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## The lure of gambling, online gaming, and sports betting



by Mary Berg

When kids turned eighteen in Minnesota, a favorite way to highlight the occasion, especially in the early 2000's, was with a night out at a nearby casino. They celebrated their milestone birthdays with all the exuberance of youth who've reached the legal age to participate in an adult activity. Most adults continue to enjoy occasional nights out at a casino. They gamble from time-to-time without any serious consequences to their health, relationships, and finances. Not everyone is as lucky.

Consider Barbara (*The name Barbara is being used to protect her anonymity*), a recovering compulsive gambler, who shared her story with *The Phoenix Spirit*. While on her honeymoon in the Bahamas, she played low stakes games,

had fun, and viewed it as simple entertainment. When she got home, she gambled once, and didn't enjoy it. For a few years, she didn't gamble at all. However, in 1995, when she moved to a small town, started a business, and came under a lot of stress, she viewed the casino as a place to get away from it all, to think, relax, and have fun. When her husband lost his job and the financial pressures increased, casinos became more than just entertainment. She went with the idea, "Let's see if I can win some money to pay the bills." For the next six years she went off-and-on, sometimes stopping completely if she'd had a bad episode and lost a lot of money. As a couple, she and her hus-

LURE OF GAMBLING to pg 6

## FROM MINNESOTA ALLIANCE ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

### Addiction is Addiction is Addiction

*This article about gambling addiction was produced by the Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling. For more information about gambling addiction in Minnesota, visit mnpga.org.*

The term "addiction" is defined as the state of being compulsively committed to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming, such as narcotics, to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma.

Most of us are familiar with certain addictions, even if we may not completely understand them. For example, many of us know the person who can't stop drinking, the person who can't stop using prescription

medications or the person who can't stop using illicit drugs.

Yet there are many other addictions, ranging from food addiction to sex addiction to video game addiction. One addiction that's as real as any but which is under reported in the media, and under recognized and under diagnosed by the treatment community and the general public, is gambling addiction.

ADDICTION IS ADDICTION to pg 14

## Three of My Most Important Life Lessons That May Help Your Personal Growth and Sobriety

*Occasionally in life there are those moments of unutterable fulfillment which cannot be explained by those symbols called words. Their meaning can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart.*

— MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

As I reflect on my life, I realize there are critical life lessons that make me into the person I am today. They are difficult to put into words, but they exist inside me—in my body, in my mind and in my soul. These essential lessons were mainly taught to me in my early childhood before I had any memory of how I learned them. They were also relearned by me when making wise and unwise choices and by being given second chances to learn. These lessons are all the result of many caring adults being devoted to me throughout my life. They are the kind of lessons that can be learned by any of us at any point in our life, provided we have people who love us at a very deep level and provided we allow them to love us. These lessons are the pillars of my life that enable me to live each day with profound and palpable gratitude. They allow me to grow, to avoid the deception of any addictive tendencies and to provide deep love to others. There are no words of thanks that could adequately express my gratitude to those who've taught me such lessons. The best I can do is to offer these lessons to others with profound love myself. They are:

### LESSON #1: THE MOST IMPORTANT HUMAN NEED IS THE NEED TO ATTACH

We humans really do need each other. Because we are mammals, we have more in common with chimpanzees who like to hang out in groups and groom each other, picking fleas off one another. The need we have for each other is immense. We are social animals. Our social media connections are built on this critical need. Our brain development, physical health, safety, mental health and life satisfaction are all developed by our membership in a group. We are not like reptiles

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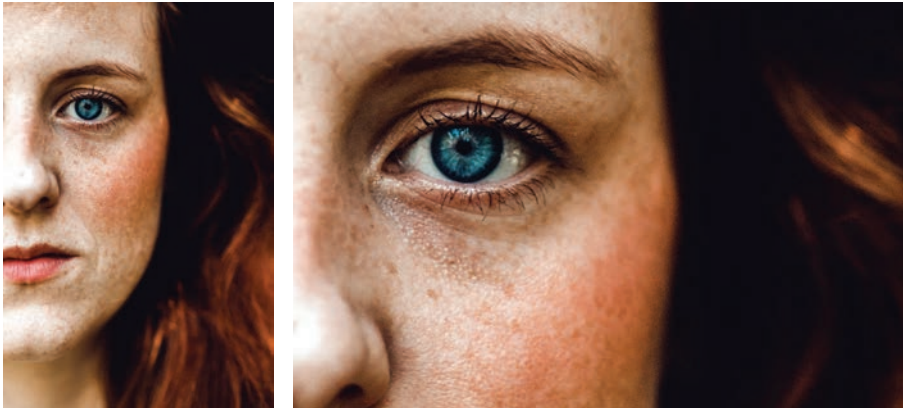
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Self

by Louise Elowen



*"The real difficulty is to overcome how you think about yourself."*  
MAYA ANGELOU

Have you ever considered how you gamble in life? I don't mean placing a bet on the horses or laying down chips at the casino, I'm talking about your relationships, your work, your *life*.

For example, my second marriage was essentially a "gamble." I gambled on the odds of it working out, when we didn't really know each other that well to begin with. I thought that I could work through any issues or troubles, as I believed that I was entering into a partnership. Unfortunately, that wasn't true. I failed to understand the enormity of that gamble until it was too late. I failed to not only get to know the person I was marrying, but I failed, up to that point in life, to get to know *myself* first. If I had, it might have saved me from the abuse I endured and given me the courage to walk away sooner.

At that point in my life, I made a poor relationship choice due to low esteem, social expectations, loneliness, and the "need" for someone to share my life with, based on past events and a sense of loss. What I had never been taught was the importance of getting to know *myself* first, before trying to understand someone else.

Society puts a lot of expectations upon us to "do the 'right' thing," and to do "what is socially acceptable," with little advice on how to "do" that, and without emphasizing the importance of self. It is probably why we make a lot of poor choices in life and gamble on things – both in life and at the casino – in the

search to try to make ourselves feel "better" if our work and relationships are not fulfilling that role.

After my last, disastrous, and abusive marriage, and not having fully worked through the process of losing my first husband to death at such a young age, I took the time to get to know myself, probably for the first time in my life. Who am *I*? What do *I* want out of life? And what do *I* have to offer, in a job, a relationship, to a community?

I'm proud to say that I've been in a steady relationship with myself for the past eight years. I have grown stronger, more confident, discovered parts of myself I didn't know existed, healed, laughed, cried, but, most importantly, made peace with who *I* am at this stage of my life.

I don't know if I'll ever enter a personal relationship with anyone else again, as I don't presently feel the need to do so and am enjoying my "solo" life, but either way, I have a stronger sense of self and what I can offer to the world at large. I also feel like I have better relationships with friends, and a stronger sense of "me" in the work that I do.

So, don't gamble away your life on something that isn't "you." Take the time to understand who *you* are, and the importance of what you have to offer first.

With gambling awareness for a better you,

*Louise*



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The Phoenix Spirit is a bi-monthly publication for people actively working on their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. We are committed to providing articles, advertising, and information about recovery, renewal, and personal growth to help people experience life in a balanced, meaningful way.

The opinions and facts presented in this publication are intended to be diverse and represent those of the writers and/or contributors, and are not necessarily those of The Phoenix Spirit. We seek writers and interview subjects who are willing to gift you with their honestly held convictions and insights. We seek to attract advertisers who offer products and services of integrity. But we urge our readers to research, and trust their instincts.

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# Trusting in My Gambling Recovery Journey Through Hope

by Catherine Townsend-Lyon

My higher power (God) has shown me the meaning of hope, of trust, and through his love, his forgiveness, and mercy, all the work you have done within recovery, you begin to transform yourself, flourish into a new life from the ashes of gambling addiction, learn to break free from gambling and begin a new way of living my life within redemption, grace, humility and with a heart of gratitude.

Today, as a recovery advocate, I share my journey through authoring books, as a writer, a speaker, and mentoring others. My life's purpose today is 'Paying It Forward' to any and all who might be suffering in silence or feeling lost due to gambling addiction. I have broken free from the bondage of this disease and share what I have learned.

I became a statistic. I became one of the 10 million Americans who were suffering in silence from problem gambling. I became a fact: as one in every five gamblers who tried suicide. I was so hopeless that I felt it was the only way to stop myself from gambling. Stop hurting my husband and everyone around me, because this addiction is a family affair.

I am a proud recovery advocate through many forms, like writing, through my recovery website, radio, and podcasts to raise awareness, inform and educate the public about this destructive addiction and disease. It is also why I wrote my memoirs of how and why I became addicted to gambling titled *Addicted To Dimes: Confessions of a Liar and a Cheat*.

My addiction required no substances and yet, is as deadly as an overdose. Gambling addiction is the #1 addiction currently with the highest suicide rate than any other addictions. This is why I help others. Suicide is not the answer to stop problem gambling or a full-blown addiction to it!

As an advocate and mentor, I get asked many questions like,

*What can we do when we feel we can not move past speed bumps and hurdles in recovery, and how do we move forward?*

*How do I recover from a relapse?*

*Why am I not strong enough NOT to cave into cravings, urges, and triggers?*

*Why is early recovery so difficult, and what can I do to not relapse?*

These are excellent questions and concerns I and those in early recovery have while choosing and maintaining a recovery path. Some can be quick fixes like starting a journal. It is a great way to look back in the journal and see your strengths and areas you have more work to do within your journey. See, recovery is not only a lifelong process, it does come to us in phases, ever-evolving as it becomes a new healthy lifestyle.

What do I mean by this?

We have many options to choose how we begin to gain our lives back from addicted gambling. In doing so, we have



choices and options from a 12-Step Program, a faith-based program, or a treatment program along with therapy or counseling. It needs to feel right to you while enhancing your recovery journey.

Next is doing the “work” that is asked of you while you begin to learn the tools and the skills that may save your life. Next is being diligent in using all the tools you learn. Not complicated. But, still, many can struggle. Since I advocate through social media. I see often disagreements going on by others wanting to force “how they maintain their recovery” that has worked for them onto others looking for help or support within recovery from addiction. Or even the never-ending battles I see play out about 12-Step Programs are the only way to recovery on many social media platforms.

A 12-step program by itself may not by itself be enough to get gamble free... and that is what I experienced. My opinions are as long as you have the desire to stop gambling and from any addiction that is making your life unmanageable, then it should be up to you alone or you and your loved ones to choose what recovery path and options work and that is comfortable for you. It will be a lifelong process to feel comfortable with a bet-free recovery lifestyle.

Once you begin, you begin to come to terms with knowing there may be much recovery work to do in the first few years. Learning and gaining the skills and tools needed to interrupt the “cycle” of gambling addiction is essential and half the battle! Becoming aware, educated, and informed about some of the roots and underlying issues that had you turn to addicted gambling. It could be old pain or hurt from issues like abuse, trauma, mental health challenges, etc., all can have us looking for ways to cope and escape those feelings that are still unprocessed — then learning to overcome hurdles or those feelings of being “stuck” and not knowing how to move forward maintaining recovery.

My advice and experiences are?

Don't place that next BET. Abstinence is KEY. Support is VITAL.

And do one thing every day for your recovery and before you know it, the hours turn into days, days turn into weeks, weeks will turn into months and you'll be on your way to a beautiful new recovery lifestyle!

*Catherine Townsend-Lyon is a former writer and columnist for InRecovery magazine and for Keys to Recovery newspaper. She advocates and speaks through many events, radio, and podcasts. Betfreerecoverynow.com.*

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### Eating Disorders

Melrose Center

Melrose's experienced team provides specialized care for those struggling with an eating disorder and substance use disorder — whether currently in treatment or recovery. Melrose Center has five Twin City metro locations. Visit [melroseheals.com](http://melroseheals.com) or call 952-993-6200.

### Seniors

Silver Sobriety “Rebuilding Lives, One Senior at a Time!”

Silver Sobriety is a treatment facility specifically for seniors over age 55. Getting sober with a group of peers you can relate to is a better treatment option. Based on the twelve step Program, we focus on strategies to handle issues facing seniors, along with abstinence from alcohol and drugs. Contact us for a free confidential conversation. [www.silversobriety.org](http://www.silversobriety.org) info@silversobriety.org. 651-431-8308.

### Substance Use Disorders

Minnesota Teen Challenge

If you or a loved one is struggling with drugs or alcohol, we're here to help. In addition to our effective and affordable residential Licensed Treatment, faith-based Long-Term Recovery and convenient Outpatient program, we have extensive prevention and transitional/aftercare services. Freedom from addiction starts here. 612-FREEDOM or [mntc.org](http://mntc.org)

### Workaholics Anonymous Meeting

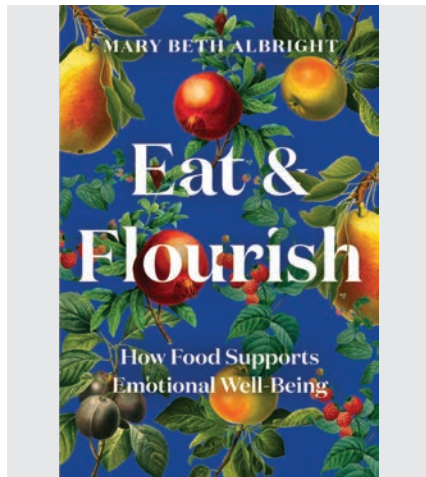
Burning out? Workaholics Anonymous provides steps and tools to break free from non-stop work and activity — or work avoidance. Meeting is currently online via Zoom. Call Pat for link to the meeting or questions: 763-560-5199. [www.workaholics-anonymous.org](http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org).

To place a Resource Directory listing call David at 612-298-5405 or email at [ads@thephoenixspirit.com](mailto:ads@thephoenixspirit.com)





# Books

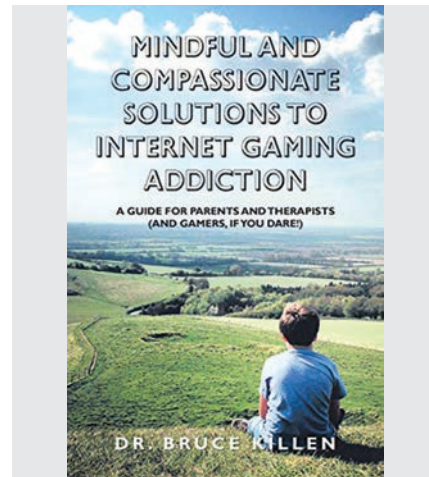


## Eat and Flourish

How Food Supports Emotional Well-Being

By Mary Beth Albright  
COUNTRYMAN PRESS

Food has power to nourish your mind, supporting emotional wellness through both nutrients and pleasure. In this groundbreaking book, journalist Mary Beth Albright draws on cutting-edge research to explain the food/mood connection. She redefines “emotional eating” based on the science, revealing how eating triggers biological responses that affect humans’ emotional states both immediately and long-term. Albright’s accessible voice and ability to interpret complex studies from the new field of nutritional psychology, combined with straightforward suggestions for what to eat and how to eat it, make this an indispensable guide. Readers will come away knowing how certain foods help reduce the inflammation that can harm mental health, the critical relationship between the microbiome and the brain, which vitamins help restore the body during intensely emotional times, and how to develop a healthful eating pattern for life—with 30-day kickoff plan included. *Eat and Flourish* is the entertaining, inspiring book for today’s world.

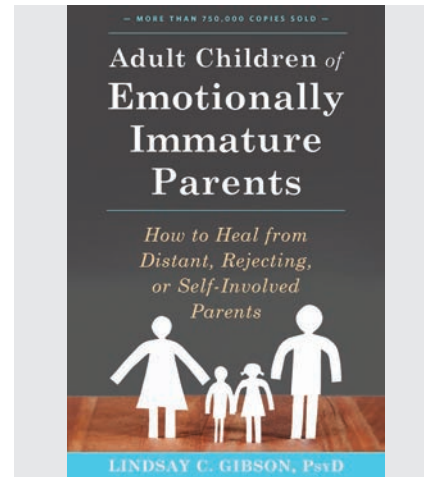


## Mindful and Compassionate Solutions to Internet Gaming Addiction

A Guide For Parents and Therapists (And Gamers, if You Dare!)

By Dr. Bruce Killen  
BALBOA PRESS

This concise, research-based, and tool-filled book gives you the information and skills you need as a parent, therapist, or gamer to overcome Internet gaming addiction. Dr. Bruce Killen draws on his decades of experience as a psychotherapist helping individuals overcome Internet gaming addiction to explain why people game and common problems associated with gaming. He also shares specific tools addicted individuals can use to conquer negative behaviors. Find out how to: overcome challenges like depression, social anxiety, and family problems for yourself, loved ones, and/or clients; recognize how an addiction to gaming affects individuals and their loved ones; summon the courage to help a family member or client recognize a gaming addiction. Helping individuals addicted to gaming accept what is going on with gentleness and compassion is no easy task, but it can improve every area of someone’s life. Whether you are a therapist, family member, or someone addicted to Internet gaming, this book will provide you with tools to mindfully overcome addiction.



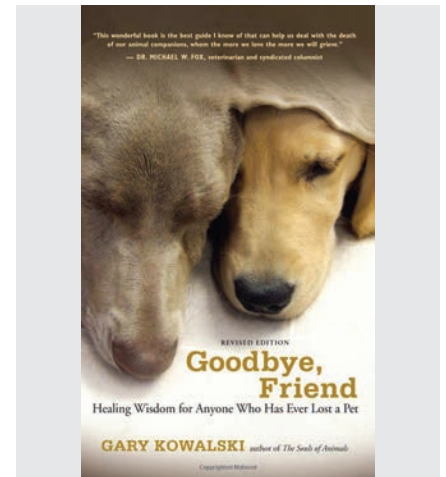
## Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents

How to Heal From Distant, Rejecting, or Self-Involved Parents

By Lindsay C. Gibson, PsyD  
NEW HARBINGER PUBLICATIONS

If you grew up with an emotionally immature, unavailable, or selfish parent, you may have lingering feelings of anger, loneliness, betrayal, or abandonment. You may recall your childhood as a time when your emotional needs were not met, when your feelings were dismissed, or when you took on adult levels of responsibility in an effort to compensate for your parent’s behavior. These wounds can be healed, and you can move forward in your life.

In this breakthrough book, clinical psychologist Lindsay Gibson exposes the destructive nature of parents who are emotionally immature or unavailable. You will see how these parents create a sense of neglect, and discover ways to heal from the pain and confusion caused by your childhood. By freeing yourself from your parents’ emotional immaturity, you can recover your true nature, control how you react to them, and avoid disappointment. Finally, you’ll learn how to create positive, new relationships so you can build a better life.



## Goodbye, Friend

Healing Wisdom for Anyone Who Has Ever Lost a Pet

By Gary Kowalski  
NEW WORLD LIBRARY

The loss of an animal companion can be a painful, wrenching experience. In *Goodbye, Friend*, Gary Kowalski takes you on a journey of healing, offering warmth and sound advice on how to cope with the death of your pet. Filled with heartwarming stories and practical guidance on such matters as taking care of yourself while mourning, creating rituals to honor your pet’s memory, and talking to children about death, *Goodbye, Friend* is a beautiful and comforting book for anyone grieving the loss of a beloved animal.

A graduate of the Harvard Divinity School, Reverend Gary Kowalski is an ordained minister who has served churches in Tennessee, Washington State, Vermont, New Mexico, and Massachusetts. He is active in the Green Mountain Animal Defenders, an advocacy group working for better treatment of animals in entertainment, research, and agriculture. A committed vegan, he is past president of the Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry.

If you have a book you’d like featured or have an old favorite you’d like to share with others, please contact us at [phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com](mailto:phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com).

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from page 1

band identified gambling as a problem. In 2001, they wanted to have another baby and went to the Mayo Clinic for fertility treatment. During one of the pre-treatment screenings, her husband brought up gambling as a concern. The screening team said, “We won’t do the fertility treatments until you deal with the gambling. We’re referring you to a treatment center in Granite Falls.”

Barbara said, “I thought they were crazy. I believed I could stop on my own. I did stop for 18 months. We went back to the Mayo Clinic, and we successfully proceeded with the treatment. However, I had a miscarriage, and after that, I had a really rough time. I just wanted to escape from the world, escape from my problems, and I sought comfort and peace through gambling.” Her use escalated, she and her husband started having marital issues, and they separated in 2006.

One of her business clients told her about his high stakes gambling. She decided, “I’m giving that a try. On my first attempt, I hit the jackpot, the endorphins kicked in, and I was hooked. I moved from blackjack betting to slot machines to high stakes slot machines.”

In her loneliness, Barbara’s use escalated for the next four years, until she said, “Man, this is hurting me a lot. I’m going to stop at the end of 2009.” She did stop. She wasn’t in a formal program; she wasn’t familiar with any 12 Step program. She reconciled with her husband in 2010.

In 2011, something set her off, and she went right back to the casino. For the next six years, she gambled off-and-on quite a bit. She lost substantial amounts of money. She still paid her bills, but wasn’t saving the way she should have, juggled accounts, and robbed from the proverbial Peter to pay Paul. She thought she was only hurting herself, that her gambling wasn’t causing any big family problems, but she’d go to the casino at night, and not be in any shape in the mornings to get her daughter to school. Her marriage was on the rocks again. Her husband lost his job. They eventually divorced.

In 2016 she tried everything she knew to stop. She banned herself from casinos and canceled all her accounts. Yet she couldn’t stop. She’d go back to the casinos, thinking, “If I just don’t carry credit cards or cash cards with me, I’ll be okay. But as everybody knows, the casinos still had a

way to get my money.”

Finally, in 2017, Barbara had had enough. She took a month off from her business, and went through treatment at Project Turnabout/Vanguard, Minnesota’s one treatment center focused only on gambling addiction, what Barbara calls ‘an eye-opening experience.’ Counseling sessions helped her recognize the unresolved grief from a traumatic event in her early twenties. Yet, when she got out, she thought it would be easy; that she wouldn’t have to work the program.

“I thought I could just quit on willpower. At 90 days, when I should have been at a Gambler’s Anonymous (GA) meeting getting a keychain {given to members at 30/60/90 days, 6 and 9 months}, I went gambling with a couple of other friends. I spiraled down into a lot of hell. I just gambled pretty hard. I’d have 5 months of not gambling and then relapse, 2 months and then relapse.”

In 2019, a cruise line offered her a free trip with free play. She went with a friend with the intention that her friend would get the free play. “I was in casino jail for a week. I hit rock bottom. I started all the gambling behaviors all over again. The juices got going, the dopamine hits took over. For the entire week, I hardly slept, maybe an hour-and-a-half at night. When I got off the ship, I looked terrible. I’d spent enough in a week to buy a new car.”

Barbara knew something had to change. “I started going to GA meetings regularly. I got a sponsor. Two meetings a week are what it seems I need to stay focused on my recovery. Even though I don’t drink much, Friday nights are when I like to ‘party.’ Now, I’ll go to a recovery meeting on Friday nights to get me through the weekend and a Tuesday meeting. I started other recovery strategies, too. I’ve been a panelist at a mini-conference on gambling and I volunteer to speak at Vanguard, the

gambling unit of Project Turnabout.”

When asked about going in and out of recovery, Barbara said, “I would say I was ‘abstinent’ from gambling more than in recovery. True recovery is different than abstaining. It’s a way of life. It’s a way of thinking. When you abstain, you’re still vulnerable. When you’re actively working a recovery program, actually working the 12 steps, and understanding what they mean, it’s different. People have a lot of amends to make. As an addict you have a lot of behaviors, you lie, you cheat, you steal.”

“For me, in recovery, I’m trying to make amends. My gambling was very hurtful to both my ex-husband and my daughter. She’s grown now, but my gambling affected our relationship quite a lot. My daughter felt that it created a coldness between us. I thought I’d always provided for her. I helped her pay for college, buy a car, and supported her. I went to all

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different than abstaining.  
It’s a way of life.  
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these activities. However, I was shocked at what she said in the family program. She felt that I was distracted and not really present with her. Making amends is a big part of a recovery program and can take a lifetime. That's way different than stopping gambling and abstaining. Making amends doesn't happen overnight."

When Barbara got serious, in May, 2019, she made it through the first 90 days and kept going. In March 2020, all the casinos closed due to Covid. For her, that was a really good thing. "Covid was a challenging time for my business. I had a lot of issues with employees being gone, out sick, and out due to quarantine. I'm in the financial industry and it was a tough business for a couple of months with so much uncertainty. It was rugged. During Covid, nobody wanted to meet in person and we couldn't meet anyway because churches were shut down. Project Turnabout started an online recovery meeting that met every Tuesday night up until last summer. I went to that meeting and then every Friday night I dialed in to a phone meeting. That was my trek from starting recovery to celebrating recovery."

Marti Paulson, the CEO of Project Turnabout/Vanguard, described the center where Barbara went for treatment. "Our center has 20 residential beds for men and women. We treat co-occurring disorders, and hire mental health practitioners to work with the gambling addiction counselors. We hire registered and licensed nurses and counselors. Patients are given very individualized treatment plans. The 30-day stay also includes a one-day program where families can come or they can participate via Zoom. Gambling is a family disease and affects everyone, the same as any other addiction. To leave the family untreated would be a severe injustice."

"We at Project Turnabout take a neutral stance to gambling. One of the reasons we do is that alcohol and gambling are legal in Minnesota. We want to be there when individuals and families are ready to get help. Second, we receive grants and a great amount of support from the casinos and resorts, both in Minnesota and from other states. We don't want them to think that we're against them."

"Minnesota is a little different from other states. The State of Minnesota will pay for any state resident or family member to go for residential gambling treatment. There isn't another state in the United States that does that. The funds are obtained through the unclaimed lottery fund, as well as from .05% of the stadium fund. Unlike chemical dependency treatment which is covered through Medicaid and state covered PMAP insurance, gambling treatment is not. It's a little-known fact that Minnesota offers free treatment for those seeking help for problem gambling."

When asked about the trends in problem gambling, Ms. Paulson noted that there has been an increase. "We saw the after-effects of Covid take quite a toll on gamblers. Covid shut down casinos. Going to casinos became difficult. Instead, online gambling increased – pool shooting gambling, card playing, sports betting – much more so than the typical casino gambling. Gamblers are very strong isolators."

In 2018, the Supreme Court overturned a nationwide ban on sports betting. Since then, nearly three dozen states

have passed legislation approving sports betting. On Feb. 20, 2023 companion bills were introduced in the Minnesota House and Senate that would legalize retail and online sports betting in the state. The tribes would have exclusivity with sports betting. {As we go to print, no votes have been taken.}

According to Ms. Paulson, in the past, many more men than women struggled with problem gambling, however in the last ten years, similar to alcoholism, the statistics have equaled out to almost 50/50. It's become much more acceptable for women to go into both bars and casinos. "We're seeing lots more young people with gambling addiction. Youth are much more likely to be involved in online gambling. We don't take anyone under the age of 18 in our residential treatment program. The only residential treatment facilities for young people are out state. Gaming is a whole industry within itself. Although gaming addiction is treated much the same as gambling, gaming has a much different, younger population."

When asked how sports betting factors into these trends, Susan Sheridan Tucker, Executive Director of the Minnesota Alliance for Problem Gambling (MN APG) stated, "Sports betting is primarily done by young men, ages 18-30. The sports gaming operators are trying to lure more women into gaming by changing the look of games so that they'll appeal to women. Lots of women enjoy sports. The operators are hoping women will also enjoy sports betting. They're using the terms 'sports betting' and 'gaming' to smooth over the negative association people have with 'gambling.' The mobility, accessibility, and lure of online gambling is concerning. Eye gaming – which is essentially any casino-type game that is also electronic – can be free to start. These games mimic slot machines, poker, and standard casino games. They allow you to play for free for a fixed amount of time or for so many wins. If you want to continue to play, you need to pay. The gaming operators know how to hook people."

Minnesotans are very fortunate to have the longest-running residential treatment center in the US and to have their treatment paid for through state funds. When asked if people are taking advantage of this opportunity, Ms. Sheridan-Tucker replied, "Not as many as they should. Right now, only 100 people are in treatment. Research shows that 0.05 - 2 percent of the population has a severe gambling problem. That's 250,000 Minnesotans, and 10,000 high school students. Nationally, 400 times more is set aside for substance use addiction than for gambling addiction. Yet the brain acts the same way with both."

Funding for prevention, research and treatment and increased awareness by the public of the issues surrounding problem gambling, online gaming, and sports betting could help so that the next group of high school seniors who go out to celebrate their 18th birthdays will be able to avoid the pitfalls of compulsive gambling. There is hope, there is recovery.

*Mary Berg is a retired associate professor of clinical education, a resume writer, published author, and poet. Her website is: marybergresumewriter.com.*

#### KEYS TO RECOVERY FROM PROBLEM GAMBLING

1. **Protect your gambling sobriety and recovery.**
2. **Cut ties with the people that you were gambling with and doing addictive things with. This might include people from the treatment center. A lot of people go through treatment relapse.**
3. **Go to meetings and find people with 5-10-15 years of experience in recovery.**
4. **Get a sponsor. Find a gambling counselor. Allow yourself to be guided by both of them.**
5. **<https://gamblersinrecovery.com> is a resource for finding a meeting 24 hours a day.**





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FAIRVIEW**

**RECOVERY**

**PROBLEM GAMBLING TREATMENT**

The Compulsive Gambling Program at M Health Fairview offers assessments and outpatient groups. We are able to work with anyone within the state of Minnesota through virtual appointments.

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**MHEALTHFAIRVIEW.ORG/TREATMENTS/COMPULSIVE-GAMBLING-PROGRAM**



CALENDAR

MARCH

40TH GRATITUDE NIGHT

**When:** Saturday, March 25 at 6:30pm  
**Where:** Minneapolis Convention Center  
**Cost:** \$12/advance; \$15/door  
**Info:** [aaminneapolis.org](http://aaminneapolis.org)

Also known as the AA Prom, Greater Minneapolis Intergroup's 40th annual, Gratitude Night will include AA speaker, Rose E. (Spring Hill, FL) and Al-Anon speaker, Jim D. (St. Paul), DJ and dancing. Tickets are \$12 in advance and \$15 at the door.

ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF SOBRIETY BANQUET

**When:** Saturday, March 18 at 5:30pm  
**Where:** Trinity Lutheran Church, Watertown, MN  
**Cost:** \$20  
**Info:** [aaminneapolis.org](http://aaminneapolis.org)

Open to all AA members, spouses and friends of AA and Al-Anon. Buy tickets from squad leader or call Sam (952) 288-6716. Register by March 12.

FRIENDS IN RECOVERY / WE-CARE PANCAKE BREAKFAST

**When:** Sunday, March 19 at 10:30am  
**Where:** First Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN  
**Cost:** \$8 (suggested) / No one will be turned away  
**Info:** [wecareaa.org](http://wecareaa.org)

Enjoy breakfast at 10:30 with speaker Pastor Stanley at 11:45am. Freewill donation. Under 5, free.

AIM FOR AMES ROUNDUP

**When:** March 24 to 26  
**Where:** Quality Inn & Suites, Ames, IA  
**Cost:** \$25 / \$99 (hotel)  
**Info:** [aimforames.org](http://aimforames.org)

AA and Al-Anon speakers, with socials, meetings and dance. Pre-registrations must be received by March 15.



APRIL

STEPUP OPEN HOUSE

**When:** April 6 at 4:30pm  
**Where:** Oren Gateway Center, Augsburg University  
**Cost:** Free  
**Info:** [augsborg.edu/stepup](http://augsborg.edu/stepup)

Tours of the substance-free campus residences, meet students / staff and information about financial aid and how to apply.



76TH SUPERIOR ROUNDUP

**When:** April 21 to 23  
**Where:** Superior Fairgrounds Curling Club, Superior, WI  
**Cost:** \$25 (under 1 year sobriety: free)  
**Info:** [aaminneapolis.org](http://aaminneapolis.org)

Workshops, AA, Al-Anon speakers and socials.

29TH SUNLIGHT OF THE SPIRIT WEEKEND

**When:** April 21 to 23  
**Where:** Best Western, Fairmont, MN  
**Cost:** \$20 (Alateen free)  
**Info:** [sotsweekend.org](http://sotsweekend.org)

AA and Al-Anon speakers, with socials, meetings.

THREE LEGACIES 40TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING

**When:** Friday, April 28 at 6:00pm  
**Where:** Cross of Glory Church, Hopkins, MN  
**Cost:** Free  
**Info:** [threelegaciesmeeting@gmail.com](mailto:threelegaciesmeeting@gmail.com)

Potluck at 6pm. Please bring your favorite dish to share. Coffee / hot tea provided. Speaker Omar M (NC) at 7:30pm.





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Stillwater, MN	1825 Curve Crest Blvd #103	651-351-9325
St Paul, MN	1821 University Ave West #385	612-326-7602
Elk River, MN	19230 Evans St NW #203	612-454-2011
Litchfield, MN	114 North Holcombe	320-693-2461
Olivia, MN	104 So. 4 <sup>th</sup> Street	320-400-0001
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FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

# Problem Gambling Prevention Efforts Always a Smart Play

by Kristine Preston

About 22% of Minnesotans, regardless of their own participation in gambling, have been negatively affected by the gambling behaviors of others. Problem gambling is not simply a bad habit: It's an addiction that isolates people and leaves them feeling despondent and hopeless. Problem gambling affects families and communities through unemployment, loss of housing, and more.

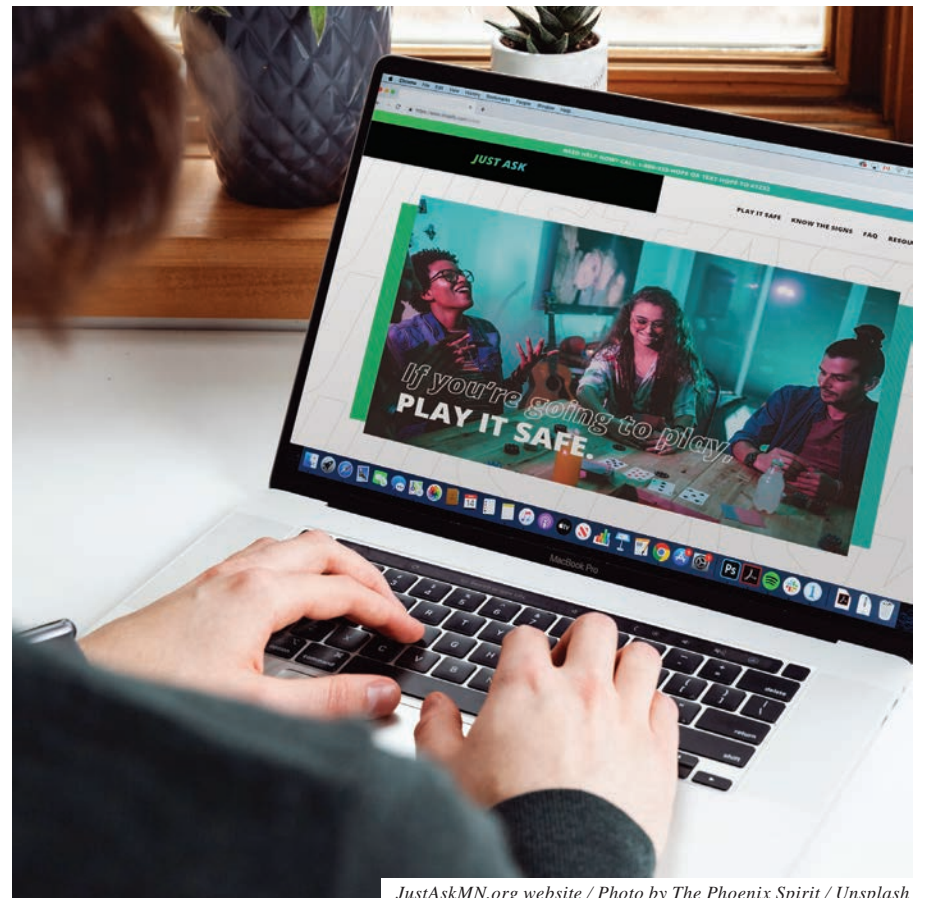
Education is an essential problem gambling prevention tool, which is why DHS is working with a marketing agency and four culturally-specific grantees to help spread the word to all corners of Minnesota. Some of the available tools include:

- A youth-focused website, justaskmn.org, that helps teach young people about problem gambling. The website includes information on moderation, myths about sports betting, and signs of problem gambling.
- Culturally tailored outreach and targeted messaging designed to get better results. We are proud to partner with

Progressive Individual Resources to reach Sub-Saharan African communities, Asian Media Access to reach Asian communities, Lao Assistance Center to reach Lao and Southeast Asian communities, and Neighborhood Youth Academy to reach African American male youth communities.

Even with knowledge related to the dangers of problem gambling, some people will fall victim. When gambling becomes a problem, resources are available.

- If you or someone you know is struggling with problem gambling in any form, you can call a free, confidential helpline at 1-800-333-HOPE, or text HOPE to 61222. This DHS-funded 24/7 helpline will help guide individuals to available problem gambling supports and resources in their community.
- The state of Minnesota provides funds for gambling treatment for people who do not have insurance or another source of payment – no one is turned away if they can't afford treatment.



JustAskMN.org website / Photo by The Phoenix Spirit / Unsplash

Visit [GetGamblingHelp.com](https://www.getgamblinghelp.com) for resources and a link to state-approved treatment providers.

While education and prevention are key, it will not eliminate problem gambling. Minnesota also needs clinicians and resources to help people struggling with a gambling use disorder. For that reason, DHS offers scholarships for qualified clinicians interested in becoming a

problem gambling treatment service provider. These scholarships cover training costs up to \$1,197.

Minnesota must be prepared. Through education, support, and a robust treatment system, we can greatly reduce the harm caused by problem gambling.

**Kristine Preston** is the deputy assistant commissioner of the Behavioral Health Division at the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS).

## Gambling addiction is real. So is recovery. Ask Jean.



Read  
Her  
Story



For every gambler, seven to ten others experience gambling-related harms. It's not just the gambler with the problem who's at risk. Families suffer in silence, often too ashamed to confront the issue.

If you are in recovery for substance use disorder or have depression/anxiety, you are at greater risk of developing a gambling addiction.



Minnesota Alliance  
on Problem Gambling



PROBLEM GAMBLING  
AWARENESS MONTH

Most Minnesotans can receive no-cost treatment if you or someone you know is struggling with a gambling problem. For a list of providers call 1-800-333-4673(HOPE) or visit [mnappg.org](https://mnappg.org)





HELP FOR PROBLEM GAMBLING

## Ask the Expert

### Katie Richard LADC and Minnesota Certified Gambling Treatment Provider

*Katie has been a substance use counselor since 2015 and became problem gambling certified in September 2020. Katie helped establish the gambling program at Vinland National Center and is leading the efforts to build their outpatient program and the MN gambling community.*

**Q** What is your role at Vinland National Center and what inspired / led you to work with compulsive gamblers?

Currently I am Vinland's Manager of Outpatient Services for both the Substance Use and Gambling programs. When I started my roll at Vinland, the previous manager and another staff member were establishing the gambling program with the state of MN. When I came, I was able to jump in and help build it from the beginning. I have knowledge of all the aspects of the program from the clients' direct care and therapy, to how to bill and work directly with DHS. Gambling specific clients, like all clients, have interesting stories of where they come from and how they have found themselves with an addiction. Getting to know the gambling clients drew me in. Also, it was not a subject I knew much about so learning more about the subject showed me the differences in client needs.

**Q** Can you share a bit about the outpatient program at Vinland National Center and how

it is unique in its approach to help those with problem gambling? (Do all problem gambling patients need to have cognitive impairments?)

I am a certified brain injury specialist and Vinland Substance programming does have a large client base of people who have brain injuries or cognition challenges. The gambling program is open to all adults regardless of cognition level. I have worked, and continue to work, with clients who have histories of head trauma or accidents and gambling addiction. During the sessions we work on how to slow down, as impulse control is a challenge for almost all clients. I teach all clients about how the brain is affected by addiction and then healthy ways to change. I have worked with clients who come with limited knowledge of addiction and how it is not just the gambling behavior that changed their life, it's a larger issue that includes family, friends, their mental health, physical health, etc. Learning to see the bigger picture can take time.

**Q** Are you seeing a trend in different types of problem gambling/gaming?

One thing I have noticed is people who do sports betting don't always like traditional gambling (casino, lotto, tabs) and set themselves apart. Helping them understand the way someone's brain reacts to addiction is similar regardless of what the person plays can help. Also quite a few of the older clients I have worked with have no idea how to do online casino or sports betting, whereas the younger or tech savvy crowd will use multiple online platforms to gamble or bet.

**Q** What are some signs that gambling has become problematic?

A couple of main signs are the amount of time spent doing the gambling – either at the actual casino or spending large amounts of time on their phone managing accounts. Also not wanting to spend money on small things; meaning they have a loss tolerance to gambling spending but cannot bring themselves to buy actual self-care needs like shoes, clothes, sometimes meds, depending on how deep the addiction is.

**Q** Who is at risk for compulsive gambling? (Are people with cognitive impairment more at risk?)

Everyone can be at risk. An example would be people who use pull tabs or e-tabs due to the wide accessibility of them – they are EVERYWHERE. From what clients have told me about pull tabs and e-tabs, they slip into their life because they play them, it's fun, it usually starts socially and sometimes with drinking, and then it becomes an issue without them realizing it. People who have head injuries depending on level of impairment could become addicted to any substance or gambling easier because they have deficits they cannot control. Or someone may cross addict, meaning they are in recovery from substances, however they gamble.

**Q** Do mental health and substance use disorders tend to go along with problem gambling?

There are usually mental health concerns, sometimes there is no actual diagnosis because gambling counseling is the first provider the client may have sought help from. Recommending mental health services paired with the counseling can be helpful. Not all gambling clients have substance addiction and/or they need more education on how both addictions affect their life.

**Q** What are some actions that a family member or friend can take if they are concerned about their loved one's gambling?

If a family member or friend is concerned and is not comfortable with talking to the person directly at first, they are welcome to reach out to a gambling provider to seek education, and even potentially counseling. Some signs they should be concerned about is the person not having enough money even though they work a steady income job. Taking out loans that have high interest rates without the ability to pay back. Borrowing money from people without paying them back. Being on their device for long periods of time and becoming irritated or upset when questioned about it. Attending a casino alone on a regular basis for long hours. Being suicidal without an obvious mental health concern. The family or friend should try to talk with the gambler and see where they think their addiction is and provide resources for what the client wants to work on. If the client only believes it's a mental health concern, start there with a therapist.

**Q** Any other things you'd like to add/mention about the work you are doing OR things you are seeing with problem gamblers?

There are many people who struggle with gambling addiction and may not want to seek services or know they are available. Hopefully in the future this will change.

Things I am a part of right now are being the VP of the board of directors for Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling and staying aware of all things advocacy and education on gambling. I also sit as co-chair of the MN DHS committee for gambling providers in MN. I stay current with DHS and legislation needed to help further the availability and quality of services for providers and clients in MN.

*If you have a question for the experts, or you are an expert interested in being featured, please email phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com. Experts have not been compensated for their advice.*



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Driggs from page 1

who live all on their own, don't suckle their young and may eat each other. We mammals are built for cuddling, bearing our young, live and loving partnerships. We often exhibit empathy for each other. These tendencies were all developed in us by evolution. You can see this need in us when a fire breaks out and our family members are saved. The first question people ask, after losing all their worldly goods is "Is everybody OK?" You can read about this phenomenon in *A General Theory of Love* by Thomas Lewis MD, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, MD New York: Vintage Books, 2000. Getting close to others and belonging to a group is the number one in life satisfaction.

*Nobody on his deathbed said, "I wish I had spent more time at the office."*

— PAUL PSONGAS, UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

**ATTACHMENT AND ADDICTION RECOVERY**

These life-saving attachments can be seen in addiction recovery. Addictions are obsessive thinking and uncontrollable impulses to consume substances that can be looked at as avoidance of allowing others to nurture us. Our genetic make-up and early childhood experiences impede our connections to others. As addicts, we learn to starve for love. We don't allow intimacy to get in the way of using a substance, which becomes the be-all and end-all of our existence. Essentially our normal human craving for fulfilling emotional attachment becomes replaced by unfulfilling use of substance-

es. Addicts become split into a cunning, using false self and a nurturing true self. They still look for love but they look for it in all the wrong places. And they become emptier and more lonely over time. Addicts cannot stand to be around caring people who don't use as their shame only gets more exposed. Their only hope is to be around other addicts who have a desire to stop using. In that way they can heal and unite both parts of themselves—their using self and their true self. The nurturing the allows him to receive from fellow addicts is miraculous and life-saving. Addicts in recovery are the most forgiving and spiritual people on the face of the earth. They often go to places that non-addicts have never visited in their lifetime. However, some addicts who are unable to recover just tragically die from their illness. Most addicts who do recover have far better lives than if they had not had an addiction to challenge them.

*I have always felt that a human being could only be saved by another human being. I am aware that we do not save each other very often. But I am aware that we save each other some of the time. The miracle on which one's unsteady attention is focused is always the same, however it may be stated, or however it may remain unstated. It is the miracle of love, love strong enough to guide or drive one into the great estate of maturity, or to put it another way, into the apprehension and acceptance of one's own identity.*

— JAMES BALDWIN, 1964-

*Addicts in recovery are the most forgiving and spiritual people on the face of the earth... Most addicts who do recover have far better lives than if they had not had an addiction to challenge them.*

**LESSON #2: TO BE A WHOLE PERSON, WE MUST DEVOTE OURSELVES TO A MUTUALLY INTIMATE AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIP TO ONE OTHER PERSON FOR THE REST OF OUR LIFE**

Erik Erikson, a famous German American psychologist identified this stage as the Intimacy versus Isolation stage in human development. It is the critical crowning glory of attachment when we can unselfishly be devoted to another person's well-being and happiness while that person is also devoted to our own. Many of us stumble in this stage as we make our way through bad relationships and divorces. Hopefully we learn from our mistakes until we eventually get it right with one other person. Often we need the guidance of a caring professional helper and 12 step group to make this transition as we can't see what we can't

see. Some of us in a committed single life devote ourselves to a life-long friend or vocation to the well-being of another precious person who is also devoted to us.

In my life the earlier misfires still linger in my heart but largely I have learned what I needed to learn. Like others who stumble in this stage I focused too much on getting the perfect partner when I really needed to focus on myself and accepting the abundant love I am offered and being a better partner myself in receiving them. I had to learn that women offer me more than just how they looked and that I myself needed to step up to the plate to love and respect them. This is how I learned to pick out my mate. Women in this culture get too little acknowledgment for their smarts and too much attention for how they look.



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- Meadow Creek - Pine City, MN
- New Beginnings - Waverly, MN
- New Beginnings IOP - 8 Locations
- Oakridge - Rochester, MN
- Tapestry - St. Paul, MN
- Twin Town - St. Paul, MN



from page 12



Over time and much daily communication, I decided to listen to my wife and trust her, especially when it made me uncomfortable. She always looks great to me even as we age together. It helped to read John Gottman's books *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* Simon and Schuster, 1994 and *What Makes Love Last* Simon and Schuster, 2013. Now I am in love forever with the love of my life. I go to places with her that I never dreamed of before and I become a person that I never knew I could be. What I learn now feels like journeying with new discoveries to places I have never been. Every day feels like a day of gratitude in which I receive more than I feel I deserve from all the people in my life due to this special bond. It is a gift than only God can give me.

**LESSON #3: TO BE HAPPY WE MUST LIVE WITH GENEROSITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF SOMETHING MUCH BIGGER THAN OUR SELF**

Our Higher Power is always with us each day in ways we seldom see. Usually, we experience such companionship when we get close to another person and something much bigger than ourselves inexplicably comes about. When a long term addict finally decides to give a 12 Step Meeting a try, when we make up with an old friend whom we've been alienated from, when we volunteer with older people or children, when we first meet the love of our life or when we sit with a loved one on his death bed, God often comes by to visit. Something bigger than our self has intervened in our life and we are changed forever. If we allow Him, God will speak to us in our dreams. The more we listen the more He speaks. Rabbi Harold Kushner talks about this phenomenon

in *When All You Ever Wanted Isn't Good Enough: A Search for a Life That Matters* Touchstone Press, 2001 and *Who Needs God*, Touchstone Press, 2001.

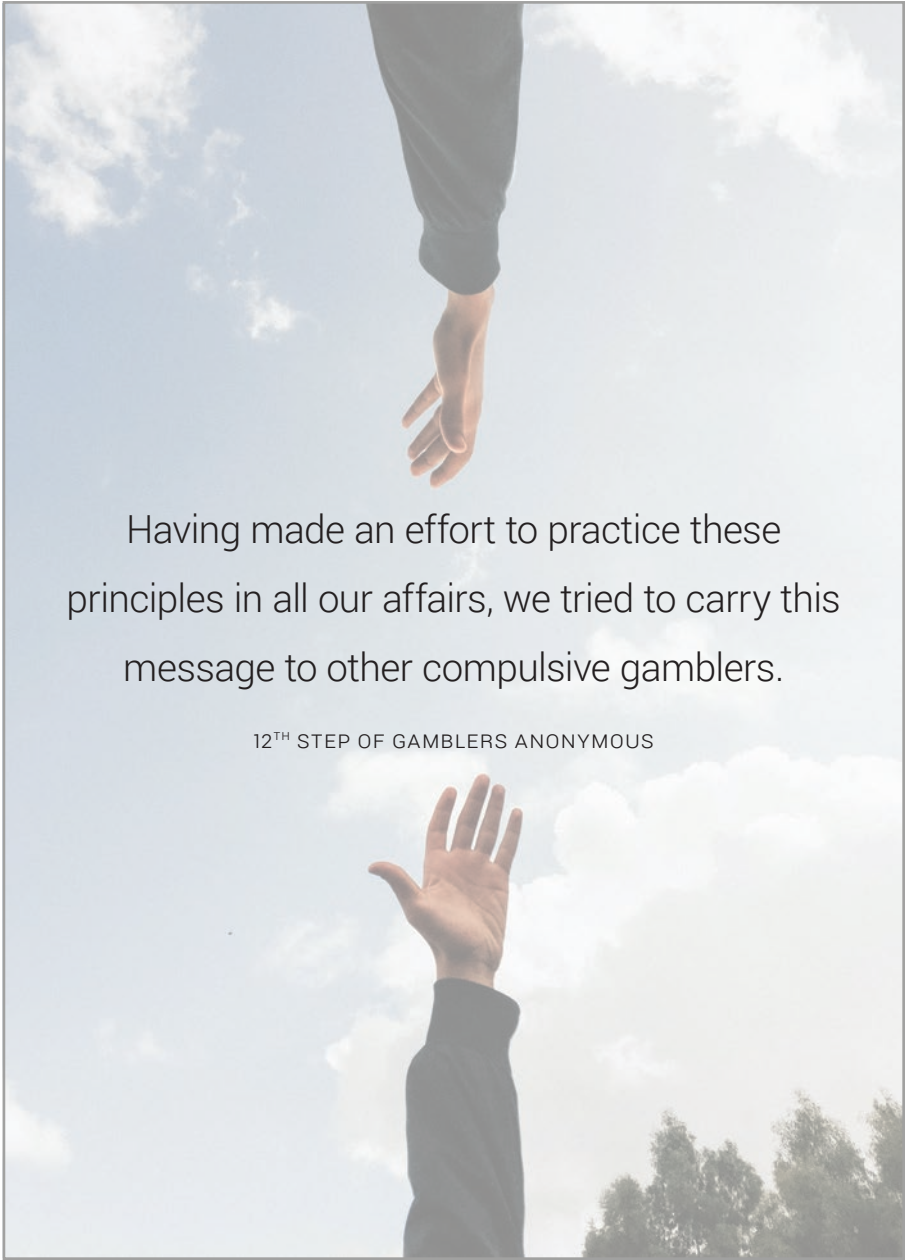
Some of us even have personal experiences in which we meet God in near death episodes. You can read about a research neurologist's powerful experience of life after death in *Proof of Heaven: A Neurologist's Journey Into the After Life* by Eben Alexander, M.D. Simon and Schuster, 2012 and in the book, *To Heaven and Back* by Mary C. Neal M.D., Waterbrook Press, 2011

Most of us may experience a Higher Power in 12 Step Groups and therapeutic relationships with sponsors and psychotherapists. Something magical happens in healing relationships that cannot be explained in words where growth steps and sobriety are attained without knowing how this happens. Sometimes the God between two people works in mysterious ways and helps both the healer and the client in ways never imagined. When two people together have an epiphany then you know that something divine has happened. You can feel the energy in the room. Often deep love and empathy are the contributing factors to the divine intervention.

*And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God.*

— AESCHYLUS, GREEK PLAYWRIGHT

*John H. Driggs, LICSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in St. Paul and co-author of Intimacy Between Men.*



Having made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.

12<sup>TH</sup> STEP OF GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

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SCAN FOR INFO





from page 1

This article will show how gambling addiction is essentially similar to other addictions and, indeed, merits the funding, attention and treatment that other, more commonly known, addictions do.

#### THE ADDICTED BRAIN

While the range of addictions might seem different on the surface, there are certain fundamental things that they have in common. In particular, the processes that take place in the brain of a person with an addiction are quite similar.

When a person gambles for the first time, they might find it exciting. They might win money and feel on top of their world. This experience registers in their “reward hub” (ventral striatum), which acts like a gas pedal in their car to get them to where they want to go. The “control network” (pre-frontal cortex) works to stop or slow down what they’re doing. When these two areas are working together, the person is in control of their behavior and knows when to stop.

Addiction takes place when these two areas of the brain are not communicating properly. Continuing with the car analogy, an addict keeps pressing on the gas only to learn that the brakes may not work. By the time someone realizes they may have a problem with their gambling, it can be difficult to stop because it’s become a habit. Habits are developed when the brain no longer exercises conscious control. The person is essentially on autopilot. They become very aware of gambling cues and triggers, such as sporting events or casino or lottery advertisements.

At this point, gambling isn’t as fun as it was in the beginning. However, the addicted gambler continues gambling to escape the uncomfortable urges that the triggers create with the hope of recreating the high that they experienced early on in their gambling activities.

As the consequences of one’s gambling get worse, so does their mood. Whereas gambling once had a positive effect on their mood, it now cycles downward. Over time, they find gambling less pleasurable, and their mood continues to get worse, even when no longer gambling.

The brain processes that take place in people with addiction have been borne out by recent studies. Analyses of brain imaging of people with substance addictions and people with gambling problems show that both have less activity in the reward hub than people without addictions when it comes to anticipating rewards.

A person with an addictive brain is operating from the deep limbic brain (the place where emotion and survival are housed) and bypassing the frontal cortex (where logic and reason reside). People with addiction don’t choose for their brains to respond in this way, it’s the demand for dopamine that forges these distorted messages and strengthens these unhealthy pathways in the brain. An addicted brain is literally sending the message of survival when it is seeking another infusion of dopamine.

This means that people with addictions don’t process rewards in the same way. They may not be as excited by natural rewards. They might also have trouble learning how new experiences, such as taking up a hobby for the first time, can

*By the time someone realizes they may have a problem with their gambling, it can be difficult to stop because it’s become a habit.*

be enjoyable. That is why some people might seek out unnatural rewards (like gambling, alcohol, or drugs) just to feel pleasure or to escape.

Addictions hijack the attachment system, meaning that when a person is addicted to something, they gradually grow more detached from their personal relationships and responsibilities. They lose their true selves. Philips Flores, PhD., describes addiction as “a disease of isolation.” As the disease progresses, the gambler prefers to be alone, not wanting anyone to disrupt their “flow,” even if they are in the midst of chasing losses.

The good news is that brains are continually changing. Therefore, the processes that create addiction can be reversed to a varying degree over time. A study published in *Neuropsychopharmacology* showed that the brains of individuals with substance-based addictions changed in response to non-addiction cues. This means that individuals recovering from an addiction can start to enjoy natural rewards again. However, because these changes can take time to occur, it emphasizes the importance of continuing to practice previously enjoyable hobbies, to try out new activities in new settings, and to be around those who engage in positive behaviors. For those who choose recovery, it’s a journey that includes breaking from addictive habits and learning to reconnect to people and activities that will promote wellbeing, satisfaction, and joy.

Given the time it takes to build new brain processes—and a lasting recovery—individuals should consider the importance of cultivating healthy responses to non-gambling rewards. This can help protect them from the dangers of cross addiction and relapse, and create a rich, meaningful, and rewarding life over the long term.

#### SIMILAR, BUT NOT EQUAL

Given the similar processes involved with all addictions, it’s not surprising that some individuals “switch” from one type of addiction to another (also known as substitution or cross-addiction). For example, when a person stops drinking, he may find himself smoking more cigarettes, binging on certain foods, or gambling excessively. This unfortunate occurrence can occur because of reduced activity in the reward hub and their ability to “brake,” making a person vulnerable to other unhealthy rewards to satisfy urges. The result could be a new pattern of repeated rewarding behavior that steals one’s attention, opening the door to a new addiction.

With recent technological advancements, brain scans clearly show the

commonalities of substance addiction and gambling addiction. In fact, it was in 2013 when the DSM-V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Health Disorders) finally recognized gambling as a peer addiction to substance addiction.

Given the similarity of the underlying process involved with all addictions, it’s logical and necessary for gambling addiction to be viewed through the same lens as substance use addiction. Fundamentally there should be appropriate and commensurate support in the form of funding. Unfortunately, funding for gambling treatment and prevention is a mere pittance of monies spent on treatment and prevention of alcohol and substance abuse.

In the U.S., substance use disorders are about seven times more common than gambling disorders, yet public funding for substance use treatment is about 338 times greater than public funding for problem gambling services. There are no federal funds for gambling disorder; all funds are provided by the states.

In Minnesota, there are no prevention materials on gambling addiction in the schools. While services offered to those seeking substance use treatment include opportunities to meet with certified peer recovery specialists, no such service is provided for problem gamblers. Minnesota has county-operated behavioral health clinics, yet they don’t offer services for problem gambling, nor is any screening for gambling addiction available. These clinics receive most of their funding from the federal government

and adhere to federal regulations. While these clinics promote themselves as one-stop shops for all mental health and substance addictions, they do a significant disservice to those who may have gambling co-addictions by not screening for this disorder.

Reforms are needed for Minnesota’s approach to gambling addiction. Part of the mission of the Minnesota Alliance on Problem Gambling (MNAPG) is to advocate for parity of services and increased funding, along with educating the general public and treatment community that gambling addiction is very real.

#### AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ADDICTION

Gambling addiction doesn’t discriminate by race, gender, socioeconomic status, culture, or age. Treatment for this often-devastating addiction is available—and it works. If you know of someone in your life who may be exhibiting signs of gambling addiction, let them know that help is available at no cost. Referrals are available through the Minnesota Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-800-333-HOPE (4673). MNAPG’s website has a wealth of information and resources on gambling addiction.

For more info on problem gambling, visit [mnapg.org](http://mnapg.org).

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## Whose Problem Is This?

by Mary Lou Logsdon

*"Allowing others to suffer the consequences of their own actions, without enabling them, is the best motivation for them to undertake the difficult task of change."* — DARLENE LANCER

I remember the freedom I felt when I considered the question: *Whose problem is this?* The problem wasn't mine, though it felt like mine. I was the one who worried, asking myself: *What is he doing while I am at work? Where is he now? Did he do the chores I had assigned?* It was my son's problem. We both thought it was at least partly mine. But I didn't need a summer job. He did. Once it was clear to me, I set a boundary. He found a job the next day.

Someone recently asked me: *What is the difference between empowering and enabling?* The short answer is boundaries.

So often we want to assist others in their success, progress, happiness. It appears supportive, makes us feel good, moves them along (or so we think). Invariably, it is someone we love and care for. But is it something that feeds our ego rather than contributes to their growth and long-term success?

The problem grows when we are focused more on their success than they are. When we encourage, nudge, explain, persist, they can sit back and let it all happen.

Enabling is at the heart of codependency. Author and addiction therapist, Michael Speakman, says "Although you want to help, enabling means you are actually helping someone continue in his or her addiction, which is the opposite of your intention." Not only that, by over functioning for someone else, we under-function for ourselves and impede our own growth.

Empowering on the other hand teaches, trains, and then trusts someone to do it themselves. It supports independence and personal growth. We empower when we are clear in our communication, encourage reasonable risks, and foster expanded support systems. When we provide feedback rather than answers. Empowering leads to the other's learning. When I empower, I trust that even if my loved one fails, they will learn something important. When I enable, I do whatever I can for them to succeed because I am not willing to tolerate my own discomfort in their failure.

I understand why we enable. We believe our safety, self-esteem, and power are dependent on their behaviors. For instance, if my spouse loses their job because they can't get up in the morning to get to work on time, I suffer, too. If my child fails a class, I feel embarrassed. If my parent bursts out in anger, I carry the family shame. But that is not a good enough reason to deny them the consequences of their actions. When I absorb the consequences, they don't have to experience them.

These are some of the questions that we can ask ourselves as we consider whether we are enabling or empowering:

- Is this the first time I have done this or is it a pattern that my loved one expects?
- Am I afraid of a blow-up if I say no?
- Do I think this is my problem? Is it?
- Am I feeling their feelings rather than my own?
- Am I providing them information that is transferable to other situations?

- Does this build their confidence in their own skills?
- Do I think my loved one is capable of managing this? If not, is it a maturity issue, a laziness issue, or an addiction issue?
- Do I think I can rescue them from a dire consequence?
- How do I feel about being the rescuer?
- Do I like the power I feel when I manage their situations?
- Is this about them or is it about how I look to others?
- Am I avoiding knowing something I don't want to know?
- Am I afraid of letting go of my parenting role? Who will I be then?
- Is this supporting them in being their most healthy self?
- Is it supporting me in being my most healthy self?
- Am I afraid of being left and abandoned? Am I abandoning myself?
- Is my action stemming from fear or love?
- Am I clear about why I am doing this?

These questions remind me that when I am enabling, I am in a codependent relationship.

How do I stop enabling? I set boundaries and make agreements. I am willing to do this, but I am not willing to do that. You are welcome to live with me for three months, but you need to keep the bathroom clean, pay rent, let me know when you will be home and when you will be gone, and be responsible for dinner twice a week.

Yes, I will listen to your problem and help you brainstorm a solution. I expect that you will let me know what you have decided to do and what happens.

No, I will not give you money for that. I am not responsible for your money choices, you are.

Besides setting boundaries and making agreements, I let go of the myth that I can be in control of others. Anne Wilson Schaef says, "Co-dependents believe that they can control others' perceptions (through impressions management); control how others see their families; and control what their children perceive and feel and how they will turn out. They believe that with just a little more effort, they can get their families back to normal and make things turn out the way they want. There is almost nothing that co-dependents do not try to control."

Those many years ago I thought I could make things turn out how I wanted. I couldn't. What I could do was let go. Let go of taking responsibility for my son's choices. Let go of feeling his feelings. Let go of thinking I could manage what others thought of me. The answer was to let go.

I am still tempted to take care of others' feelings, solve their problems, advise when not invited to do so. Then I remember to ask myself: *Whose problem is this?* If it's not mine, I let go.

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