

FOCUS

Concerning People with Gambling Problems

Fall 2003

Up Close & Personal



Hooked at a Young Age

The anonymous e-mail was short and to the point: "Your son is gambling heavily and he is going to lose everything." For several moments, Joyce, a fictitious name to protect anonymity, sat there staring at the computer screen in utter disbelief.

This had to be a prank, she finally concluded. Her nineteen-year-old son, Carl, not his real name, was away from home attending one of Florida's state universities and there was no way he would have the time, the money or the inclination to get into that kind of trouble. Or was there? An ill-defined something in the back of Joyce's mind nagged at her.

Although the sender's e-mail address was unfamiliar, she fired off an indignant response challenging the message's contents and demanding to know who would be writing such trash about her son. Minutes later, the answers flooded back over the Internet in overwhelming and undeniable detail.

"I was floored," Joyce said, "when I realized that the person I was in touch with was Carl's best friend in college. He sent me a copy of an e-mail from my son that showed he was so deeply in debt from Internet sports gambling that he was writing bad checks, had stolen a girl's credit card and had even accumulated twenty-five credit cards, all charged to the hilt. It was so unbelievable! But then again it wasn't, really. When he was seventeen, Carl had stolen \$5,000 from his father and me in order to pay off gambling debts. We found out that he had somehow been getting into the dog track and was betting heavily in high school."

Immediately Joyce called her son who predictably denied everything. Being the woman of action that she is, the distraught mother then contacted her husband and found a trained gambling counselor associ-

ated with the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. Within a short time, an intervention forced Carl into admitting that he had a real problem and agreeing to go to Gambler's Anonymous as well as to professional counseling.



"My husband and I always thought we were being such good parents by sending our son money whenever he needed it," Joyce continued. "But that came to a screeching halt when we attended Gam-Anon meetings and listened to our counselor. Suddenly we realized that money is like a drug to Carl and just bailing him out would do nothing but keep the cycle going. So, without mom and dad to take care of things, he got a job and finally graduated from high school. Now he's even working on his master's degree but it will take him years to pay off those thousands of dollars in debts."

"Your son is gambling heavily and he is going to lose everything."

When asked if she could trace Carl's gambling urges back any further than his high school years, Joyce said, "Sure, now I can. Hindsight is such a great teacher, isn't it? You know, even as a small child Carl loved it when I would give him lottery scratch off tickets as rewards. If I had only known how early a young person can get hooked, maybe I would have done things differently."

Gambling Problems?
Yours? A friend's?
A family member's?

Call the FCCG 24-hour
HelpLine
1-888-ADMIT-IT
(1-888-236-4848)