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Move Over Scrooge: How the Hidden Addiction Can Really Ruin the Holidays

Most look forward to the holidays as a special time of year time for family and friends to enjoy together, and some also take the time to deepen their faith and spirituality. However, for those suffering from gambling addiction, the experience is completely different. What used to be an annual celebration becomes a looming threat where social and financial pressures peak.

Problem gambling is known as the hidden addiction for a reason. Not only are there no physical signs common with substance abuse – no “card marks” on the arms, no “roulette breath”, no “dice eyes”, and no saturation point – individuals addicted to gambling are also working overtime to conceal a growing mountain of secrets. This becomes increasingly challenging with the abundance of social activity and reconnections common during the holidays, leading to stress and anxiety for the compulsive gambler. As those suffering from gambling disorder often rely on gambling as a coping mechanism, they may also seek ways to gamble to escape the increased stress of the holidays, which itself can bring about family conflict as well as the attention and scrutiny they feared in the first place.

Increased financial pressures are another powerful force at play during the holidays. Gifts, travel, and time off work all place strain on the problem gambler's already vulnerable accounts and balances. Loved ones may have no idea about the family's dire financial situation or the gambling problem until the gambler's credit card gets declined when trying to pay for the holiday meal! Needless to say, the hidden addiction can abruptly transform seasonal cheer into an emotional crisis and family emergency.

Can You Walk Away? No matter what's going on under the surface or what comes to light, the important thing to know is that help and hope are available all year round in Florida for both gamblers and loved ones by calling or texting the 888-ADMIT-IT HelpLine, including 24/7 throughout the holidays! Access live chat for the HelpLine and learn more at gamblinghelp.org.

This December, the FCCG is joining with the National Council on Problem Gambling and the International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors at McGill University for the Gift Responsibly Campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of gifting lottery tickets and scratch-offs to children in an effort to limit underage gambling and the risks that come with it.

In many cases, children get their hands on gambling products from adults who willingly gift these items. While the intention may be innocent, the associated risks are significant. Research shows the earlier a person is exposed to or participates in gambling during childhood, the more likely they are to develop a gambling problem later in life.[1]

This holiday season, join us and other organizations around the world to promote responsible gifting and gambling. We all share a responsibility to look out for the next generation. Lottery products are never appropriate gifts for children! Learn more at gamblinghelp.org/gift-responsibly and share this page to spread the word.

References: 🔍

1. “[1] “GIFT RESPONSIBLY CAMPAIGN.” National Council on Problem Gambling, 18 Oct. 2023, <https://www.ncpgambling.org/programs-resources/gift-responsibly-campaign/>.