, but I continued to attend meetings even when away from home. Once, after a period of working in Miami, we were given Thursday off. I knew I could make it in time to attend my meeting in Central Florida so I headed home. I walked in and for the first time, the room was full of



"I thought I was doing good in the program but at that point, I knew deep in my heart if I didn't do something more about my compulsive gambling it would kill me too."

members that had their heads down or were crying. I didn't have any idea what had happened.

Members came to me directly and hugged me crying even harder. My friend had taken his life. He was married and had three children. They explained to me that he had gone into his garage and left the car running and the next morning he had died. What a tragic situation. I thought we were doing good in the program. I thought I was doing good in the program but at that point, I knew deep in my heart if I didn't do something more about my

compulsive gambling it would kill me too. It could have been me, it could have been anyone.

I felt so bad about my gambling addiction I had wanted to die, and the only reason I didn't was I was too much of a coward. I'm glad I didn't do it because 21 years later life is really good. It took the loss of my friend, along with working the steps, getting involved and giving back, letting go and letting God, looking up and asking for help, and putting myself in a position to be helped, to get to where I am today. I know I am a compulsive gambler and I cannot gamble but I love being in recovery. I rediscovered good qualities: kindness, goodness, and generosity. I learned that if you give you get. Today I give of myself and I stay involved.

The program has saved my life and I've seen it save thousands of others.

Family Gambling Addiction Resulted in All Forms of Abuse



Hello, my name is Selena and I am the grandchild and child of a gambling addict. I am a victim of compulsive gambling.

My maternal grandfather was killed on the US-Mexico border as a result of his gambling. My mother told stories of the times when he would come back home with his empty pants pockets showing. This was his way of telling my grandmother and my mother that he lost everything.

Despite her experience with her father's gambling, my mother also developed a gambling problem, betting on the lottery, race horses, etc. She lost the money she had for food, and didn't take care of me or my brothers and sisters. Her gambling ultimately resulted in my experiencing difficulty in school and her inability to pay for books and other necessities required I drop out.

I was a very depressed child who also suffered from anxiety. My mom's care was so poor that she left my sister and me to become the victims of abuse. We suffered sexual abuse due to the lack of parental supervision.

Over the course of her gambling, I lost respect for my mother. She gambled behind my stepfather's back. She was a liar and she made us lie for her. When my stepfather found out she was gambling, he would beat her in the presence of me and my brothers and sisters. My mom's body was bruised and

beaten terribly; she is very white so the bruises were visible and took weeks to heal.

“Despite her experience with her father’s gambling, my mother also developed a gambling problem... My mom’s care was so poor that she left my sister and I to become the victims of... sexual abuse due to the lack of parental supervision.”

There was everything in my family, domestic violence, gambling, and financial difficulties. I hated her for a long time because she was not there for us because of her gambling problem. To top it off, in addition to

pawning off all of our possessions, my mother got into so much debt that we lost THE ONLY HOME we ever had. We were forced to leave Mexico City because she would have gone to jail because she owed so many people money.

Thank God I am free of this addiction in my life and have found a way to forgive my mother even though she is still actively gambling. I never give her money, because she continually spends the little money my brothers and sisters give her on gambling.

“I wish there had been a FCCG when I was a little girl for my family and my mom.”

I developed such an aversion for anything that has to do with gambling, that I cannot even play games. I get anxious because of the terrible memories I have. I even developed different personality traits that made me aggressive and very defensive towards people. I was very detached and unable to demonstrate affection to others until I underwent therapy, which helped me overcome certain things but not everything.

I am committed to the cause of FCCG, to helping disseminate information to others about gambling and to alert people that hope is an option. This is true even in instances when the gambler doesn't wish to seek help. Today, recovery is possible for family members and other loved ones. I wish there had been a FCCG when I was a little girl for my family and my mom.

Thomas' Story

Helpless, Hopeless and Alone



I was a social gambler for 20 years, gambling occasionally and playing the lottery. I lost control in 2004 after hitting a significant jackpot on a scratch off ticket. I felt invincible. I “knew” I was going to continue to win big.

“I was physically, emotionally and mentally drained, morally bankrupt and out of options.”

My gambling increased and I quickly used all of the household money to gamble. In fall, 2005, I began embezzling money from my employer. Initially, I could return the money before it was missed, but it got out of hand and the money I stole was substantial. I hid bills from my wife, wrote bad checks and my life spun out of control. I borrowed money and lied to everyone.

In spring, 2006, I could no longer see any way out of the mess I created. I rounded up all the money I could and left town. I left my wife a suicide note asking her to tell my parents that I was a criminal and was sorry I had screwed things up for myself and her. I drove to Biloxi, Mississippi to gamble one last time before killing myself. I didn't know how I was going

to do it, but after 3 days of gambling, I made contact with my family and came home. My parents gave me money to pay back the company. Red flags were raised about the money but nothing ever happened.

The bailout and lack of consequences were the worst things that could have happened. I returned to gambling, taking larger amounts to finance my addiction. My wife and I were “separated,” I told her I did not love her anymore (because I did not want to bring her down with me), I was financially ruining us and was committing criminal acts. I even developed neuropathy in both feet and hands and could barely walk upright because of all of the stress. I was physically, emotionally and mentally drained, morally bankrupt and out of options.

In November, 2006, during our separation, my wife was house-sitting

in a home that had guns. I spent the afternoons there alone “role playing” my suicide, planning to kill myself in the pool house where I wouldn't be found. Before I could take my life, I again took all the money I could from work and went this time to Las Vegas for one last gambling binge before killing myself. I spent days gambling, void of caring and trying to lose everything. Once out of money, I wrote a suicide note and went out to the 10th story balcony of the hotel to jump. I was numb, eerily calm, and everything was hazy. I no longer felt the sting of the neuropathy that had plagued me for months. As the moment came closer and I was ready to jump, I became flooded with a feeling that everything was going to be okay. I didn't need to jump. I came in from the balcony and called my estranged wife for help.

“I thought suicide was the best option because I could see no alternatives. I felt helpless, hopeless and alone.”

A few days later, I was home making different plans, plans for recovery and life. It is scary how dark everything was back then. I thought suicide was the best option because I could see no alternatives. I felt helpless, hopeless and alone. Now that I am in recovery, things are good and I am truly blessed to be alive.



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WHEN GAMBLING BECOMES A PROBLEM

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Suicide Warning Signs

There are several warning signs that can prove extremely helpful in identifying whether someone may be experiencing suicidal thoughts.

- Buying pills or weapons
- Losing interest in personal appearance
- Changing eating, sleeping or sexual drive
- Ending a relationship
- Previous attempts
- Exhausting resources
- Recent loss of a loved one
- Feeling helpless
- Giving away personal possessions
- Feeling like a burden to others
- Sense of failure
- Experiencing guilt
- Taking unnecessary risks
- Losing interest in normal activities

If you or someone you know is revealing any of the aforementioned warning signs due to gambling, call the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling:
24-hour HelpLine: 888-ADMIT-IT (Multilingual & Confidential)