

## TAKING ACTION

## PROGRESS SINCE THE PREVIOUS TOPIC

**Ask yourself the following questions as you get ready to go through Treatment Topic Three:**

1. Are you meeting your gambling goal?

Yes     Mostly     No

2. If you are not meeting your goal, briefly describe what you think is getting in the way of achieving your goal:

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3. Have you made any changes to your goal since the previous Topic?

Yes     No

If your answer is Yes, describe how your goal has changed:

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## TAKING ACTION

### GAMBLING SITUATIONS

Gambling too much, for too long, or with too much money does not occur randomly, out of the blue. Like most of your behaviour, your decision to gamble too much after you have decided to stop or cut down may depend on specific situations and contexts. Some people gamble too much when they are seeking fun or excitement; others may decide to gamble when they want to win some money. For others, socializing is a big attraction to gambling, whereas others might gamble when they feel stressed or upset. In other cases, being tempted to gamble when there is a possibility of a big jackpot or just being in a gambling situation might lead you to decide to gamble.

If you are someone who is trying to cut down and control your gambling rather than stop altogether, then there are other types of situations that might lead you to gamble too much. This could include having more money available than would be wise, feeling stressed or upset, or being in a gambling situation where you find yourself influenced by others to keep on gambling. You can imagine that there are many challenges to keep yourself within safe gambling guidelines. That is why it is important for you to be aware of any situation (whether it is in your environment, or whether it is within yourself) that could lead you to stray from your decision to either stop gambling or only gamble moderately.

By being aware of these situations, you can plan effective responses and make different, healthier choices than you might have in the past. One thing we know about changing a habit is that awareness is very, very important. By awareness, we simply mean that you should be

quite knowledgeable about the factors that affect your decision to gamble.

- You should know when you are in a situation that may tempt you;
- You should know what might happen if you follow through on the temptation,
- You should know of alternative ways you have to respond to these situations and temptations.

Sometimes when we are really involved in a habit, we can become unaware about the factors that affect our gambling and how we react seems to be almost automatic and impulsive. We can feel like the habit is out of control. The truth is that we always have the option of controlling any habit or behaviour. If that was not true, this treatment program or any program couldn't help you. One of the best ways to begin to develop control over a habit is to become very aware of the specific situations and contexts in which the habit (or strong urges to do the habit) occurs. So awareness is a very healthy characteristic to develop.

The more that you know exactly about the situations that can affect your decision to gamble too much, the more power you gain over that behaviour. You now have an idea of what you may need to prepare for so that you do not find yourself either gambling (if you have decided to quit) or gambling past your limits.

In the next exercise, you will find 13 common types of situations that are frequently associated with gambling or the urge to gamble. We would like you to go through these thirteen situations and rate how much they would lead you to gamble too much or feel strong urges to gamble at the present time. We will examine each of these situations later on in this treatment topic and help you develop an effective coping response.

IMAGINE YOURSELF IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS.

AT THE PRESENT TIME, HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE, IN EACH SITUATION, TO GAMBLE TOO MUCH OR FEEL A VERY STRONG URGE OR TEMPTATION TO GAMBLE?

Please indicate your likelihood by circling a number for each situation.

SITUATION:	NEVER	RARELY	OFTEN	ALMOST ALWAYS
1. When I am feeling good.	1	2	3	4
2. When someone strongly encouraged me to bet.	1	2	3	4
3. When I am feeling stressed or unhappy.	1	2	3	4
4. When I am having conflicts with others.	1	2	3	4
5. When I have a strong urge to gamble.	1	2	3	4
6. When I lose money gambling and want to win it back.	1	2	3	4
7. When I was with others who wanted to gamble.	1	2	3	4
8. When I wanted to have some fun and excitement.	1	2	3	4
9. When I am short of money.	1	2	3	4
10. When I believed I could control my gambling.	1	2	3	4
11. When I feel confident about my gambling skills.	1	2	3	4
12. When I convinced myself that I was a new person and could make a few bets without going too far.	1	2	3	4
13. When I have money available.	1	2	3	4

## COPING WITH GAMBLING SITUATIONS

Like with any habit change, you will find yourself in situations that put you in a position where you have a choice to gamble or not. Even if you decide not to gamble, you may be quite tempted to and find yourself having strong urges to do so. If you have stopped gambling altogether then you are probably dealing with these kinds of situations already. If you have decided to cut down your gambling and are still in situations where you can gamble, then the challenge becomes one of playing within your limits and not being tempted to exceed them.

It is important to have some ready-made, effective coping strategies to make sure you stick to your treatment goal. In general, the most effective coping techniques are very practical, simple, and easy to do. There are two major ways or categories of coping that can help when you find yourself in a situation where you might normally gamble, or in a situation where you have a strong urge to gamble, or in a situation where you are making efforts to control your gambling but you are at risk to gamble excessively.

One way is focused on taking action, doing something concrete. This is called behavioural coping. This is generally the best way to deal with gambling situations and urges as it is action-oriented and directly related to the specific situation. But there are times when it is hard to take direct action or when doing so might create additional problems. In these situations you should be prepared to cope with the gambling situation by changing your perspective or the way you look at the situation. This is called mental coping. In many cases, you will use a combination of both behavioural coping and mental coping.

## BEHAVIOURAL COPING

As we mentioned before, *Behavioural Coping* is action-based problem solving. We recommend that you use behavioural coping as your first choice when dealing with gambling situations or strong urges to gamble. In behavioural coping, the emphasis is on doing something else, other than gambling, when you find yourself in a gambling situation. Behavioural coping also includes improving your overall lifestyle, who you spend time with, how you have fun, and how you spend your money.

Many of the ideas that we will share will be familiar to you since behavioural coping with gambling will resemble behavioural coping with any other habit or behaviour that you have ever faced. In Treatment Topic One, on page 42 we asked you to list all the ways you were going to achieve your gambling goal. Many of these were probably examples of behavioural coping.

Examples of behavioural coping include:

- Avoid the gambling situation to avoid urges and temptations:**
  - Make sure you are not in a situation where gambling can occur.
  - Change your travel habits if they take you past places where you may be tempted to gamble.
  - Do not go to the casino or racetrack or bingo hall or lottery kiosk if this is where you would gamble (or gamble too much)
  - Applying the principle of 'out of sight, out of mind', which works well in the early stages of changing a bad habit.
- If you have been frequenting casinos, consider the Self-Exclusion offered by the casino:**

- Request entry into this program so you can help yourself by making it illegal for you to enter any casino in Ontario and reduce the temptation to even go to a casino.
- Ask someone you know to support your efforts to (reduce or) not gamble:**
  - Identify key people whom you have an agreement with that you can call and receive immediate support if you find yourself strongly tempted to gamble.
  - Avoid going to gaming places alone where there may be greater temptation or opportunity to exceed your limits – for this reason, identifying a key trustworthy person who can accompany you would be very helpful.
- Avoid people with whom you would normally gamble (or gamble too much):**
  - Avoid socializing in gambling places. If you wish to see these friends or acquaintances, then it is not wise to do so in places where you could gamble or that might eventually lead to a gambling place (e.g., meeting friends for dinner but then deciding afterwards to go play slots).
  - Have a plan to remove yourself from gambling situations as quickly as possible if you find yourself going along with people who are intending to go gambling.
  - Learn to be assertive with people who might pressure you into gambling.
- Plan activities that do not include gambling:**
  - Enhance your lifestyle with more rewarding and gratifying activities that can replace some of the rewarding aspects of gambling.
  - Spend time with people who can enhance your leisure and recreational life.
- Start a new good habit or hobby based on your interests and passions.
- Do things you used to enjoy but have neglected as a result of gambling or other life situations.
- Manage your money to reduce the chance you might spend it gambling:**
  - Have a trusted person manage your money for a while if necessary. This would involve letting them have access to your money and having very limited access to your money. While this may be an unpleasant action to take, the need for it would be influenced by the severity of your gambling and the ability for easy availability of money to increase the chance of gambling or urges to do so.
  - Eliminate easy sources of money like credit and debit cards and require co-signatures on cheques.
  - Do not bring credit cards or cheques to places where you might gamble.
  - Plan any visits to gambling venues by deciding in advance what a reasonable amount of money would be to bring with you and letting someone whom you trust hold on to excess cash and any other sources of credit.
- Establish good relationships with people important to you:**
  - Spend more time with people who are supportive of your efforts to change your gambling, and whom you care about, whether they are family, friends or relatives. Just being with people you care about and who care about you will make a difference.
  - Work to repair relationships that have been strained or damaged by your gambling. We

will discuss more about this in Treatment Session 5.

- Demonstrate to those closest to you of your sincere intentions to do something about your gambling. This will go a long way towards bringing important people back into your life at a time when you may most need them.

## MENTAL COPING

When Behavioural Coping is not possible or not enough, then it is important to work with how you see things. Working with your gambling perceptions, thoughts and beliefs to help you deal with situations where you may be tempted to gamble is called mental coping. This includes anything you tell yourself in order to make sure that this gambling situation does not lead to gambling. Mental Coping is described sometimes as a kind of self-talk, using attitude change or creative thinking, to help you avoid either gambling at all or keeping within your controlled gambling guidelines.

Examples of mental coping include:

- Distract yourself from thinking about the gambling situation:**
  - Shift your mind away from thinking about the gambling situation. Leaving your attention focused on the gambling situation can increase the urge to gamble. Instead, learn to direct your mental focus on anything else other than gambling (or the desire to). This can be done by stimulating your senses in any way that is reasonable such as listening to music, concentrating on your senses, speaking to someone, fantasizing, concentrating on other tasks that you may need to do, and so on.
  - Repeatedly interrupt any thought patterns that encourage you to gamble (this includes

thoughts that you should gamble more money or longer than you know is healthy for you) even though the thoughts keep returning.

- Engage in any mild activity (including sports and exercise) since this tends to interrupt any ongoing mental activity.
- Recall the damage gambling has done to your life:**
  - Remember all the reasons why you are trying to change your gambling habit.
  - Imagine what might happen if you let gambling back into your life (or gamble too much).
  - Remind yourself that you always have a choice as to whether you actually gamble or not regardless of how tempting or desirable gambling might be.
- Come up with alternative activities other than gambling:**
  - Shift your mind away from gambling thoughts and focus on other things you could do instead.
  - Challenge yourself to find another way to spend your time or money other than gambling.
  - Identify people who you know would help you avoid gambling at all (or too much if you are planning to gamble moderately).
- Reason with yourself so that you do not let the gambling situation lead you to gamble:**
  - Become aware of all the negative effects that gambling has brought you.
  - Remind yourself of the virtual impossibility of really winning.
  - Realize any benefits of gambling that you may be thinking about with all of the benefits of NOT gambling.

**Imagine the bad things that could happen if you continue to gamble:**

- Imagine all of the effects on your financial situation, your emotional health, key people in your life, and your self-esteem that would almost certainly occur if you gamble (or gamble too mu

The *Mental Coping* and *Behavioural Coping* responses discussed above should be viewed as additions to whatever you may already be doing and finding effective. Whatever technique and/or strategy you are using, if you practice them often, you will certainly have a major impact on your gambling (and your life) over the long-term.

To put this into practice, in the next exercise we will ask you to apply Mental and Behavioural Coping to the gambling situations you have checked off as being important to you at the present time. Try to come up with your best ways to cope with these thoughts using both mental (thinking) and behavioural (action) coping techniques. You can use some of the ideas that were described earlier or ones that you personally prefer.

Once completed, this exercise is like an action plan for you to rely on as you proceed with your gambling recovery. However, none of these exercises will be useful if you do not make a strong effort to apply them when you are in the face of these situations. Like any habit change, it takes practice, practice, and more practice!!!

Complete only those situations from page 42 that you checked would “OFTEN” or “ALMOST ALWAYS” increase the chance that you will gamble, gamble too much, or trigger an urge to gamble at the present time.

SITUATION 1:

WHEN I AM FEELING GOOD

1a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when “*you feel good*”?

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1b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when “*you feel good*”?

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SITUATION 2:

WHEN SOMEONE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED ME TO BET.

2a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“someone strongly encourages you to bet”*?

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2b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“someone strongly encourages you to bet”*?

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SITUATION 3:

WHEN I AM FEELING STRESSED OR UNHAPPY.

3a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you are feeling stressed or unhappy”*?

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3b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you are feeling stressed or unhappy”*?

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SITUATION 4:

WHEN I AM HAVING CONFLICTS WITH OTHERS.

4a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you are having conflicts with others”*?

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4b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you are having conflicts with others”*?

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SITUATION 5:

WHEN I HAVE A STRONG URGE TO GAMBLE.

5a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“your urges to gamble are strong”*?

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5b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“your urges to gamble are strong”*?

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SITUATION 6:

WHEN I LOSE MONEY GAMBLING AND WANT TO WIN IT BACK.

6a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you lose money gambling and want to win it back”*?

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6b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you lose money gambling and want to win it back”*?

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SITUATION 7:

WHEN I WAS WITH OTHERS WHO WANTED TO GAMBLE.

7a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you are with others who want to gamble”*?

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7b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you are with others who want to gamble”*?

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SITUATION 8:

WHEN I WANTED TO HAVE SOME FUN AND EXCITEMENT.

8a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you want to have some fun and excitement”*?

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8b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you want to have some fun and excitement”*?

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SITUATION 9:

WHEN I FEEL OVERWHELMED WITH WORRIES ABOUT MY DEBTS.

9a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you are feeling overwhelmed with worries about your debts”*?

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9b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you are feeling overwhelmed with worries about your debts”*?

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SITUATION 10:

WHEN I BELIEVED I COULD CONTROL MY GAMBLING.

10a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you believe you can control your gambling”*?

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10b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you believe you can control your gambling”*?

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SITUATION 11:

WHEN I FELT CONFIDENT ABOUT MY GAMBLING SKILLS.

11a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you feel confident about your gambling skills”*?

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11b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you feel confident about your gambling skills”*?

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SITUATION 12:

WHEN I CONVINCED MYSELF THAT I WAS A NEW PERSON AND  
COULD MAKE A FEW BETS WITHOUT GOING TOO FAR.

12a. What kinds of behavioural coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you convince yourself that you are a new person and can make a few bets without going too far”*?

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12b. What kinds of mental coping techniques will help you to overcome the urge to gamble when *“you convince yourself that you are a new person and can make a few bets without going too far”*?

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