



## How Can You Keep Gambling from Becoming a Problem?

### What is Gambling?

We gamble when we risk something in the hope of gaining something more in return. Usually, gambling is done in the form of a “game.” For example, when a group of people put money or something that is important to them into a “pot.” The pot is the prize that the players hope to win. Each player in the game risks losing what they put into the pot.

Popular gambling games in Inuit communities include bingos, lotteries, Nevada tickets and card games such as *patik* and Texas Hold'em. These games are usually played for positive and socially accepted reasons such as fundraising events, to pass time, or as social gatherings.

### When is Gambling a Problem?

Gambling is not a problem if it is done for fun and if each gambler is in control of themselves. Gambling is a problem if it starts to interfere with relationships and other responsibilities such as school,

employment, finances, parenting, or proper communication with people.

Problem gambling can turn into pathological gambling. This is when a person thinks a lot about gambling, becomes restless and irritable or even violent because of urges to gamble.

### Is Gambling Addictive?

A definition of addiction is: a recurring urge by a person to take part in a specific activity, even though there are harmful results affecting the person's health, mental

state or social life.<sup>1</sup> Gambling can be addictive and it has many of the same characteristics as a substance addiction. We know this by people's experience, and by research on a chemical called “dopamine.” Dopamine is a chemical in the brain that makes a person “feel good” when it is released.

When someone uses drugs like cocaine, dopamine is produced in the brain in unnatural amounts and makes the person feel very good or “high” for a little while. Gambling also changes our dopamine levels and because of this, a gambling addiction can be as powerful as an addiction to cocaine or other drugs.

Random (unexpected) rewards – like winning a gambling bet – have been shown to release high levels of dopamine and create a sense of excitement and happiness. This soon wears off as dopamine levels drop,

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► Talk to friends and family about making positive changes and plan it out together.

<sup>1</sup> This definition is adapted from the Wikipedia Web site located at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Addiction>



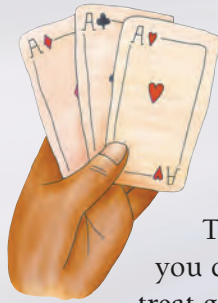
and the person may crave playing again to get that same feeling back.

## What are the Effects of Gambling Problems?

- Money problems: problem gamblers can lose their jobs, their interest in productive activities such as hunting and working, and may not have money for food and rent.
- Family problems: serious gambling problems can lead to partner violence and abuse, telling lies, and neglect of children. Violence and abuse, in turn, can lead to family members dropping out of school, or becoming attracted to gambling or substance abuse themselves.
- Depression and suicide: there is

increasing evidence that depression and suicidal thoughts and attempts are linked to problem gambling.

- Crime: serious gambling problems can lead to crimes such as stealing money or credit cards, forging cheques, and theft from homes or local businesses.



## How Can You Keep Gambling from Becoming a Problem?

There are positive steps that you can take to prevent and treat gambling problems. Protect yourself – be prepared and be in control:

- Avoid exposing children to gambling and make sure they are in a safe place if you are going to gamble.

- Set a money limit: before you go, decide how much money you are going to spend on gambling and only take that amount with you.
- Set a time limit: decide on how much time you want to spend gambling and stick to it. Don't let others change your mind.
- Be confident that walking away when you reach these limits is a real sign of courage and maturity.
- Take on other activities: it's important to do other things so that gambling won't become a big part of your life.
- Talk to friends and family about making positive changes and plan it out together.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

If you think that you or someone you know has a gambling problem, get help. Contact your local addictions program, mental health worker, the health centre or social services for counselling and advice, and ask family and friends for their support.

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## OTHER RESOURCES:

Directory of Canada Gambling Addiction Treatment Programs: <http://canadadrugrehab.ca/Gambling-Addiction-Treatment.html>;  
Telephone: 1-866-487-9010

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, information on gambling counselling: [http://camh.net/Care\\_Treatment/Program\\_Descriptions/Problem\\_Gambling/index.html](http://camh.net/Care_Treatment/Program_Descriptions/Problem_Gambling/index.html)

Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who help each other recover from their gambling problems. [www.gamblersanonymous.org/mtgdirCAN.html](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/mtgdirCAN.html)