

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

## ASSISTANCE FOR PROBLEM GAMBLERS

**G**ambling has become more prevalent in the last two decades due to its legalization in many states. Once considered an underground activity, gambling has evolved into a legal “gaming industry” that has grown tenfold since the mid-1970s. Almost all states have some form of legal lottery and many have legalized casinos.

But this article is not about approval (or disapproval) of the gaming industry. It’s about helping those with gambling problems and emphasizing that the Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. provides help to lawyers, judges and their family members who may be suffering from problem gambling and the severe damage it can cause.

In the same way that a majority of people can consume alcohol recreationally and not experience problems, many people also place a wager in the gaming industry now and then without experiencing problems. But, conversely, much like alcohol becomes poison to the alcoholic who develops a chronic yet treatable illness, gambling may become compulsive and toxic to the problem gambler who develops a pathology that requires similar treatment.

The starting point of addressing any problem is recognizing it. Problem gambling is defined as:

*Problem gambling is gambling behavior which causes disruptions in any major area of life: psychological, physical, social or vocational. The term “Problem Gambling” includes, but is not limited to, the condition known as “Pathological” or “Compulsive” Gambling, a progressive addiction characterized by increasing preoccupation with gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop, “chasing” losses, and loss of*

*control manifested by continuation of the gambling behavior in spite of mounting, serious, negative consequences. (Source: National Council on Problem Gambling.)*

Problem gambling can destroy families and marriages, force bankruptcies, and jeopardize employment. Problem gamblers have higher rates of suicide, divorce and criminal behavior. Seeking professional help for a gambling problem is nothing to be ashamed of and it is not a sign of weakness. On the contrary, it is a sign of strength to recognize that gambling has become a real problem and to responsibly seek assistance.

Helping the person with the gambling problem is not the only issue. Those around the problem gambler need information and tools of their own to deal with the problem gambler and to weather the collateral damage of problem gambling. Help should be sought by those with a problem gambler in their midst, regardless of whether the problem gambler seeks help.

Treatment professionals are quick to point out that no one can force someone else to stop gambling. Peers, friends and family can, however, play an important role in helping the problem gambler decide to get help by simply refusing to loan money or enable the gambling behavior. The problem gambler needs to fully “own” his or her behavior and suffer the full brunt of consequences. Only then can the gambler truly know the seriousness of the problem.

There are many resources for information on problem gambling, including the Louisiana Association on Compulsive Gambling at [www.helpforgambling.org](http://www.helpforgambling.org) and the National Council on Problem Gambling at [www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org).

To make a preliminary determination about whether someone has a gambling problem, ask the following questions:

1. Are you ever preoccupied with planning gambling activity or getting money to gamble?
2. Do you increase amounts of money wagered to achieve the desired excitement?
3. Have you made repeated, unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop gambling?
4. Are you restless or irritable when you attempt to cut down or stop gambling?
5. Does gambling help you relieve feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety or depression?
6. After losing money gambling, have you ever returned another day to try and get even?
7. Have you ever lied to family members or others to conceal the extent of your gambling?
8. Have you ever committed illegal acts such as theft or embezzlement to finance gambling?
9. Has your gambling jeopardized a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity?
10. Have you ever relied on others to provide money to relieve a debt caused by gambling?

If you answered YES to any of these questions, it may indicate a problem. Lawyers, judges and their family members may seek help from the Lawyers Assistance Program by calling (866)354-9334, emailing [LAP@louisianalap.com](mailto:LAP@louisianalap.com), or visiting LAP online at: [www.louisianalap.com](http://www.louisianalap.com). Your call is confidential as a matter of law and you do not have to give your name.

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