

UNRESOLVED GAMBLING ISSUES IN TREATMENT

PART III

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL LOSSES

Significant social losses will also accompany abstinence. Most gamblers gravitate friendships that center around gambling, so as their gambling increases, they tend to withdraw from other friendships. When the gambling stops, the friendships with their gambling friends will also stop. They have already lost the friendships they had before they started to gamble, and now they are losing their gambling friends too. This is the time when the gambler is most in need of support. The immediate family and other relatives have been hurt and are angry and don't trust the gambler any more. There might even be relatives who are active gamblers and feel threatened by the abstinence of the recovering gambler. This is one of the reasons Gamblers Anonymous (G.A.) is so important. G.A. provides much needed social support and may be the only support that the gambler has right now. But, we also have to remember that even with the support of G.A., the pain of lost friendships and the sense of isolation may still remain.

Recovering gamblers may also undergo a loss of their own social image. Many gamblers are very concerned with how they believe others perceive them, so this loss can be an important one. Many gamblers see themselves as "Big Shots" and now they have to admit to others that they cannot control their gambling and are afraid they will be looked at as "Losers."

Gamblers can also develop a variety of psychological benefits from gambling and these benefits can be lost through abstinence.

There are two related psychological issues that arise when treating gamblers. One is the conflict between dependency needs and the need for independence and the other involves feelings of inadequacy.

Gambling provides a solution to the gamblers independence/dependence conflict. The gambler depends on gambling to provide the action that is craved and to meet many other needs as well.

While gambling, your client can easily maintain an illusion of independence and control. The gambler feels free to choose. “Hit me, I want the four horse in the 5th race, or I want the Giants plus 6”. He/she feels powerful and confident while making these decisions. These illusions of independence are lost when the gambler stops gambling.

They must also give up the ways they have used gambling to defend against anxieties. It becomes the activity around which gamblers organize their lives. It provides structure, continuity and meaning.

Gamblers confirm their existence and affirm their worth through gambling. Gambling serves to counteract feelings of “Nothingness or Emptiness”. It replaces these negative feelings with feelings of importance, power and control. It gives them the sense of predicting the future, controlling fate and defying the odds, and all that is lost when they stop gambling.

The next loss is you! You have built a strong relationship with your client. He/she has learned to trust and depend on you. He/she has told you things that he/she might not have told anyone else. You’re the one that’s been there when things got rough and you have come through for him/her, time and time again. Now it is time for the

gambler to leave the nest. You have to let your client know that you'll always be there if there's a need return to treatment. It's also the time to reinforce the importance of Gamblers Anonymous. Hopefully by now he/she has a sponsor and a G.A. support network of other members who have walked in his/her shoes. Whatever the recovering gambler is facing, whatever the problem, I feel confident saying that he/she can walk into any G.A. meeting and find someone who has dealt with the same issue.

Part IV of this series will look at the importance of: "Grieving the Loss."