Problem Gambling & Recovery

Recovering from any addiction or mental health disorder is a powerful journey of rebuilding. Whether addressing a gambling disorder directly, or guarding an ongoing recovery from substance use or other behavioral addiction, being mindful of gambling risks is a vital step in protecting the future.

When an individual stops one addictive behavior, their brain often still craves that familiar chemical reward. Because gambling triggers the same pleasure pathways in the brain as drugs, alcohol, or other compulsive behaviors, it is highly susceptible to cross-addiction.

It's important to recognize that trading one dependence for another is something that can happen quietly and quickly. Believing that gambling is a 'safe' activity because it may not feel connected to the original substance or behavior, can allow for problems to begin developing. For individuals in recovery, participation in gambling is something that has the potential to impact mental health and trigger a recurrence of primary disorders, so having an understanding of risks, warning signs and available resources is so important.

ccgp
Council on Compulsive Gambling of Pennsylvania

Help is available.

1-800-GAMBLER®

www.pacouncil.com

Are You Gambling with Your Recovery?

Ask yourself, Do You...

- gamble to escape stress, boredom, anxiety, depression?
- spend more time/money gambling than you plan to?
- hide your gambling from your support system?

Identify Triggers & Prevent Recurrence

Maintaining long-term wellness means recognizing signs that your recovery might be under pressure.

Common Gambling Triggers

- **Emotional States:** High stress, loneliness, celebrating a milestone, experiencing a loss
- **Environments:** Passing by a casino, viewing sports betting ads, being around friends who gamble
- **Financial Strain:** Looking for a "quick fix" to money issues

Early Warning Signs of a Recurrence

- **Justifying:** "It's only one hand", "It's only a scratch-off ticket"
- **Secrecy:** Hiding gambling or lying about spent time/money
- **Obsession:** Frequently thinking about gambling
- **Isolation:** Distancing from sponsors, therapists, family

Safeguarding Recovery

- **Building Barriers:** Use of self-exclusion programs, deleting betting apps, blocking gambling sites on mobile devices
- **Staying Connected:** 12-step groups, therapy sessions, peer networks, podcasts, recovery apps
- **Healthy Outlets:** Replacing gambling with safer, dopamine boosting activities like exercise, hobbies, volunteering

Help is just a phone call away.

If you think you, or someone you know, may have an issue related to gambling, please call the 24/7 toll-free Pennsylvania Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-800-GAMBLER® or visit www.pacouncil.com.



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