

UNRESOLVED GAMBLING TREATMENT ISSUES:

PART I: THE GAMBLING CRISIS

We know that recovery from a gambling disorder is a process where the gambler makes a decision to surrender to the gambling addiction and to maintain that choice. But at the same time he/she has to face the loss of the gambling.

Gambling provides our clients with action, and is a method of dealing with stress and avoiding unpleasant events. The loss of gambling is a complicated and significant life-changing event that will bring on grief responses that are similar to those seen in responses to other types of major losses.

When recovering gamblers choose to give up what has become the central part of their lives, they must confront and manage two crises: (1) the crisis caused by their addiction and at the same time, (2) deal with the crisis caused by the loss of their active addiction.

There are many reasons why some people are more attracted to gambling than other people and why some of them become addicted to it. But it really doesn't matter why they become addicted. What does matter is that the gambler gets many benefits from gambling. It's important to understand just what it is that each gambler gets out of gambling, because that is what is lost when the gambling stops.

One of the first things a gambler learns after developing an addiction to gambling is how to use the gambling as a way of dealing with crisis and stress. While gambling, the gambler feels temporary relief from pressures outside the gambling arena, and gambling becomes the preferred method of dealing with stress.

ESCAPE

The escalation of gambling can be an attempt to avoid financial problems. For instance, as a spouse/partner/parent/adult child becomes increasingly upset over compounding financial problems, the gambler may spend more time gambling to avoid the domestic stress. Then, of course, when he/she stops gambling this method of escape is lost.

LOW SELF ESTEEM

A gambler frequently has low self-esteem and low self-worth. The magical feelings of gambling can give him/her feelings of power and being in control. There are many other aspects of a gambler's life that are also caught up in this vicious cycle. The gambler is stuck and confused when he/she tries to fix or resolve this crisis. He/she doesn't realize that it is self-induced and self-escalating. All he/she knows is that gambling will provide temporary relief.

So, when the gambler finally does realize the crisis, he/she still doesn't want to admit that the crisis is caused by the gambling and will attempt other rationalizations. One of the most popular rationalizations blames shortage of money for causing the problem. The gambler thinks that if he/she just had more money, bills would get paid and bookies satisfied. This kind of irrational thinking leads to bailouts and/or illegal activities.

The gambler, just like the alcoholic or drug addict, doesn't want to admit that his/her favorite activity is causing serious problems, and that the solution to the problems is to stop gambling. So now, he/she

is caught between two sets of crises. One crisis is caused by the gambling and the other crisis will occur when he/she stops gambling.

In Part II, we will discuss “The Meaning of Money”.