

UNRESOLVED GAMBLING TREATMENT ISSUES:

PART II: THE MEANING OF MONEY

To better understand why a person with a gambling disorder fears and avoids the idea of not gambling, it is important to look deeper into what happens when your client decides to abstain from gambling, besides the obvious loss of action and a stress-coping mechanism as explained in Part I of this series.

Functions served by gambling that are lost through abstinence may be placed into four major categories: social, psychological, existential and the avoidance negative affectivity.

But before we go over some of those losses, I want to talk about one loss that often may not be addressed in treatment at all.

THE MEANING OF MONEY

I think it's safe to say that the cessation of gambling is probably the biggest loss for the gambler. But I also think that money and what money means to the gambler is a close second.

As a therapist, it's relevant and necessary to examine your own attitudes and emotions regarding money. But it's just as crucial if not more, to know what money means to your clients. It's important to understand the emotional implications of money for each gambler. To those unaffected by problem gambling, money might mean security, being able to pay bills, going on vacation, buying nice things for the family. However, some gamblers use money as a way to gain acceptance, status and power. Others gamble money away as a means of expressing anger and hurt, and feelings of being unloved.

Finding the unique meaning of money for each of your clients is essential their recovery.

MONEY AND EMOTIONS:

Again, it's important to remember that money might mean one thing to us, but it means something very different to the gambler. The motivations behind the desire to acquire money are so unique to each individual that we need to make sure that we truly understand what our client's financial structure is, and what he/she feels will be lost when the gambling stops.

Freedom—Having a great deal of money can mean freedom for the gambler. If he/she can just make that big hit, everyone will back off and then he/she can do whatever he/she wants to do.

Money can give the gambler the feeling of power and control. The gambler who feels insecure may try to dominate other people with his/her wealth and the ensuing belief that wealth can control other people. It can become a narcissistic issue in terms of evaluating him/herself against others in an attempt to control and dominate them.

Money can give the gambler the feeling of security. When there is enough money, the gambler will feel safe and capable of protecting him/herself. What is not understood is that he/she is still susceptible to loss and grief no matter how much money there is.

Money can give the gambler the feeling of independence. Independence is like freedom. But when independence gets extended in a negative direction, it moves into the concept of "Now that I have money, I don't need anyone else". I can take care of

myself. I don't have to listen to other people—I can isolate myself and do whatever I want to. Everyone just leave me alone—I am fine!" This type of thinking should be addressed in treatment. Let your client know that no matter how much money one has, one still needs other people—everyone needs that human connection.

Competence—When some gamblers win big they can move into the sense that “Now that I have won some big money maybe people will start to realize just how smart I am”. But, that’s just an irrational thought that helps deal with incompetence or low self-esteem.

Money can mean love. Many gamblers feel that if they win and give some of the winnings to a loved one, it proves and confirms the love. Saying “I love you,” is not necessary. In the mind of the gambler, the handing over of the precious money (winning) is a demonstration of love.

So, in summary, therapists need to understand that money has many different meanings for the diverse population of gamblers. Understand that what money means to you doesn't necessarily mean the same thing to your gambling client.

Part III will address social and psychological losses.