



ProblemGambling.ca

TREATMENT PROGRAM

for

People Affected by Problem Gambling

How to quit or reduce your gambling

PERSONAL WORKBOOK

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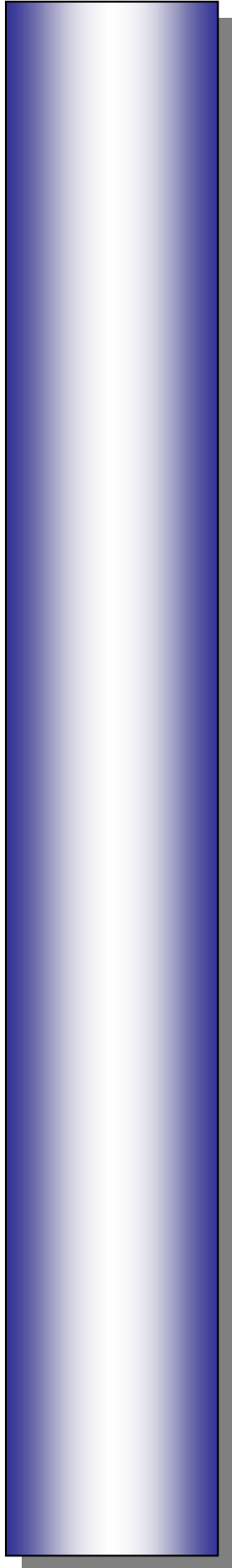


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WELCOME

You may have been thinking about doing something about your gambling for a while. Or, something may have happened to you recently as a result of your gambling that has prompted you to decide that this is the right time to take action. You may also be fed up with the stress that gambling can cause and want to get a firm handle on this habit. There are many reasons why people may decide to change a habit but usually it generally has to do with a lot of bad things happening as a result of the habit. In the case of gambling, this usually means having very serious problems with money, conflicts with the important people in your life (usually your family and close friends), and a damaging effect on your emotional and physical health.

Even though you may be worried about your gambling and feel that it has gotten out of hand, it is still not always easy to ask for help, or even know where to get the right kind of help. You might have felt too embarrassed to ask for professional help before, or you might not have thought you needed to get help. It is also possible that you thought you would try to solve this problem on your own.

This treatment program will suggest to you a number of techniques and strategies to help you cut back your gambling to a healthy level or, if you prefer, to quit gambling entirely. You will find this program helpful even if you have just begun to experience problems as a result of your gambling but did not think it was serious enough to seek intensive treatment, go to Gamblers Anonymous, or attend a gambling treatment centre. If this is the case, then completing this program may prevent you from developing a more serious problem in the future.

FEATURES AND BENEFITS OF THIS TREATMENT PROGRAM

This program differs from some other treatment programs for gamblers in the following ways:

- Studies have shown that most clients attend treatment an average of 6 times, which is why this Program has been structured so that the bulk of the treatment can be completed in about 6 weeks.
- This Workbook summarizes the most effective ways to help someone trying to overcome a gambling habit. As you may have noticed, each of the Treatment Topics includes a short description, some information for you to think about, and an exercise for you to work on.

ABOUT EACH OF THE SIX TREATMENT TOPICS

We believe that the material contained in this Workbook will go a long way towards helping you to make a change in your gambling behaviour. Here is a brief overview of what will be discussed in each session.

TREATMENT TOPIC ONE: SETTING GOALS

This first topic will ask you to define your goal with respect to gambling. Your goal will help guide your efforts throughout the program. We will provide outlines of 2 different types of goals, quitting gambling completely or cutting back. We will also provide you with some guidance as to which goal may be right for you.

TREATMENT TOPIC TWO: STRENGTHENING YOUR COMMITMENT

In this second topic, we want to strengthen your commitment to solving your gambling problem.

Many individuals who decide to change a habit that is causing them problems do so because of a crisis or a sudden avalanche of problems. While this may be very motivating at first, this type of motivation sometimes does not last very long. As a result, what seemed like a good idea at one time (that is, doing something about your gambling) may now seem less urgent or critical.

To help prevent this happening to you, this topic will help maximize your motivation to change your gambling by helping you to examine the role gambling has had in your life and its effects, both good and bad, in a very honest and open way. We also will explore some of your important personal values and the way gambling may have threatened them.

TREATMENT TOPIC THREE: TAKING ACTION

In Treatment Topic Three, we will discuss some practical ways for you to quickly make changes in your gambling behaviour. We know that you may already have done quite a bit on your own so this may be like a refresher for you. We will ask you to consider how you spend your free time, with whom you spend it, and your relationship to money. You can, and probably have already started to, make different decisions about how you live your life and spend your available free time and money. The goal of this session is to strengthen your efforts at changing your lifestyle so that gambling no longer fits in. Even if you have already stopped gambling, reading this section will serve as a good summary and review.

We will also discuss coping with urges, temptations and cravings, which most gamblers experience after cutting back or stopping. Since we know that urges and temptations can be a serious obstacle to your gambling goal, we will discuss ways of coping with them.

TREATMENT TOPIC FOUR: TRACKING YOUR THOUGHTS

We know that many gamblers develop strong beliefs about their chances of winning, how to win, how to avoid losing, and so on. These beliefs can be a serious problem in the long-term since they still provide the illusion that you may be able to eventually succeed at gambling. Even though you may cut back or stop entirely, these gambling thoughts and beliefs do not generally disappear on their own. They need to be discussed and directly treated.

In this topic we will look at specific beliefs and attitudes about gambling and winning that may apply to you, how to identify them, and what to do when they become a threat to your treatment goal.

TREATMENT TOPIC FIVE: HEALING RELATIONSHIPS

In this session, we examine the state of your relationships with the people you care about the most. As is true with any habit that has gotten out of control, you are not the only one who suffers. Many others can also be harmed, concerned, or in some way affected by gambling. As part of your recovery, it is important to take action to improve these relationships as much as possible. We know that this may take longer than can be done in a short treatment program. But by identifying it at this point, and being ready to do something about these relationships earlier rather than later, we hope to improve your success in controlling this habit and improving your quality of life.

TREATMENT TOPIC SIX: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The focus of the period until the 6th session will be to be on the lookout for any obstacles or hindrances that you encounter which get in the

way of sticking to your treatment goal or that are getting in the way of managing your gambling successfully.

Topic Six is an important session because it is a way of checking to see what is and isn't working for you. While the material in each section may sound very reasonable and helpful, sometimes applying it to your own situation may be difficult. You may find that the gambling habit is stronger than you thought or you find it hard to keep to your goal. Whatever the difficulty, this session will help you figure out how to get over these obstacles. If, however, everything is going very well, then you should summarize what *is* working and how to strengthen it.

PLEASE READ THIS IMPORTANT INFORMATION!

You have made a serious commitment to solving your gambling problem. *Congratulations!!* Looking ahead, your future without gambling (or with a responsible gambling goal) should look brighter and more hopeful. Unfortunately, many people affected by problem gambling often face a serious situation in which they owe money, a lot of money, as a result of their gambling. For some people this debt may seem overwhelming. It may take years of financial discipline to repay it or it may even be impossible to repay if your income is threatened (i.e., loss of job) or if your income is significantly lower than your debt. As a result, as you work on gaining control over your gambling, you may find yourself also becoming demoralized or depressed over the prospect of having to repay money that will take most of your working life to earn.

The feelings that this kind of situation can produce may have a strong impact on your motivation to continue to work on your gambling and your long-term recovery. You may feel that it is not worth working on your gambling since the situation may appear too hopeless or you may feel that gambling may be the only way that gives you a chance to solve the financial problems quicker.

Unresolved financial problems may also have a severe impact on the relationships with your family, on their emotional and physical health as well as on yours. This can be even more serious if your family is not fully aware of the extent of the financial difficulties and only later find out the true severity of the financial problem.

The dangers of not addressing these problems as early as possible is the real possibility of seeking out illegal means to repay the loan, asking money from individuals who may charge excessive interest rates, or turning to gambling as a way to 'fix' the problem. Any of these 'solutions' would, of course, worsen your financial problems and must be avoided.

Finally, some distraught gamblers are unable to see a way out of their problems. They carry with them a great deal of shame and guilt. They may be angry with themselves and be the subject of anger from others who have been affected by the gambling. The gambler may begin to believe there is no way out of the situation they find themselves in, and seriously consider the option of suicide. They may believe that this is the only option left to them. If you find yourself having these types of feelings, or if you have begun to consider hurting yourself, then it is very important that you speak to a professional counsellor or therapist, clergy, family physician or The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at 416.535.8501 as soon as possible to assist you past this crisis and work constructively towards solving this problem.

If you believe that you may be facing this kind of financial situation, then we highly recommend that you meet with a professional financial counsellor to discuss specific strategies to deal with such debt. We have provided you with information on credit counselling and where you can find it in your local area in Appendix A.