

# ADDRESSING GAMBLING ISSUES IN SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT

## A Guide for Peers and Counselors When Gambling Treatment Is Outside Your Scope

Co-occurring problem gambling can impede substance use treatment success. As a recovery professional, you play an important role in helping clients address co-occurring problems that may impact their substance recovery. Your existing clinical skills can support screening for a problem, compassionate psychoeducation, and encouraging further help-seeking. By following the guidance below, you do not have to step outside of your scope to address potential gambling issues.

1

### Screen Briefly and Routinely

- Use validated screens (e.g., PGSI or BBGS). Document results objectively—do not diagnose.
- Normalize: *"We ask all clients about gambling because it often affects recovery."*

2

### Provide Basic Psychoeducation

- Gambling activates the same reward pathways involved in substance use.
- Wins/losses can trigger cravings or emotional swings that impact recovery.
- Emphasize that gambling problems are common and treatable.

3

### Explore How Gambling Interacts With Substance Use

- Use basic motivational interviewing strategies to help engage clients in discussion about gambling. Clients may not recognize the impact of gambling on their recovery.
- Ask: *"How does gambling affect your stress, spending, or substance use goals?"*
- Identify patterns or risks that may disrupt treatment stability.

4

### Offer Self-Help and Community Resources

- In Nevada, state-supported specialty gambling treatment is offered at no to low cost: <https://www.projectworthnv.org/>
- Free to use apps can support healthy gambling: <https://www.getevive.com/>
- Community peer support: Gamblers Anonymous (GA), Gam-Anon for affected others, etc.

5

### Refer When Concerns Exceed Your Scope & Monitor Goals

- Document objectively without diagnosing (e.g., client scored a 10 on the PGSI, placing them on the high-risk range for problem gambling).
- Document the client's goal in their treatment or recovery plan.
- Monitor goal, using client's self-report (e.g., client reported no gambling for past 30 days)
- Refer to a qualified provider for further evaluation to rule out a gambling disorder.

 **Key Reminder:** You are not diagnosing or treating gambling disorder—you are recognizing how gambling affects recovery, supporting safety and stability, and connecting clients to appropriate care.