

Problem Gambling

Gambling among college students runs along the continuum from no gambling, to experimenting, to regular gambling, to excessive gambling. “Problem gambling” is not defined by the frequency of gambling, but rather, by the disruption gambling causes in the person’s life. Aspects of life affected include: psychological, physical, social, vocational. For college students, adverse consequences might include missing classes, failing grades, sleep deprivation, and financial debt. Research on college students has been relatively recent, and findings vary from study to study. It is generally thought that 5-9% of college men and 1-2% of college women are problem gamblers.

Essential features of problem gambling include:

- preoccupation with gambling
- a need to bet more money more frequently
- restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop
- continuing gambling despite mounting serious, negative consequences

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

The risk of problem gambling is highly correlated with abuse of alcohol, illicit drugs, and tobacco. Heavy alcohol use is associated with loss of money beyond what a student can afford. Males are at higher risk than females. The risk is three to five times greater for a student whose parent is a problem gambler. Protective factors – ones that lessen the risk – include an interest in religion and the arts, and having parents with a college education.

The College Setting

Gambling is in some ways a “norm” among college students. The most popular games are casino activities such as cards and gambling machines. Informal games with friends are also common. Easy access to online betting has certainly contributed to problem gambling. There are thought to be more than 400 online poker sites. Bets can be placed via internet, phones, cell phones, and interactive television. It is important to remember that a majority of college student gambling is benign – and does not jeopardize the student’s wellbeing.

Signs of Problem Gambling

It is, of course, important to recognize when a student is involved in problem gambling. Examples of “warning signs” include:

- Being matter of fact about large losses: “But I haven’t lost that much” or “It isn’t as if I gamble every day”

- Gambling for a longer time period than planned
- Loss of sleep due to gambling late into the night or inability to shut off thoughts of gambling
- Exhausting supply of money
- Using money for gambling rather than for paying bills
- Repeated, unsuccessful attempts to stop gambling
- Breaking the law in order to finance gambling
- Borrowing money to finance gambling
- Feeling depressed or suicidal because of gambling losses
- Feeling remorseful after gambling
- Gambling to get money to meet financial obligations
- Using gambling to relieve feelings of loneliness, emptiness, anxiety or depression

For More Information

A person with any of the signs of problem gambling is strongly encouraged to seek counseling. Confidential treatment is available through the Union College Counseling Center. Problem gamblers usually seek treatment only at the urging or insistence of important people in their lives. The Counseling Center provides consultation regarding how to help a friend or loved one with a gambling problem.

To make an appointment- either for treatment, or for consultation about a friend or family member, please call (518) 388-6161, or stop by the front desk of the Wicker Wellness Center.