Gambling

We now live in a society that openly encourages gambling. Most states have lotteries, many have established sites for legal casino gambling, and the Internet has made gambling accessible to almost everyone. The increased media coverage of sporting events has also contributed to a significant increase in sports betting in the United States. While most people handle recreational gambling in a controlled way, for many it can become an overwhelming addiction. In recent years, gambling has become recognized as a national problem. In particular, there has been a growing concern about gambling among youth and college students.

Some Facts about College Student Gambling

1. Most people that gamble, do it in a controlled way; for 15-20% it may create some problems in their lives
2. 5% of adults and 8% of those under 21 are compulsive gamblers.
3. Approximately 7 million youth under 18 gamble; 4-7% of them meet criteria for problem gambling.
4. Based upon a 1997 study, 68% of Texas college students gambled within the previous year.
5. Of the 68%, half participated in the lottery; nearly 1/5 gambled in casinos.
6. 5% of Texas college students report betting weekly or more.
7. A 1995 survey found problem or pathological gambling in 8% of young adults 18-24 (traditional college age range).
8. Problem/compulsive gamblers are disproportionately represented among males, fraternity/sorority members, binge drinkers, alcoholics, drug abusers, youth, those obsessed with video games

Compulsive gambling

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, the outcome of which is loss of productive time and money. Unless treated, the gambling will reach the point where it compromises, disrupts, and then destroys the gambler’s personal life, family relationships, and school and vocational pursuits.

Stages of Compulsive Gambling

1. Winning Phase (1-3 years) Gambling wins enhance self-image and ego. Losses are rationalized as temporary bad luck. The gambler feels intense excitement and identifies with being a winner.
2. Losing Stage Losses outweigh wins and all gains are wiped out. The gambler begins to chase losses (gamble in order to get even). He/she will borrow money, sell possessions to get gambling resources in the belief that losses can be won back.
3. Desperation Stage Compulsive gamblers think only about gambling. They may exhibit visible personality changes. They are driven. Gambling takes priority over work, school, family, and other life aspects. They will pile up sever debts that create more life problems. They often experience sever mood swings and may commit crimes to get gambling money. Compulsive gamblers do not see a future without gambling. Suicide may be considered as a way out.

Are You A Compulsive Gambler?

On this Compulsive Gambling Questionnaire most compulsive gamblers will answer “yes” to at least seven of these questions.

- Do you lose time from school or work due to gambling?
- Have your grades dropped because of gambling?
• Have you gambled at school?
• Is gambling making your home or personal life unhappy?
• Is gambling affecting your reputation?
• Is gambling the most exciting thing you do?
• Does your life center on sports related events or literature?
• Have references to gambling or gambling language increased in your language and/or conversation?
• Do you gamble to escape worry or trouble?
• Has gambling caused a decrease in your ambition or efficiency?
• Have you ever felt remorse after gambling?
• Have you ever been reluctant to use gambling money for normal expenditures?
• Do you ever gamble longer than you planned?
• Do you ever borrow to finance your gambling?
• Have you ever sold any real or personal property to finance your gambling?
• Have you ever committed or considered committing an illegal act to finance gambling?
• Does gambling cause you to have difficulty sleeping?
• Do you often gamble until your last dollar is gone?
• After a win, do you have a strong urge to win more?
• After losing, do you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses?
• Do arguments, disappointments, or frustrations create within you an urge to gamble?
• Do you have an urge to celebrate good fortune by a few hours of gambling?
• Have you ever considered suicide as a way of solving your gambling related problems?

**Why Students Gamble**

• Students are not afraid to take risks
• Increased campus proximity to casinos
• It’s entertainment
• The excitement of taking road trips to casinos
• The promise of quick riches
• Fascination with the stroke of luck
• Natural adrenaline-induced high
• Availability of easy credit
• Accessibility of ATM machines
• Free alcohol in casinos

**Recognizing Gambling Problems among Your Friends and Loved Ones**

• Unexplained absences from school or classes.
• Sudden drop in grades.
• Change of personality.
• Possession of a large amount of money; brags about winnings.
• An unusual interest in newspapers, magazines or periodicals having to do with horseracing.
• An intense interest in gambling conversations.
• Exaggerated display of money and/or material possessions?
• Visible changes in behavior (e.g. mood changes, behavior problems, etc.)
• Increased use of gambling language, including the word “bet” in conversation.
How You Can Help Friends and Loved Ones

- Verify that the person may have a gambling problem with a mutual friend or relative.
- Tell the person that you care about him or her.
- Tell the person what he or she has done that has raised your concern and how you feel.
- Be willing to listen to what the person has to say.
- Tell the person what you’d like to see him or her do, including:
  1. setting limits on gambling
  2. talking to another trusted person
  3. getting professional help
- Tell the person what you are willing to do. This may include:
  1. being available to talk again
  2. assisting in finding help
- Do not enable by lending money or helping to get gambling resources.

Where You Can Get Help

San Antonio Gamblers Anonymous meetings [www.texasga.org/id29.html](http://www.texasga.org/id29.html)
Texas Gamblers Anonymous [www.texasga.org/](http://www.texasga.org/)

Source: Texas State University Counseling Center