



FAMILY HOLDS OUT FOR HOPE

significant and when all was said and done and Michael returned home, he owed in excess of \$5,000.

Both while away at college and when Michael was back in Florida, he attended counseling and self-help groups. We also attended sessions with the therapist and went to a support group for family members. However, nothing ever resulted in Michael stopping for long periods of time.

Today, several years later, Michael's gambling is sporadic but is not as problematic as it used to be. He has since graduated college with honors, is working towards his graduate degree, and is employed full-time. He lives at home and we help manage his money.

Michael's gambling continues to have short and long-term impacts on our family. He has never regained our full trust. His younger brother became disheartened upon realizing there was little he could do to help Michael. We acknowledge that Michael eventually needs to lead an independent life, which is critical to his development, but he needs to first gain stability and demonstrate that he can manage on his own.

"We know that Michael never hit bottom because we chose not to let him."

We stopped seeing the counselor, even though we found it beneficial, because he said we needed to totally cut Michael off and we are not prepared to abandon our son. We know that Michael never hit bottom because we chose not to let him. We also realize that Michael

has difficulty relating to some of the self-help group members because they tend to be much older than he. Similarly, the support group meetings for loved ones in our area are comprised of primarily spouses versus parents, and although we aren't looking to "divorce" our son, we do find the guidance offered and the forums helpful.

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We will continue to stand by our son as he transitions to the next phase of his adult life. Despite his challenges and daily struggles, we have seen the progress he has made since the day we brought him home from college. Finally, if there's one thing that recovery has taught us is that anything is possible if you keep the faith and keep working the program one step at a time.

Bill and Delores



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

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

To read Bill and Delores' tips to parents of young gamblers, see page 3.

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.



The Forgotten Victims

By Paul Ashe, President and
Pat Fowler, Executive Director



As is the case with other addictions, the focus and available resources for help are usually directed at the addicted. Even less services and funds are available to address the collateral damage caused by compulsive gambling on those most negatively affected - the family.

Whether you're a spouse, a child, a parent, a sibling, or an adult child or other family member, the impact of compulsive gambling can be broad and devastating, ranging from deprivation of basic necessities, such as shelter and food, to mental, physical and financial abuse. Even well after the gambling stops, the family often continues to suffer the emotional and financial scars with few resources for healing and recovery. It is not uncommon to hear an adult child of a compulsive gambling parent speak of the issues they continue to confront or a senior parent share how an adult child drained them of their life savings and retirement through manipulation or intimidation due to a gambling problem.

Yet, if families are going to survive, resources need to be made available to realistically help them move forward in their lives. One supportive resource is the self-help fellowship of Gam-Anon. Comprised of family members and loved ones of compulsive gamblers, this group offers identification and assistance in family recovery. Although everyone who attends may not find physical or cultural identification here, the program furnishes meaningful insights and assistance to everyone. Upon attending meetings and remaining open, one can experience

program benefits. The drawback is that these groups are sparse and may not be easily accessible in many areas.

“...a family member’s recovery is not dependent upon what the gambler ultimately does or does not do. Whether the gambler seeks help or not, there are free resources available to assist families to begin recovery and to find a healthier way of life.”

In recognition of the need to provide help and guidance to family members and gamblers, the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling has instituted a series of programs. Loved ones and gamblers are eligible for the PATS program, which provides free assessment and treatment services (under a new treatment pilot program). Self help workbooks, a Peer Connect Program and live chat options are also available. In addition, the organization offers financial education services and information regarding one’s legal rights. (See page 7 for program and service details.)

Finally, it’s important to remember that regardless of what the relationship is with the compulsive gambler, a family member’s recovery is not dependent upon what the gambler ultimately does or does not do. Whether the gambler seeks help or not, there are free resources available to assist families to begin recovery and to find a healthier way of life.”

Note: Unlike years past, compulsive gamblers today are just as likely to be female as they are male. For this reason, we interchange the use of gender references (e.g., his, her, he or she) throughout this newsletter to assure this point is clearly understood.



COMPULSIVE GAMBLING AND HONESTY DON'T MIX

According to the American Psychiatric Association, pathological gambling (i.e., commonly referred to as compulsive gambling) is a mental health disorder of impulse control. One of the 10 criteria for a clinical diagnosis is "lying to conceal activity".

Compulsive gamblers lie to protect themselves from being revealed. Secrets and lies become the foundation on which a web of deceit is built in a family with a compulsive gambler. Most times, their secret is disclosed following a major event, such as a substantial loss, difficulty at or termination of work, commission of a crime, etc. Family members and others closest to the gambler feel disrespected, demeaned and completely dumbfounded upon learning their loved one has been spending countless hours gambling, resulting in major financial and/or personal and familial problems.

The lying is often the most painful part for family members. It can be agonizing to confront the issues of lying because frequently they result in arguments and a cycle of behavior of more gambling, more lying, and more arguing. For the person

being lied to, very often their life begins to revolve around whether the gambler is telling the truth. Ultimately, re-establishing trust, after an extended period of lies, is an ongoing challenge for family members and for the gamblers themselves. This is when appropriate treatment and self-help supports can prove crucial to a family's recovery. A professional therapist and recovering persons can provide the assistance necessary to help family members and others to address the various gambling related impacts and to get back on track. In isolation, many families will remain in crisis, some will split up, others will toggle between recovery and everyday life struggles, and others may choose to live in denial.

However, recovery is possible for compulsive gamblers and their families if each family member, including the gambler is committed to change. For information and free statewide services and supports, call the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling's 24-hour HelpLine at 888-ADMIT-IT or visit us online at www.gamblinghelp.org.

ARE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW EXPERIENCING THE FOLLOWING DIFFICULTIES DUE TO GAMBLING:

- Frustrated with a loved one?
- Facing financial problems?
- Being lied to by someone you care about?
- Feeling helpless and don't know what to do?
- Becoming emotionally detached?
- Feeling physically ill?
- Becoming stressed out?
- Having depressed thoughts or feelings?
- Suffering from legal impacts?
- Thinking about ending your marriage or relationship?
- Believing your problems are hopeless?

Reviewing the preceding checklist can help family members and others to determine whether a loved one's gambling is negatively impacting their lives. Answering "Yes" to one or more questions shows signs of a gambling problem. For confidential and free information, resources and community based supports, call the FCCG 24-hour HelpLine: 888-ADMIT-IT.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

Bill and Delores suggest the following tips to parents of young gamblers:

- Intervene early
- Be prepared to make a continuous commitment
- Value the relationship
- Insist that your child seek help
- Become proactive in treatment
- Maintain that your child take responsibility for his life
- Increase awareness as to the seriousness of gambling
- Monitor (and if necessary, manage) your child's finances
- Be mindful of credit cards your child may obtain via the Internet or on a college campus
- Be attentive to how and with whom your child is spending their time
- Be aware that athletic children have a natural competitive nature, which can lead to gambling
- Look for signs of substitution (e.g. consuming alcohol or using drugs)
- Be united as to how you handle and address certain issues with your child
- Require that your child apply himself at school and/or work

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that often parents and other family members attribute their child's erratic or secretive behavior to alcohol or drug use, without ever realizing that gambling is the contributing factor.



ARE YOU CODEPENDENT?

Family and others do not often realize how codependent their lives might be on the gambler. A loved one becomes codependent when their life, needs and behaviors revolve around the gambler and his or her behaviors. While codependency, to some extent, is not unusual in most relationships, when living with a compulsive gambler, it becomes unhealthy when a family member's life is deeply affected and their decisions or actions are reliant or revolve around the gambler's irrational behaviors.

Codependency Checklist

To determine whether you or someone you know may be codependent due to gambling, answer the questions in the following checklist. Be sure to check the box that most closely matches how you feel:

Do you or someone you know:	Never	Sometimes	Very Often	Always
Have a hard time saying "No" to the gambler?				
Have difficulty telling the gambler what you really think or feel?				
Do whatever the gambler wants you to do?				
Try not to let the gambler see that you're upset about her gambling?				
Try not to let the gambler see that you're upset about other things so she will remain happy?				
Try to keep the gambler away from situations in which he will gamble?				
Encourage the gambler to gamble?				
Make excuses for the gambling behavior?				
Feel afraid that the gambling is hurting your relationship or your family's, but hide how you're feeling?				
Just give up trying to change things?				
Feel that things could be worse and that you should try to live with the gambling?				
Let the gambler do whatever he wants so you can have free time?				
Feel sorry for the gambler because she has nothing to do if she doesn't gamble?				

If you or someone you know responded primarily in the "Very Often" and "Always" categories, you likely have some level of codependency and might even be enabling the gambler.

WAKING UP AS THE ENABLER

Codependents and others are frequently in denial as to how they may be contributing to the gambling problem and ultimately to their own unhappiness. In some cases, loved ones may actually be enabling the gambler in his behavior. The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling's HelpLine has many years of experience listening to the stories of the non-gambling spouses or partners, parents, adult children, young people, and others who call in to its 24-hour HelpLine. More often than not, enablers do not recognize their behaviors until it is brought to their attention by a friend or family member, colleague, professional counselor, self-help support group or other person.

Some of the more common explanations reported by family members include:

- I accompany my wife to the casino because I don't want her to be there all hours of the night alone.
- I make only friendly bets with my son or wager low amounts but never on the game he's experiencing the most difficulty with.
- I lie or cover for my mother because it's easier.
- I loan or borrow money for my partner to pay off debts or to gamble.
- I would never get upset about his gambling because I didn't want the children to see us arguing.
- I give my girlfriend money to gamble with because I don't want to deal with her irrational behavior.
- I think the gambling problem will somehow just stop.

Like codependency, enabling is a behavior that becomes ingrained and can take time for family members to change their behaviors and to redirect their attention to themselves. Recognizing oneself as an enabler can truly be the single most awakening moment for loved ones, as well as a time for renewed vigor to keep the focus on self.

PUTTING “ME” FIRST

If anyone would have told me that I would marry a compulsive gambler, I would have never believed it. My husband was the man of my dreams, a handsome educated professional, and despite our 10 year age difference, we have persevered for over 40 years. However, it's only been the past 15 years where our marriage was reborn – thanks to our respective recovery programs. The prior near 30 years consisted of varying points of devastation. During this time, we had no money for anything, including groceries and rent, became accustomed to living without lights or phone service and were deep in credit card debt.



Little did I know when I met my husband that he was already gambling. It didn't matter where we lived. In Cuba, it was casinos, the old fashioned type. In Puerto Rico, it was the lottery, horse races, poker games with friends, and blackjack at the casinos. He went to the horse races each week and played the lottery daily. I gave birth to a child at the time that died of congenital heart failure and my husband's gambling only made the grieving process that much more unbearable.

The turning point came, or so I thought, when my husband embezzled money from the company he worked for over a decade. Amazingly, his boss let him leave honorably, without being arrested, but he was required to pay the money back. We moved to Florida where we had family. Yet, it didn't take long before he started gambling again,

unbeknownst to me, until there was a shortage of money. His relapse on lottery games nearly resulted in the loss of our home. I was in such a lost and depressed state of mind that I didn't have the strength to go to self-help groups. I was resigned to the fact that I was gradually losing my mind. My sons alternated taking me to the meetings and the rest, I suppose, was a complete leap of faith.

I recall the empowering day when my children and I told my husband that he needed to seek help or get out. We never dreamed he would actually take to the program because we forced him to go. Four years later, my husband was able to pay off his credit card debt and the money he stole from his employer. It was another six years before he repaid others, beginning with our sons, his sister, brother-in-law, and close acquaintances.

“I've learned that there's nothing like crisis to make a person pro-active, provided it doesn't destroy you first.”

In the interim, I learned to save every penny. I went back to school when our oldest of three children was only age 10, finished a B.A. in psychology and decided to explore what went wrong in our relationship. Thereafter, I attended graduate school, received my degree, and today I am a licensed mental health counselor working with domestic violence victims.

I owe my mental health to the self-help group, Gam-Anon, and to

the countless women and others who have helped me through hopeless times. The best years of my married life have been in the program. I began the healing process and saw, for the first time, how I contributed to my own victimization by allowing the gambling. Meetings helped me to discover how I was part of the problem which was a revelation I wasn't prepared for. Before then, I thought “he was the one with all the problems!”

Today, we attend the English and Spanish group meetings and my husband has become an older mentor, serving as a father figure to many. He also is now the dad he never was. Overall, he is a different person and I am in awe when I hear him speak. I too have learned a few things over the years, including:

- ***You have to become brave!*** Actually, when you get to the point where you become fed up, you become brave.
- ***Intervention is needed.*** The family needs to let out the family secret and pressure the gambler into the program and treatment.
- ***Financial independence is critical.*** We need to put all of our efforts into becoming self-sufficient so we don't become dependent on someone else to make us happy.
- ***Allow the children to help.*** Our children worked paper routes, which not only generated income but built character and resilience as to holding up during troubled times.

Finally, I've learned that there's nothing like crisis to make a person pro-active, provided it doesn't destroy you first.

Carmen

GAMBLING BY ANY OTHER NAME IS STILL GAMBLING



Very often, people have different perceptions as to what defines gambling. This is a very important distinction so family members and others closest to the gambler do not inadvertently encourage their loved one to gamble.

Gambling, by definition, is anytime a person places an item of value at risk in anticipation of winning something of greater value. Whether someone wagers \$1 on a lottery ticket or raffle, \$10 at bingo, \$100 on a golf game, \$500 on a horse race, or \$5,000 on the stock market, it all falls into the category of gambling. Among children, even

dares qualify as gambling because youngsters are risking something of value, whether money, personal possessions, pride or prestige.

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Knowing the limits can be very helpful when establishing parameters with a compulsive gambler who hasn't any limits.

UNDERSTANDING ABSTINENCE

According to most gambling addiction counselors and therapists, as well as Gamblers Anonymous, the self-help group for compulsive gamblers, abstinence from gambling is essential to treatment and positive change. Controlled gambling is the belief that a compulsive gambler can engage in gambling behavior at the level of a social gambler, who hasn't any difficulty, and can stop after a certain point. In fact, for most compulsive gamblers this is almost never possible.

The idea of spending only a limited amount of money in a gambling outing is one of the rationalizations or justifications that compulsive gamblers engage in to allow themselves to continue to gamble. While abstinence is not a requirement for recovery, it is the recommended treatment option for the compulsive gambler. In most instances when

gamblers substitute their primary form of gambling for another, they ultimately find that they cannot limit themselves and that attempts to control their gambling activity are unsuccessful.

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One of the most difficult and important aspects of abstinence is for the gambler to substitute the gambling behavior with new routines. Frequently, the gambler will look for support from family members and others as a means of occupying their time and thoughts.

888-ADMIT IT DATA REVEALS TELLING TRENDS FOR LOVED ONES

Per 2008-2009 data from loved ones to the FCCG's 24-Hour HelpLine (888-ADMIT-IT):

- 26% of contacts are from family members or others closest to the gambler (i.e. spouse or significant other, parent, adult child, sibling or other relative).
- Nearly 60% sought assistance primarily for help resulting from relationship problems.
- Over 35% of these callers made contact due to overextended debt, difficulty paying bills or a substantial loss by the gambler.
- Family conflict (75%), anxiety (60%) and depression (42%) were among the top three difficulties loved ones were experiencing at the time of contact.
- Callers identified the gambler as male in 60% of the cases, further revealing that women are continuing to close in on the gender gap.

**For information, support and free services, call the FCCG:
24-Hour Problem Gambling HelpLine | Confidential & Multilingual | 888-ADMIT-IT**

We're here to help.



FCCG OFFERS FREE SERVICES TO REBUILD FAMILIES

For more than 20 years, the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling has been providing services and supports for compulsive gamblers and their families. Today, HelpLine services include a multitude of free options available statewide to persons in need of information, assistance or resource referrals for a gambling problem.

24-Hour HelpLine (888-ADMIT-IT)

Confidential and multilingual service is available around the clock, seven days a week. HelpLine Specialists are trained to listen to caller concerns and to offer a series of options pending individual needs. Callers receive supportive intervention, information and resource referrals to self-help, professional treatment, peer-to-peer connections, financial, legal, and other assistance.

A Chance for Change Recovery Program

Callers can receive a wealth of information and publications addressing impacts and recovery options. For example, the FCCG's *A Chance for Change Program* is three 7-part series of recovery workbooks for loved ones, gamblers and elder gamblers. The comprehensive program aids persons in addressing all aspects of the addiction and its impacts (financial, legal and otherwise). The *A Chance for Change* program also provides step-by-step guidance in assessing one's situation, in establishing and adhering to a recovery plan, and in navigating a new, happier and healthier life. Workbooks are available in English and Spanish and are delivered via the mail in an unmarked envelope to further assure caller anonymity.

Peer-to-Peer, PATS & Soft Transfer Programs

HelpLine callers can also speak to a recovering family member, as well as a compulsive gambler, as part of

the FCCG's *Peer-to-Peer Connection Program*, for valuable insights and support. In addition, callers with an inability to pay or without appropriate insurance coverage can participate in the *PATS Program*, which allows family members and others to attend a session with a professional therapist for free. In fact, the FCCG's *Soft Transfer Program* will even schedule the appointment with the counselor while callers are on the phone.

Self-help Supports

Self-help is a crucial element of the healing process, which is equally critical for family members, whether or not the gambler is seeking help. The FCCG supplies information about the self-help groups of *Gam-Anon* (support group for persons adversely affected by the gambler), for *Gamblers Anonymous* (recovery fellowship for gamblers) and to *Celebrate Recovery*, which is a worldwide Christ-centered recovery ministry that works the 12 steps of recovery. All of these programs are totally free.

Special Programs

The FCCG offers recovery options for specific populations and provides special programs and services to addictions, mental health and other health care professionals, schools, community groups, government organizations, businesses, and others.

Online Supports

The FCCG furnishes online forums from its web site (www.gamblinghelp.org), which is now available in both English and Spanish, and offers a *Live Chat* option, which is accessible Monday through Friday for varying hours of the day.



RELAPSE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO WORK HARDER

A major consideration during recovery from compulsive gambling is the ability to recognize that people, places and things can serve as triggers, which cause a person to react or respond in a way that can be detrimental to their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Triggers often lead to relapse, which can have short or long-term impacts on the gambler and family. Although relapse is a normal part of the recovery process, when it occurs, a key point to remember is that it can be viewed as an opportunity to work harder, to discover what didn't work, and to try again with renewed commitment.

Recovery is about a person's commitment to change in their life. Whether the gambler seeks help and changes their way of thinking and behavior, family members can take control of their own lives. Loved

ones can choose how they respond to the gambler and to situations that arise. They can also determine the options they use to cope. Having a strong support system in place, including self-help and professional treatment, can prove lifesaving during these periods.

Any change is possible if one puts their heart and mind to it.

Long-term change requires work and commitment. One of the best ways to resist the temptation of relapsing is to have a plan in place. Practicing a plan for change can begin by thinking about your life differently. Your thoughts become words. Your words become actions. Your actions can change your life.

SPECIAL FOCUS



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WHEN GAMBLING BECOMES A PROBLEM

888-ADMIT-IT

 **Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc.** www.gamblinghelp.org

REBUILDING AND REAFFIRMING THE FAMILY

Rebuilding the family is a central component of the healing process for loved ones living with a compulsive gambler. Learning to relax and to enjoy life are also key factors. Adhering to the following three principles each day may help in reaffirming a fresh start:

1. Take time to sit in a quiet space for 5 minutes and let go of all thoughts and stressors. Imagine a peaceful place and just breathe.
2. Do something that is healthy, uplifting and restoring for 30 minutes (e.g., exercise, read a book, dance to music, meditate, watch a good television program, take a power nap, etc.)
3. Recite the following out loud: *Any change is possible if I put my heart and mind to it. Only I can change my life. The power to change my life is within me right now.*



For professional treatment, self-help and other supports, call:
888-ADMIT-IT