

## Problem gambling and the workplace

Gambling is part of our mainstream culture and we know that most problem gamblers are ordinary, hard working people. Over 60,000 adult employed Oregonians are problem gamblers.

### What is problem gambling?

A problem gambler is anyone whose gambling is causing psychological, financial, emotional, marital, legal, or other difficulties for themselves or the people around them.

Problem gambling may be an isolated case of overspending, or a pattern of excessive gambling when upset, or it may be an ongoing problem with continual losses and mounting debts.

At the extreme end of this range is pathological gambling, where people are unable to control their gambling much as those addicted to alcohol are unable to control their drinking.

### Effects on the workplace

Although not often recognized, problem gambling is a significant workforce issue. 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, lost productivity and, in desperate situations, the gambler may resort to theft, fraud, or embezzlement.

### Lost time

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

Family members also become preoccupied, worrying about finances and holding the family together. There are feelings of anger, frustration, resentment, isolation and desperation. Family members (spouses, children, parents) feel like their life is consumed by the problems they are facing.

## Free, effective treatment available statewide

Counseling services for gamblers and their families are available free of charge in Oregon. All services are offered by experienced counselors. Outpatient and Residential treatment is available. Call the Problem Gambling Help Line (877-2-STOP-NOW) for more information about Oregon's highly acclaimed system of problem gambling treatment.

### Other Programs:

#### Oregon's Gambling Evaluation And Reduction Program

Oregon's Gambling Evaluation And Reduction Program (GEAR) is designed to provide gamblers with the tools and support to change unwanted gambling patterns without traveling to a counselor's office. GEAR combines phone consultation with certified counselors, workbook exercises and referral resources to give participants the tools and motivation to make good choices about if and how much to gamble. For more information: 877-870-0177.

#### Gamblers Anonymous (GA)

Gamblers Anonymous provides people with an opportunity to share their experience, support and hope in order to stop gambling. They discuss 12-step recovery. The only membership requirements is a desire to stop gambling. A list of local meetings is available by calling the Problem Gambling Help Line. (877-2-STOP-NOW)

#### Gam-Anon

Gam-Anon provides a supportive environment for the spouses, relatives, or close friends of problem gamblers to share their experiences. There is no membership fee. Participation in Gam-Anon will help you to realize you are not alone. Gam-Anon is particularly important for immediate support in a calling crisis. A list of local meetings is available by calling the Problem Gambling Help Line. (877-2-STOP-NOW)

#### Problem Gambling Educational Resources

The Oregon Department of Human Services, Problem Gambling Services Unit, loans books, journals, videos and other resource materials on problem gambling. To find out what materials are available, call 800-822-6772.

If you think you might be gambling too much, or if you are worried about a friend or relative, help is available.

Oregon has a toll-free gambling help line:

**877-2-STOP-NOW**  
(877-278-6766)

## Co-workers – 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 they become desperate. To this end, it is important that all employers and employees develop a greater awareness of the signs associated with a gambling problem.

## Workplace signs of gambling problems

- Work performance deteriorates; the person is preoccupied, has trouble concentrating, is absent or late for meetings and misses assignment deadlines.
- Frequent, unexplained absences or disappearances from work.
- Eager to organize and participate in betting opportunities.
- Pay is requested in lieu of vacation time, large blocks of vacation time are not taken.
- Frequently borrows money, argues with co-workers about money that is owed to them.
- Complains about mounting debts.
- Excessive use of the telephone and internet for personal matters.
- 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.

## When they suspect an employee has a gambling problem, what can supervisors do?

Here are a few tips:

- **Express concerns in a caring and supportive manner. Do not diagnose the problem or tell the individual what to do. Be clear, nonjudgmental and speak only for yourself.**  
"I've been noticing changes in your work, and I am concerned 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.**  
"You are a conscientious person with a history of doing good work."
- **Explain how the problem affects you.**  
"I had to reassign two of your projects, because you missed three deadlines."
- **Be clear about your position.**  
"I need you to perform your job duties to the best of your ability, your performance has been slipping and without corrective actions your job is in jeopardy."
- **Respect personal boundaries.**  
"I don't want to pry into your life, but I had to let you know I am concerned. I would be happy to talk to you about anything that is troubling you or assist you in making an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) appointment."
- **When a gambling problem is known, provide information, not advice.**  
"Here is some information about available problem gambling resources. Another resource available to you is our EAP professional, 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**

Incorporate the topic of gambling into relevant policies. Most companies have policies on Internet use, phone use, and disallowed activities during work hours. When reviewing policy statements make sure the policies are sufficiently comprehensive to address gambling issues; e.g., Internet gambling.

- **Utilize your Employee Assistance Program**

Ask your EAP professional about awareness training. Without awareness, problem gambling will not be detected. Training can help employees and employers identify and assist the problem gambler. When you suspect there is a problem gambling issue in the workplace, call your EAP professional for further consultation and/or make EAP referrals.

- **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 a fiscal 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 problem gambler and a monitoring system can protect employee and employer.

## What statewide resources are available in Oregon?

### Problem Gambling Help Line:

**877-2-STOP-NOW (877-278-6766)**

The Problem Gambling Help Line provides help to people with gambling problems and their families. 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 help line provides: information, consultation, crisis intervention services, follow-up services, referrals to publicly funded problem gambling counselors and self-help groups.

## Lost productivity

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 illness can surface in individuals with gambling related problems and their family members.

Suicide and suicide attempts occur among individuals with gambling problems. Stressed family members are also at risk of suicide. The emotional, financial or legal problems can appear to be so severe that suicide looks like the only way out.

## Theft, fraud and embezzlement

Employees with severe problems may commit theft, fraud or embezzlement. Money is the gambler’s key to action. Once all legitimate avenues to obtain cash are exhausted, the gambler, in desperation, may resort to illegal acts to acquire cash.

The workplace becomes a primary avenue for the gambler to illegally finance their gambling. Problem gamblers do not see this activity as stealing. They see it as borrowing money and plan to replace it when they win.

## Treatment is free & confidential

### Getting help

If you think you or someone you know may have a gambling problem, help is available. Treatment options include telephone counseling, in-person individual counseling, and group counseling, **all services are free**. Call the confidential, 24-hour phone number below for information or help:

**877-2-STOP-NOW (877-278-6766)**

### For more information:

Department of Human Services  
Addictions & Mental Health Division:  
[www.oregon.gov/DHS/addiction](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/addiction)

Oregon Lottery Problem Gambling Help Site:  
[www.oregonlotteryhelp.com](http://www.oregonlotteryhelp.com)

Gamblers Anonymous:  
[www.gamblersanonymous.org/mtgdirOR.html](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/mtgdirOR.html)

Gam-Anon:  
[www.gam-anon.org/meeting.asp](http://www.gam-anon.org/meeting.asp)

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# Get help for a gambling problem

Treatment is free, confidential and it works.

## 877-2-STOP-NOW

(877-278-6766)

# 1 OUT OF 37 OF YOUR EMPLOYEES MAY HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM.

