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OPINION/EDITORIAL

FINANCIAL TROUBLES, HEALTH PROBLEMS MAY BE A SIGN OF PROBLEM GAMBLING HAVE THE CONVERSATION WITH FRIENDS & FAMILY



JENNIFER FARINGER

right time to have the conversation about problem gambling with friends, partners, and children.

Problem gambling has been called "the hidden addiction," because there are no visible signs to help identify the problem. As a result, problem gambling often goes undetected, until a major crisis is experienced. The longer the problem gambling goes untreated, the greater the financial, emotional or health consequences can become. Financial stress, or health issues, may be an indicator that someone in your life has a gambling addiction.

Common health consequences of gambling disorder include:

- Sleep disorders
- Anxiety
- Heart disease

Sports gambling associated with March Madness activities began March 17, and runs through early April. March is also Problem Gambling Awareness Month, which makes now the

- Abuse of alcohol or other drugs
- Depression
- Digestive ailments

While, for some, gambling is a form of entertainment, for a problem gambler, chemicals in the brain are activated during gambling activity, resulting in between six and eight million Americans having a gambling addiction. And, because a gambling disorder often goes unrecognized, only around eight percent of those with a problem ever seek treatment. Problem gambling is a legitimate mental health issue that responds well to treatment and counseling.

If you suspect someone in your life has a gambling problem, have the conversation. Ask if they borrow money from friends or family to gamble. Ask if their gambling activity interferes with their ability to focus on work or school. Ask if they've ever lied about their gambling, or if they've bet more than they intended. Share resources with them that can help.

For problem gamblers, March Madness describes their strong, persistent urges to gamble, regardless of the consequences. Gambling is all around us, and the social pressure to gamble can be strong, especially this time of the year! Sports betting is a

particularly easy way for someone to be introduced to gambling. Office pools and bracket competitions happen in the workplace, at schools, and among friends, and can make people feel like part of a team.

Sports betting is the most popular form of gambling among youth ages 14 to 22. And, nearly 25 percent of males bet on sports in an average month. An estimated 60 million Americans filled out sports brackets last year, and, according to Las Vegas odds-maker Pregame.com, about \$12 billion is wagered on the March Madness tournament, making March the largest month for individual bets.

While gambling can be an entertaining pastime for some, for others it can quickly become a problem. If you, or your loved ones, find yourselves preoccupied with betting, lying about how much money has been bet, and feeling anxious or sleepless due to betting activity, or borrowing money to keep betting, it is very possible that there is a problem with gambling. Gambling can be a serious addiction which negatively impacts a person's job, relationships, health, well-being, and finances.

Locally, NCADD-RA is partnering again with the New York Council on Problem Gambling on the 2015 YOU(th) Decide Outreach Project. Through this project, our primary target audience is youth ages 12 to 17. Our project goals

include:

- Increasing the awareness of the issue of underage gambling, and the importance of decreasing youth access to gambling among parents of school aged youth, and community leaders.
- Increasing awareness of key media literacy facts.
- Increasing youth awareness of the common misperceptions of gambling.
- Increasing parental action toward the issue of underage gambling.

In addition, during the project, NCADD-RA will be offering youth problem gambling media literacy training upon request. We are also seeking youth/adult teams who want to be involved in advocating for gambling-free events and /or gambling policies in their schools and/or communities.

For further information on our local YOU(th) Decide outreach project, please contact NCADD-RA Director Jennifer Faringer at (585) 719-3480 or email jfaringer@depaul.org. And, for more ideas on how to have the conversation, or information on problem-gambling prevention and counseling resources, or to schedule a presentation, call (585) 719-3480 or visit www.ncadd-ra.org.

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