



How Can You Identify a Problem Gambler?

Problem gamblers often present to treatment for other types of problems. For instance, individuals experiencing gambling related problems may seek treatment for depression, marital problems, or another addictive behavior. It might be helpful when people present with these problems to ask them about their gambling. The following questions might be useful to help identify individuals with gambling problems.

- ◆ Do you experience preoccupation with reliving past gambling experiences, planning the next gambling venture, and/or thinking of ways in which to get money to gamble?
- ◆ Do you bet increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement?
- ◆ Do you gamble as a way to escape problems or to feel better?
- ◆ Have you been repeatedly unsuccessful in your attempts to control, cut back, or stop gambling?
- ◆ Do you feel restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling?
- ◆ Have you lied to your family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of your gambling?
- ◆ Have you committed illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft, or embezzlement to finance your gambling?
- ◆ After losing money gambling, have you returned another day to get even?
- ◆ Have you jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling?
- ◆ Have you relied on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling?

Answering yes to any of these questions may be an indication that an individual is experiencing problems as a result of their gambling behavior. Answering yes to five or more questions is consistent with a diagnosis of pathological gambling. These questions have been adapted from the diagnostic criteria for Pathological Gambling and can be found on our website at <http://thegamblingclinic.memphis.edu/questionnaire.htm>

The SOGS vs. the MAGS: Two Screening Measures

The following screening measures can be useful when assessing for gambling problems. These screening instruments can be found on The Gambling Clinic's website at <http://thegamblingclinic.memphis.edu/screening.htm>

SOGS

The South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) is a 20-item self-report measure and is the most widely used clinical screening measure for disordered gambling. The measure was based upon DSM-III criteria and assesses pathological gambling during the past year. It has adequate validity and reliability in assessing problematic and pathological gamblers. However, because the SOGS was validated using clinical populations (i.e., individuals in a treatment setting), it has a tendency to overestimate gambling problems. Therefore, using this screening measure is not diagnostic and may mistakenly identify some people as having a gambling problem when they do not. Individuals scoring less than 2 on the SOGS are classified as non-problem gamblers. Those scoring between a 2 and 4 are classified as problem gamblers. Those scoring a 5 or more are classified as probable pathological gamblers.

MAGS

The Massachusetts Gambling Screen (MAGS) is a self-report clinical screening measurement that consists of two distinct subscales. The first subscale, termed the DSM-IV subscale, consists of 12 items that relate to the ten criterion for diagnosis. This measure was based on the more recent DSM-IV diagnostic criteria. The second subscale, termed the MAGS subscale, consists of 14 items that measure the social aspects of problematic gambling. The MAGS was developed using an adolescent population and therefore has a lower reading level than the SOGS. It has also been shown to be valid and reliable with adults. Individuals receiving a total score of 5 or more on the MAGS DSM-IV items or 2 or more on the MAGS subscale items are consistent with those who meet the criteria for pathological gambling. We have found that few recreational gamblers will score above the cutoff but that some pathological gamblers may score below the cutoff.

We want to hear from you!

Please send your questions or comments to Odds and Ends:

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Each month, we'll select and answer several questions from our readers. We want to hear your concerns and look forward to your feedback.

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Visit Us Online: www.thegamblingclinic.memphis.edu

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How Much is Too Much?

Unlike other addictions, the literature does not help us decide how much gambling is too much. When does wagering money at a casino become a problem? When does one become concerned about how much is wagered while playing golf? Given that gambling behavior can consist of a wide variety of activities, it is difficult to conceptualize all of the different dimensions that lead to potential problems.

Because gambling is such a complex activity, understanding an individual's behavior can be aided by some mental frameworks. First, it may be beneficial to think about the activity in terms of its intensity. For instance, gambling behavior may be quantified in terms of frequency, duration, amount of money intended to risk, and the amount of money actually risked. Understanding

this behavior requires that we understand the context.

Consider two factors, annual income and the gambler's timeframe. An episode where \$1000 is risked may be quite a different experience for an individual earning \$100,000 vs. \$20,000. Second, because gambling behavior can fluctuate dramatically over shorter time periods, it is recommended that behavior be reported within at least a one month timeframe. Keeping in mind the individual's personal, social, financial, and legal circumstances will also aid in understanding gambling behavior.

In the next issue of Odds and Ends we will take a closer look at the research on identifying gambling problem behavior and our best guess about how much gambling might be too much.

COMMENTS,
QUESTIONS,
SUGGESTIONS?

WE WANT YOUR
FEEDBACK!!