



Using Diagnostic Tools to Determine Gambling Problems

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Using Diagnostic Tools to Determine Gambling Problems

■ Indicators of Compulsive Gambling

1. How much time is spent gambling
2. Increase in gambling time and places
3. Increase in size of bets (sudden and dramatic)
4. Working up special occasions for gambling (canceling other plans)
5. Intensity of interest in gambling (constant high tension/excitement)
6. Boasting (about winning; evasive about losing)
7. Exaggerated display of money and other possessions
8. Gambling when there is a crisis
9. Drop off in other activities and interests
10. Frequent absences from school, work and home
11. Excessive phone use
12. Withdrawal from family
13. Personality changes (increased irritability/hostility)
14. Diversion of funds earmarked for other purposes



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- Problem Areas for Pathological Gamblers

1. Financial
2. Depression/Pain
3. Respected Gambling
4. Family Dysfunction
5. Co-morbid Disorders
 1. Borderline Personality
 2. Chemical Dependence
 3. Antisocial Personality
 4. Others
6. Grief/Loss
7. Legal



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- Assessment comprises no less than nine important tasks:
 1. Formal diagnosis of the patient's gambling problem
 2. Establish the severity of the problem
 3. Recognition of other mental (and physical) disorders, including other addictions:co-morbidity
 4. Gambling history, including precipitating factors and those which hastened progression
 5. Psychological portrait-underlying conflicts, defenses and coping style, strengths and weaknesses
 6. Pertinent reality factors-especially those putting limitations on treatment
 7. Establish baseline, to which future condition can be compared
 8. Psychodynamic formulation
 9. Treatment Plan



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■ Outline for an evaluation:

1. Why is the patient here? Why now?
 - a. Self referred or obligated by family member, employer or courts
2. Diagnosis of pathological gambling
 - a. Distinguish from problem gambling
 - b. DSM-IV
 - c. Role of SOGS or GA 20 questions
3. History of present illness
 - a. Severity
 1. Disruption or damage
 2. Number of positive answers-DSM-IV, SOGS, or 20 Questions
 3. Money lost or owed/income
 4. Gambling Severity Index



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- Outline for an evaluation:

- b. Course

- 1. Phase: Winning, losing. Desperation and giving up or resignation
 - 2. Progression: Conversion from social to pathological or hooked with first bet

- a. Factors hastening progression:

- i. Intrinsic

- 1. Big Win
 - 2. Chasing
 - 3. Guilt, shame
 - 4. Meaning of money
 - 5. Competitiveness
 - 6. Entitlement, superiority
 - 7. Aggressiveness
 - 8. Bailout
 - 9. "Going on Tilt"
 - 10. Alcohol, drugs
 - 11. Playing too long
 - 12. Needling
 - 13. Anger
 - 14. "Bad beats"



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- Outline for an evaluation:
 - ii. Extrinsic
 1. Alcohol/drugs
 2. Difficulty with relationships
 3. Death, divorce
 4. Birth of a child
 5. Physical illness or threat to one's life
 6. Job or career disappointment/success



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- Outline for an evaluation:

- c. Why they gamble?

1. Action seekers vs. escape artists
2. Omnipotence
3. Spectacular success
4. Anger, rebellion
5. Counter phobic

What do you get out of it?

What do you feel? Before, during, after?

How has it changed?

When do you go gambling?



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- Outline for an evaluation:
 4. Co-morbidity: Other addictions
 1. Alcohol
 2. Drugs-early use of stimulants
 3. Eating
 4. Sex
 5. Overspending, shopping
 6. Smoking
 7. Simultaneous or sequential
 8. Motivation for abstaining from other addictions
 9. Rationale for treatment at same time



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- Outline for an evaluation:

- 5. Co-morbidity: Other disorders

- 1. Depression:

- a. Secondary to gambling or separate and preceding gambling

- b. Family history

- c. Double depression

- 2. Bipolar or cyclothymia

- 3. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

- 4. Antisocial personality

- 5. Narcissistic/borderline personality



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- Outline for an evaluation:
 - a. Need to wait before diagnosing-how long?
 - b. Withdrawal symptoms
 - i. Are there long term withdrawal symptoms similar to the anergia, emptiness typical of cocaine addiction?
 - ii. Are they cognitive defects?
 - 6. Tourette's syndrome
- 6. Past History
 - a. Parental history of alcoholism, pathological gambling-other biological relatives
 - b. Parental neglect, criticism, abuse
 - c. School performance
 - d. Friends, relationships with opposite sex
 - e. sports-competitiveness
 - f. Attitude towards authority-legal difficulties, problems
 - g. Lying
 - h. Self esteem issues
 - i. Expectations, interests



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- Outline for an evaluation:

- 7. Reality Factors:

- a. Family, friends and vocational support
- b. Finances-including insurance, how treatment will be paid
- c. Legal difficulties
- d. Limitations on treatment

- 8. Medical

- a. If not done separately, review of systems-when last exam?
- b. Stress related physical illnesses

- 9. Formal instruments, questionnaires

- 10. Psychodynamic formulation (importance of giving the patient something)

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Questioning the treatment options:

Is outpatient treatment appropriate?

If so, how often does the patient need to be seen?

Should it be individual or group therapy, or a combination?

Should family members be involved? Which ones?

Should the spouse and patient be seen separately or together?

Is medication indicated?

What about Gamblers Anonymous?

How directive need the therapist be?

When is inpatient treatment required?

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Questioning the treatment options:

If so, should the setting be psychiatric, or gambling specific or dual diagnosis?

Should it be near where the patient lives so that family members can be involved, and so that the patient can connect with local GA groups and continued aftercare, or should it be out of the area, perhaps even out of state, to get the patient away from bookies and loan sharks, gambling buddies and an unhealthy environment?

Perhaps a third alternative is indicated, in the form of:

Partial hospitalization

A residential program

Halfway house

Or Perhaps Gamblers Anonymous is sufficient.

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Problem Gambling Screening Questions

1. Sometimes I've felt depressed or anxious after a session of gambling. Yes No
2. Sometimes I've felt guilty about the way I gamble. Yes No
3. When I think about it, gambling has sometimes caused me problems. Yes No
4. Sometimes I've found it better not to tell others, especially my family about the amount of time or money I spend gambling. Yes No
5. I often find that when I stop gambling I've run out of money. Yes No
6. Often I get the urge to return to gambling to win back losses from a past session. Yes No
7. Yes I have received criticism about my gambling in the past. Yes No
8. Yes, I have tried to win money to pay debts. Yes No

Developed by Sean Sullivan, Goodfellow Unit, Auckland Medical School

Scoring Guide: Affirmed 4 or more questions: Gambling likely to be affecting individual's well-being and may even meet criteria for gambling pathology