



HELP SHEET

SCREENING FOR GAMBLING PROBLEMS

A GUIDE FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Recognise the stigma associated with identifying as a “Problem Gambler” or “Partner of a Problem Gambler” people do not usually disclose in an upfront manner. Therefore they may tell you all sorts of other issues, which are affecting them rather than gambling.
- In 1999 the Productivity Inquiry into Australia’s Gambling Industries found that between 2-3 % of the population (300,000 people) had gambling problems and for every one of them 5-10 other people were negatively impacted. In today’s figures this means there are approximately 500,000 people in Australia with gambling problems and potentially over a quarter of the Australian population affected by problem gambling. So anticipate that you may be in contact with people who are either gambling problematically themselves or negatively affected by someone else’s gambling behaviour.
- Learn about problem gambling its signs and symptoms and where people can get help locally. **G-line 1800 633 635 is a 24 hr** information and referral service and has details on local services.
- Many people who gamble problematically do not recognise it as a difficulty so asking if they have “problems with gambling” or “gambling too much” may not elicit the actual picture.
- As gambling is such a culturally acceptable activity in our society many people do not see their activities in cold hard terms of gambling so asking questions such as “do you ever play the pokies/TAB”, “how often do you play them?” may be more helpful
- Research has shown that asking questions such as “have you ever spent more **money** gambling than you intended” or “have you ever spent more **time** gambling than intended” is more likely to elicit a disclosure.
- Many partners or close relations of people who have gambling difficulties suffer extreme stress, relationship conflict, depression, anxiety and other health problems. They may well present with these other problems and fail to identify with the gambling as the underlying issue.
- Gently exploring with the client as to whether gambling may be present is an invitation to disclose to those who are often held in shame by the gambling activity. But remember problem gambling is often a hidden



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activity and even close family members can be ignorant of its signs and symptoms. They may need to explore their concerns and find out more information about problem gambling to assist them. So know where to direct them for self help information eg www.gisnsw.org.au as they may not want to speak to a gambling counsellor yet.

- Familiarise yourself with some gambling screening tools. GA 20 questions or the South Oaks Gambling Screen may help you use some of the questions to guide your client.
- Research has shown that children of people who gamble problematically are at higher risk of developing their own gambling problems in later life. They are also more likely as children to suffer ill health related to the stressful family dynamics. If you work with children or young people explore this possibility.
- Young people are also at high risk of developing gambling problems. For many turning 18 and being able to gamble is part of a youthful ritual. Helping young people develop healthy alternatives to gambling is part of a healthy lifestyle approach. There are some specific youth gambling services and these can be contacted via **G-line 1800 633 635**
- Many people who have difficulties with gambling use it as an activity to escape other worries or stressful situations.

Those experiencing chronic physical pain through injury or illness are also at risk. Research has shown Electronic Gaming Machine players (pokies) often use the process of playing to block out both emotional or physical pain. Many people who gamble problematically will tell you that it is all about “time out”. If you work with these vulnerable clients consider gambling a real possibility not a coincidence and ask about their gambling activities and how they are coping.