

## UNDERSTANDING RECREATIONAL GAMBLING

- Recreational gambling or social gambling refers to someone who gambles for fun. It does not result in any negative consequences for the person in terms of time and money spent.
- Recreational gamblers are able to gamble within their means and can stop gambling at any time.
- It is important to know that not all gamblers are addicts. Some can plan and enjoy the occasional trip to a gambling venue for a weekend of fun and relaxation.

## UNDERSTANDING PROBLEM GAMBLING

- Problem gambling occurs when someone continues to invest time and money on gambling despite experiencing harmful negative consequences.
- For problem gamblers, the act of gambling is a compulsive activity which they have little or no control over. They think about it all the time and even cling on to the fantasy of winning.
- Losses represent catastrophic events and attempts to recoup losses eventually become an obsession. For some, gambling is also used as an outlet to deal with stressful situations.



If you have any questions or would like to learn more about problem gambling or our support group programmes, please contact us.

### NATIONAL ADDICTIONS MANAGEMENT SERVICE

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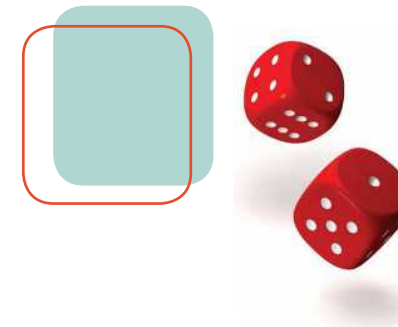
All Addictions Helpline: 6-RECOVER (6-732 6837)  
Problem Gambling Helpline: 1800-666 8668

[www.nams.sg](http://www.nams.sg)

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## Understanding Your GAMBLING Addiction



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ADDICTIONS  
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## WHAT IS GAMBLING?

*Gambling involves taking risks with something of value (usually money) or an activity or event in which the outcome is uncertain. Generally, the primary intent of gambling is to win additional money and/or items. Some examples of gambling include jackpot, lottery, horse betting and soccer betting.*



### Recreational Gambling

Able to stop gambling at any time

### Problem Gambling

Great difficulty in stopping – gambler has little or no control

### Common Signs of Problem Gambling

- Betting more than one intended or can afford to
- Chasing losses
- Lying to family and friends about the extent of gambling and related problems
- Missing work and family commitments due to gambling
- Thinking about gambling most of the time

### Common Myths and Distorted Beliefs About Gambling

#### • Illusion of control

The belief that one has the ability to predict outcomes and that skills and experience improves one's chances of winning, e.g. I have the winning formula, I know the ways of the game

#### • Superstitions

The belief that certain rituals, number combinations or special objects can improve and enhance one's luck in gambling.

#### • Misinterpretations

Losses are seen as near misses and a sign indicating that a win is coming, e.g. betting on the 4D combination of 1233 and the winning number turns out to be 1234, or getting two apples and a banana in the jackpot slot machine).



### How Do Such Distorted Beliefs Develop?

A common theme underlying all these distortions is the failure to recognise or appreciate the independence of events in the world of gambling.

People, in general, are uncomfortable with the unknown and would try as best as they can to derive reliable patterns and trends to make sense of things that are happening around them.

This usually works in the real world as one can quite accurately and reliably predict an outcome based on another event, e.g. if the sky is darkening, it is probably going to rain; if my boss looks upset, he/she is probably in a bad mood and I had better wait for a better time before discussing things with him/her. These distortions (especially superstitions) may also have its roots in one's cultural beliefs.

### What Effects Do Distorted Beliefs Have on Gamblers?

Many studies have shown that distorted beliefs about gambling often play an important role in perpetuating gambling behaviours. Such distortions could also, to a great extent, explain why many gamblers continue to gamble despite experiencing negative consequences.

For example, a gambler might continue to gamble despite incurring heavy gambling-related debts because of certain beliefs, such as:

- I cannot be so unlucky all the time
- I have a strong hunch that I am going to win the next game
- I only need one big win to recoup all previous losses and solve all my outstanding problems

Research has also shown that pathological gamblers experience and endorse more cognitive distortions than non-pathological gamblers.



### Must Problem Gamblers Go through a Professional Gambling Addiction Treatment to Ensure Full Recovery?

While most pathological gamblers do best with systematic and professional gambling treatment, there are problem gamblers who, at some point in their lives, come to realise that gambling has created multiple problems in their lives and manage to set some limits (e.g. cutting down or stopping completely) and successfully keep to those limits over significant periods of time without any form of professional help.

Having said that, the advantage of entering a professional treatment programme is the opportunity to work through the barriers of recovery with a trained professional on a one-to-one and group setting.

It is often difficult for the gambler to enter into a therapeutic relationship with a professional or get into a treatment group when they are attempting to get well on their own. They might also miss out on receiving objective feedback on their progress in recovery from a trained professional and not know exactly where they are heading in recovery.



### How Can Family and Friends Help Problem Gamblers in the Process of Recovery?

Family and friends can help by making information and resources related to treatment readily available. Financial bailouts are usually discouraged as these will only worsen the situation and delay the gambler from facing up to the magnitude of problems arising from problem gambling, and taking steps to seek help. It is important for family members to learn how to protect their financial assets to minimise further damages caused by the gambler's gambling.

Family members can provide healthier support by being physically and emotionally present for the gambler instead, e.g. accompany him/her for treatment. At NAMS, we organise support groups to help family members learn how to re-focus on their own well-being and also acquire practical ways of giving the gambler support.

