

888-ADMIT-IT HelpLine Resource:

Compulsive Gambling- The Addiction

For Gamblers, Older Adult Gamblers, and Loved Ones

Compulsive gambling is a progressive behavior disorder in which an individual has a psychologically uncontrollable preoccupation and urge to gamble. This results in excessive gambling and the loss of time and money. The gambling eventually compromises, disrupts, or destroys the gambler's personal life, family relationships or vocational pursuits. The cardinal features are emotional dependence on gambling, loss of control, and interference with normal functioning.

THE HIDDEN DISEASE

Compulsive gambling is called the Hidden Disease because people who have the disease look normal. They do not stumble around or slur their words. Compulsive gambling is, however, just as debilitating as alcohol or drug addiction.

THE FOUR PHASES OF PROGRESSIVE COMPULSIVE GAMBLING

The Winning Phase-

In the beginning, the compulsive gambler usually 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. It is important to note, however, that some never experience this phase and pass directly on to the following stages of progression.

The Losing Phase-

During this period, the compulsive gambler thinks only about gambling. Personality changes begin to develop. Lies, money borrowing, and cover-ups are common. The gambler can no longer control the gambling, and relationships with family, friends and employers deteriorate.

The Desperation Phase-

The gambler can no longer pay debts and looks for bailouts that could be legal or illegal. The time spent gambling is increased as the gambler becomes obsessed with getting even. As the "chase" continues, the gambler panics at the prospect that the "action" will stop. There are often feelings of remorse and hopelessness. Loss of good standing in the community or deteriorating reputation due to gambling may be accompanied by thoughts of suicide.

The Hopeless Phase-

At this point, serious ramifications begin to occur, which may seem irreparable. There are often arrests, divorce, alcohol or other substance abuse, emotional breakdowns and serious withdrawal symptoms. This type of destitution often leads the gambler to experience suicidal thoughts or attempts.