



- Gambling, Your Brain and Your Thoughts/Emotions
- Evangelist Kim L. Ferguson, MSW LCSW MTS
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# Gambling

- Dates back to at least the first millennium BC.
- Evolved into growing popularity.
- Increased popularity especially during the pandemic.
- Has led to significant financial loss and psychological and physical hardship.



# Gambling

- the betting or staking of something of value, with consciousness of risk and hope of gain, on the outcome of a game, a contest, or an uncertain event whose result may be determined by chance or accident or have an unexpected result by reason of the bettor's miscalculation

# Ways People Gamble

Sports

Scratch cards

Roulette

Bingo

Poker

Slots

- in a casino
- at the track
- online

# Reason for Gambling

To provide excitement, get a rush of adrenaline

To be more social, overcome shyness or isolation

To numb unpleasant feelings, not think about problems

Boredom or loneliness

To relax after a stressful day

To solve money problems

# True or False

You have to gamble every day to be a problem gambler.

Fact: A problem gambler may gamble frequently or infrequently. Gambling is a problem if it causes problems.

# True or False

Problem gambling is not really a problem if the gambler can afford it.

Fact: Problems caused by excessive gambling are not just financial. Too much time spent on gambling can also lead to relationship and legal problems, job loss, mental health problems including depression, anxiety, and even suicide.

# True or False

Having a gambling problem is just a case of being weak-willed, irresponsible, or unintelligent.

Fact: Gambling problems affect people of all levels of intelligence and all backgrounds. Previously responsible and strong-willed people are just as likely to develop a gambling problem as anyone else.



# True or False

Partners of problem gamblers often drive their loved ones to gamble.

Fact: Problem gamblers often try to rationalize their behavior. Blaming others is one way to avoid taking responsibility for their actions, including what is needed to overcome the problem.

# True or False

If a problem gambler builds up a debt, you should help them take care of it.

Fact: Quick-fix solutions may appear to be the right thing to do. However, bailing the gambler out of debt may actually make matters worse by enabling their gambling problems to continue.

# Cognitively Similar to Drugs

Dr. Timothy W Fong:

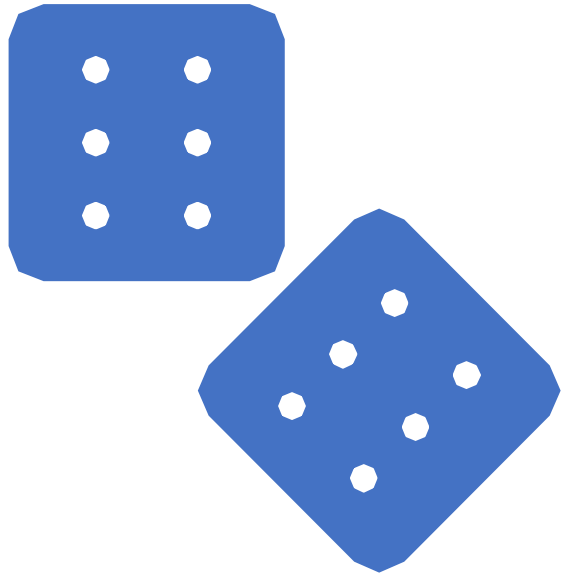
- “Like addictive drugs such as cocaine, heroin, nicotine and alcohol, gambling activates the brain’s reward system, which is powered by dopamine.”
- “Dopamine is a neurotransmitter inside the brain that reinforces sensations of pleasure and connect those sensations to certain behaviors or actions.”

## Dopamine (cont.)

- Dopamine is a chemical released in the brain that makes you feel good.
- Having the right amount of dopamine is important both for your body and your brain.
- Helps nerve cells send messages to other cells.
- It is responsible for allowing you to feel pleasure, satisfaction and motivation. When you feel good because you've achieved something, it's because you have a surge of dopamine in the brain.

## Dopamine (cont.)

- You may start craving more of the dopamine 'reward' (which is caused by many pleasant experiences, including eating nice food, having sex, winning a game and earning money).
- Alcohol and other drugs cause a surge of dopamine too, which is partly why people get addicted to them.
- Can increase levels through diet
  - Chicken
  - Eggs
  - Beef
  - Avocados, bananas, almonds



# Cognitive Distortions

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Dr. Fong:

- “Gambling, unlike any other addiction, is associated with cognitive distortions.”
- Cognitive distortions are internal mental filters or biases that increase our misery, fuel our anxiety, and make us feel bad about ourselves.

## Cognitive Distortions (cont.)

- Often occur as a result of negative events.
- May start in childhood as a child is trying to process an event.
- It starts as an attempt to make meaning out of something (i.e. a child who hears his/her name when parents are arguing may come to the erroneous conclusion that he/she is responsible for the argument).
- Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)
- These distortions can be negated by the Work of the Holy Ghost and therapy.

# Cognitive Distortions (cont.)

- Prefrontal context (front of the brain)
  - Responsible for higher executive functioning/reasoning.
  - Doesn't fully develop until mid-twenties.
  - Doesn't function properly in a brain that has experienced excessive trauma unless retrained through talk-therapy.
- Without a fully functioning prefrontal context, individuals may experience more cognitive distortions.
- Retraining the prefrontal context—speaking truth to the lies
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
  - Dialectal Behavioral Therapy (DBT)



# Cognitive Distortions (cont.)

- An exaggerated pattern of thought that's not based on facts. It consequently leads you to view things more negatively than they really are.
- In other words, cognitive distortions are your mind convincing you to believe negative things about yourself and your world that are not necessarily true.
- Our thoughts have a great impact on how we feel and how we behave. When you treat these negative thoughts as facts, you may see yourself and act in a way based on faulty assumptions.

(PsychCentral)

# Cognitive Distortions (cont.)

- If you engage too frequently in negative thoughts, your mental health can take a hit.
- You can learn to identify cognitive distortions so that you'll know when your mind is playing tricks on you. Then you can reframe and redirect your thoughts so that they have less of a negative impact on your mood and behaviors.
- Individuals with anxiety may have more cognitive distortions.



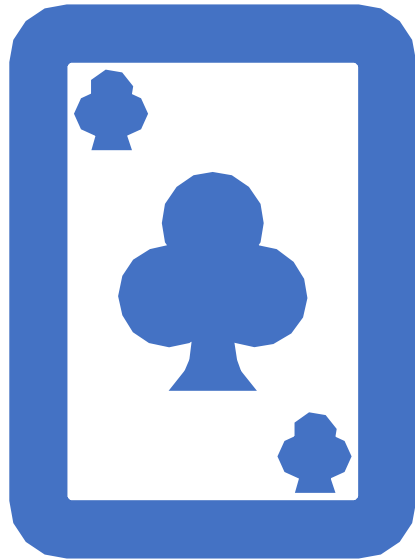
## Back to Dr. Fong...

- “People say, ‘If I keep gambling then eventually I’ll win.’ You don’t say that about alcohol, tobacco or cocaine.”
- The cognitive distortion often takes place within people who have lost large amounts of money or other assets due to gambling. Sometimes their pride, ego, or sense of despair drives them to gamble more, in hopes of making back what they lost.

# Diagnosing a Gambling Disorder (DSM)

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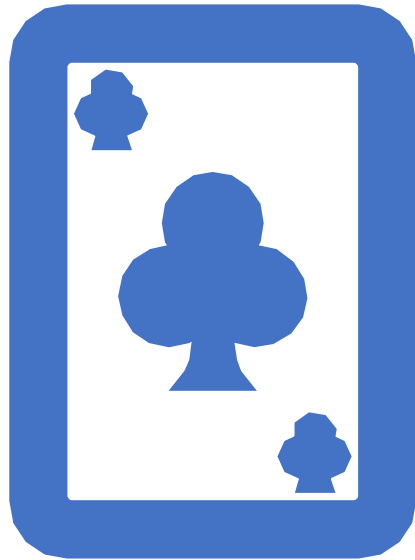




Diagnosis requires 4 of the following 9 symptoms occurring during past year

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- Need to gamble with increasing amounts to achieve desired excitement
- Restless or irritable when trying to cut down/quit gambling
- Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop
- Frequent thoughts about gambling (reliving past/planning future)
- Often gambling when feeling distressed



Diagnosis requires 4 of the following 9 symptoms occurring during past year (cont.)

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- After losing money gambling, often returning to get even (“chasing” one’s losses)
- Lying to hide gambling activity
- Risking or losing a close relationship, a job, or a school opportunity because of gambling
- Relying on others to help with money problems caused by gambling

# Gambling Disorders

- People with gambling disorders can have periods where symptoms subside.
- Tend to run in families.
- Trauma and social inequality (particularly in women) can be risk factors.
- Men tend to start at a younger age than women—can begin as early as adolescence.

# Getting Help

Some people can stop gambling on their own

Many people need help to address their gambling problems

- Only 1 in 10 seek help

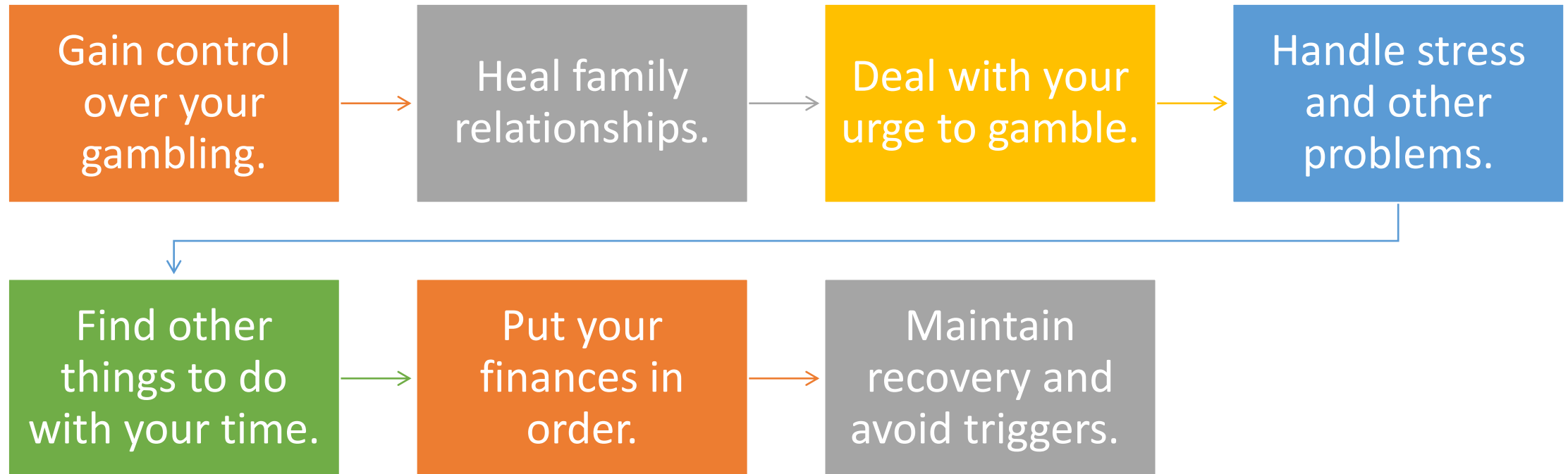
Several types of therapy are used to treat gambling disorders

- cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- psychodynamic therapy
- group therapy
- family therapy



# Counseling Can Help

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# Strategies to Deal With Cravings

1

Reach out for support.  
Call a trusted friend or  
family member. Go to  
a Gamblers  
Anonymous meeting.

2

Distract yourself with  
other activities.

3

Postpone gambling.  
Giving yourself time  
may allow the urge to  
pass or weaken.

4

Stop for a moment  
and consider what will  
happen when you  
gamble.

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**Reason for gambling:**

**Sample substitute behaviors:**

**To provide excitement, get a rush of adrenaline**

Sport or a challenging hobby, such as mountain biking, rock climbing, or Go Kart racing.

**To be more social, overcome shyness or isolation**

Counseling, enroll in a public speaking class, join a social group, connect with family and friends, volunteer, find new friends.

**To numb unpleasant feelings, not think about problems**

Try therapy or use HelpGuide's free Emotional Intelligence toolkit.

**Boredom or loneliness**

Find something you're passionate about such as art, music, sports, or books and then find others with the same interests.

**To relax after a stressful day**

As little as 15 minutes of daily exercise can relieve stress. Or deep breathing, meditation, or massage.

**To solve money problems**

The odds are always stacked against you so it's far better to seek help with debts from a credit counselor.

Know Someone With a  
Gambling Problem?

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# DO... (For Family Members and Friends)

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- Talk to your partner about their problem gambling and its consequences when you're calm and not stressed or angry.
- Look for support. Self-help groups for families of problem gamblers, such as Gam-Anon, for example, can introduce you to people who've faced the same obstacles.
- Explain to your partner that you're seeking help because of how their gambling affects you and the family.
- Talk to your children about your partner's problem gambling.
- Take over management of your family finances, carefully monitoring bank and credit card statements.
- Encourage and support your loved one during treatment of their gambling problem, even though it may be a long process peppered with setbacks.

# Don't... (For Family Members and Friends)

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- Lose your temper, preach, lecture, or issue threats and ultimatums that you're unable to follow through on.
- Overlook your partner's positive qualities.
- Prevent your partner from participating in family life and activities.
- Expect your partner's recovery from problem gambling to be smooth or easy. Even when their gambling stops, other underlying problems may surface.
- Bail your partner out of debt or enable their gambling in any way.
- Cover-up or deny your partner's problem to yourself or others.

# Preventing Suicide in Problem Gamblers

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- When faced with the consequences of their actions, problem gamblers can suffer a crushing drop in self-esteem. This is one reason why there is a high rate of suicide among compulsive gamblers.
- Call 9-8-8
- If you suspect your loved one is feeling suicidal, call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/) in the U.S. at 1-800-273-8255

# References

- Encyclopedia Britannica
- Gambling Addiction and Problem Gambling—HelpGuide.org
- What is Gambling Disorder? (APA)
- Gambling addiction can cause psychological, physiological health challenges. (UCLA Health)