



It's Your Business To Know

Problem Gambling in the Workplace

Employees with gambling problems affect the bottom line.



Government
of
Saskatchewan



Just having a little fun...

Gambling is so much a part of our lives, we often do not think of it as gambling. We flip a coin to see who pays for coffee. We buy raffle tickets from co-workers to support local charities. We buy into the sports pool during the playoff season. And, we can't miss out on the office lottery pool.

Gambling of this nature often seems like a harmless recreational activity. And, for most people – it is. They gamble only occasionally – for fun or to support a community charity.

However, for some people, gambling has greater risks. Gambling becomes the only activity they enjoy. It quickly becomes the focus of their lives.

Many problems are created when an individual is pre-occupied with gambling. A person's employment, family relationships and financial stability are all adversely affected by excessive gambling.

Gambling problems are difficult to detect. To prevent discovery, individuals with gambling problems become very resourceful in covering up their activities. They can usually maintain the appearance of a normal lifestyle, until a crisis occurs.

DOES SOMEONE YOU WORK WITH GAMBLE REGULARLY?

In 2011/12, 72% of health region problem gambling clients who played VLTs played either daily or weekly.

Where does simple fun end and trouble begin?

It is difficult to determine exactly when someone has crossed the line and is headed for trouble. It varies with each person, depending on individual circumstances.

The following may be helpful as a guide. When an individual feels the need to gamble more frequently, gambles more money than they can afford, cannot follow limits on time and money spent gambling, misses work to gamble and “chases losses” (betting more money to win back money already lost), trouble is sure to follow.

Co-workers are often the first line of defense.

Gambling and gambling related activities are frequently carried out during work hours. The workplace is used as a shield to hide the problem gambling from family members. This leaves managers and co-workers as the first line of defense.

The challenge is to identify the problem gambler before the person becomes desperate. To this end, it is important that all employers and employees develop a greater awareness of the signs associated with a gambling problem.

IN 2011/12, 75% OF HEALTH REGION PROBLEM GAMBLING CLIENTS WERE EMPLOYED.

The average health region problem gambling client spent \$2365 a month on gambling in 2011/12.

How problem gambling affects the workplace.

The effects of a gambling problem almost always spill over into the workplace. This occurs through either the gambler themselves or a family member who is living with the effects of a gambling problem.

The workplace is primarily affected through lost time and lost productivity. In desperate situations, the gambler may resort to theft.

Individuals with gambling problems become completely pre-occupied with gambling. The workday is often spent either in the act of gambling, planning the next gambling opportunity, or plotting to get money for gambling.

Family members also become pre-occupied, worrying about finances and holding the family together. There are feelings of anger, frustration, resentment, isolation, and desperation. Family members (spouses, children and parents), often feel consumed by the problems the family is facing.

As a result of lost time, the company's productivity is damaged. The gambler becomes unreliable, misses project deadlines and important meetings and produces work that is of poor quality.

Physical and emotional health problems associated with excessive gambling can further diminish work performance and attendance. Depression, anxiety, high blood pressure or stress-related illnesses can surface in individuals or family members of individuals with gambling related problems.

Suicide and attempted suicide are high among individuals with gambling problems. Stressed family members are also at risk of suicide.

Money is the problem gambler's key to action. Once all legitimate avenues to obtain cash are exhausted, the problem gambler, in desperation, may resort to illegal acts to acquire cash.

Employees with severe problems may commit theft, fraud or embezzlement.

The workplace becomes a primary avenue for the problem gambler to illegally finance their addiction. Problem gamblers do not see this activity as stealing; they see it as "borrowing money" – planning to replace it when they win.

In 2011/12, 11% of health region problem gambling clients reported being involved in the legal system.



Signs of a gambling problem:

- Work performance deteriorates: symptoms include pre-occupation, lack of concentration, absent or late for meetings, assignment deadlines are missed.
- Frequent unexplained absences or disappearances from work.
- Eager to organize and participate in betting opportunities.
- Pay is requested in lieu of vacation time, or large blocks of vacation time are not taken.
- Frequently borrows money or argues with co-workers about money that is owed to them.
- Complains about mounting debts.
- Excessive use of the telephone or internet for non-work related purposes.
- Experiences mood swings, often related to winning and losing streaks.
- Credit card or loan bills are mailed to work rather than home.
- Increasingly spends more time gambling during lunch hours and coffee breaks.
- False claims are made against expense accounts.
- Theft of company property.

What can you do?

If you feel a co-worker or employee is dealing with a gambling problem and you wish to support them, you should express your concerns in a caring and supportive manner. Do not diagnose the problem or tell the individual what to do.

These tips may help you:

- **Be clear, non-judgmental and speak only for yourself.** “I’ve been noticing changes in your work, and I’m worried about you”
- **Use work-related observations.** “I see you coming in very late from lunch every day, too distracted to work all afternoon”
- **Be positive.** “Your work is usually so good and you always meet your deadlines”
- **Explain how the problem affects you.** “I had to reassign two of your projects because you missed three deadlines”
- **Be clear about your position.** “Missing deadlines affects many people on your team and puts additional pressure on everyone’s workloads”
- **Respect personal boundaries.** “I don’t want to pry into your personal life but I had to let you know that I am concerned. I would be happy to talk to you about anything that is troubling you”
- **Provide information, not advice.** “Here are some resources about problem gambling. Another resource available to you is our Employee and Family Assistance Program consultant/HR consultant – here is their name and number”
- **Be prepared for denial or a hostile reaction.** “It must be uncomfortable to hear this. It’s difficult for me to bring it up, but I am concerned about you”

What can your organization do?

A proactive response from your organization will help reduce the negative impact problem gambling can have within the workplace.

The following are some measures to consider:

- **Policy statements**

Most companies have policies governing the use of alcohol and drugs in the workplace. Gambling requires the same attention.

- **Provide awareness training**

Without awareness, problem gambling will not be detected. The signs of a gambling problem are seldom identified as gambling related. Training can help employees and employers to identify and assist the individual struggling with problem gambling.

- **Make financial counseling available**

Financial issues can be just as serious as a mental health disorder. It is important that financial counseling be made available to employees who are in financial crisis.

- **Monitor the money stream**

Some occupations involve direct contact with money while in other occupations money can be “moved”. These occupations might be considered high risk for the individual with problem gambling issues and a monitoring system can protect both the employer and the employee.

[Adapted with permission from Up Close and...Personnel, Vol. 5, No. 3, July 1994]

What resources are available?

Problem Gambling Helpline 1-800-306-6789

The Problem Gambling Helpline provides information and help to individuals and families of individuals with problem gambling issues, across Saskatchewan. Callers receive confidential, professional service from trained counselors. *The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is free of charge.*

The Helpline provides:

- Information
- Short term counseling
- Crisis intervention services
- Referrals to health region gambling counselors and self-help groups

Health Region Problem Gambling Counselors

Confidential counseling services for gamblers and their families are available, free of charge, in all health regions. All services are offered by experienced counselors working in out-patient centres.

Counselor names and phone numbers are available by calling the Problem Gambling Helpline.

Employee and Family Assistance Programs (EAP/EFAP)

Employee and Family Assistance Programs are an intervention service for employees experiencing social, health or financial problems which affect their life and work performance. Many companies and organizations offer this type of service to all employees. Check with your supervisor or HR department for more information about your company EFAP programming.

Private Agency Counselors

There are many private counselors listed in the yellow pages directory or online. Look under “counseling” for the listings. Private agency counselors charge a fee and the cost is not covered under Saskatchewan Health benefits.

Gamblers Anonymous (GA)

Gamblers anonymous provide people with an opportunity to share their experience, support and hope in order to stop gambling. They discuss 12-step recovery. The only membership requirement is a desire to stop gambling. A list of local meetings is available by calling the Problem Gambling Helpline.

Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan division) Gambling Awareness Program

CMHA staff is available to provide resources and training to organizations through group presentations and on-site displays. Gambling awareness is provided in an engaging and interactive format to support your organization’s EFAP or HR department. Prevention materials can be circulated during conferences or general meetings with staff. There is no cost to organizations for this service. For more information call 306-683-2600.



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