

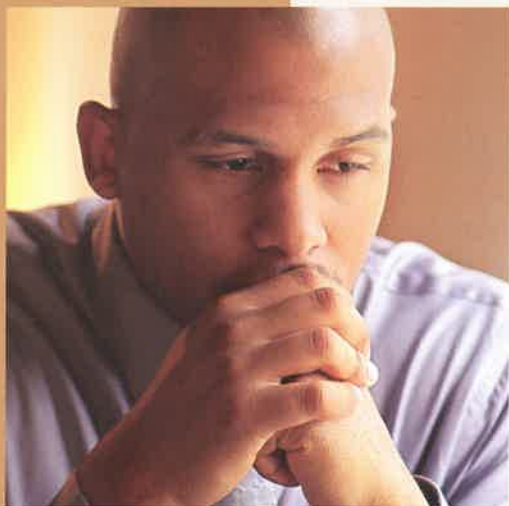


Up Close & Personal

The Vacant Stare

Like drug addiction and alcoholism, compulsive gambling is an equal opportunity

disease. It welcomes all comers regardless of sex, age, race, ethnicity, education, wealth or status. Alex found that out as he stared into a mirror a couple of years ago and finally realized that he desperately needed help. In that moment, it became clear to him that his intellect, knowledge and advanced college degrees were no protection against his own inner frailties.



"I had been on a three month gambling binge," Alex recalls now, "and didn't have enough money left for the dollar slot machines. That last morning in the casino hotel room when I looked in the mirror and saw the vacant stare of an addict, I knew something had to change. I could either deal with what I had become or lose myself entirely. The very frightening and unacceptable alternatives were prison, insanity or death."

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were prison, insanity
or death."*

That single, final gambling experience cost Alex \$70,000. But, it was simply the last chapter in a long story in which he describes his behavior with words like, "lying," "cheating," and "stealing." "I was so hooked on

those slot machines," he says, "that my car just seemed to drive itself to the casino; I couldn't leave until I had lost everything."

Fortunately, Alex's response to the image in the mirror was to find a trained gambling therapist, join Gamblers Anonymous (GA) and eventually enter an in-patient gambling treatment facility. "Once I got into quality recovery," he says, "things really began to change. Suddenly I realized that I was spiritually bankrupt; my intellect wasn't going to cure this illness and obviously it had a lot to do with my emotions and feelings."

In fact, Alex is now able to trace his illness back 10 to 15 years before he started gambling compulsively. "What became clear," he explains, "is that I was covering up my feelings using slot machines as an anesthetic. It wasn't really about the money and gambling, it was all about who I was down deep. Truly I would not have the solid recovery that I now have today without the help of all the professionals who really understand the disease of compulsive gambling. After so many years, I finally feel at peace with myself. All of that help literally saved my life."

Even as he experiences the personal joy of recovery, Alex thinks of the other compulsive gamblers who are still stuck in their illness. "I wish everyone could obtain the type of help that I've gotten," he says. "There are so many people out there just like me. If only they could look into a mirror as I did and really see the horrific reality of what they have become, where they could end up . . . but without that first step, all the help in the world doesn't do very much good."



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

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