

Screening for Gambling Disorder: Getting Started

What is Screening?

Screening is a structured process to identify people whose gambling behaviors may indicate Gambling Disorder or gambling-related harms. Gambling screens are standardized questionnaires designed to identify individuals who may have a problem and should receive a full assessment.

Selecting a Gambling Disorder Screening Tool

There are over 30 different screens for Gambling Disorder. They can differ in several ways:



Format

There are two types of screens: brief screens and full-length screens.

Brief Screens: Brief screens are usually no more than 5 questions long and take less than a minute to answer. Scoring is simple. They are a good choice for incorporating routine screening into your workflow.

Full-length Screens: Full-length screens are generally 10-20 questions or longer and take more time to administer. Scoring can be more complicated. They are a good choice for when you have more time and want to gather a more detailed picture of the client's behavior.



Populations/Settings Tested

Screening tools are often tested with different populations such as veterans, immigrants, youth or older adults.

Do you work with specific populations? If so, you might consider selecting a screening tool that has been tested within that population and shown to be effective.



Psychometric Properties




Psychometric properties tell us how well a screen does its job.

Sensitivity: Highly sensitive screens will flag almost everyone with Gambling Disorder. While those with Gambling Disorder will be correctly identified, a sensitive screen might incorrectly trigger a full assessment for those who don't actually have the condition, which can be costly and time consuming.

Specificity: Highly specific screens rule out almost everyone without Gambling Disorder. They are good for when it's especially important to avoid unnecessary full assessments, but might miss some people who have problems.

Comparing Popular Gambling Screens

Two of the most common gambling screens are the Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (BBGS) and the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS). Let's see how they compare.

	Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (BBGS)	South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS)
	Brief screen with 3 items (yes/no); "yes" to any items = positive screen, the person should complete a full assessment	Full screen with 20 items (various formats); "yes" to 5+ items = positive screen, the person should complete a full assessment
	Used successfully with veterans, college students, and among those in treatment for a substance use or mental health problem	Used successfully with veterans, college students, adolescents, and in clinical settings
	High sensitivity High specificity	Moderate sensitivity High specificity

The BBGS is a great option if you are looking to implement routine screening into your workflow. While it presents a less-detailed picture of the client's gambling behavior compared to the SOGS, its high sensitivity and specificity make it a good choice for those who want to identify as many people with Gambling Disorder as possible while also avoiding unnecessary full assessments on those who don't have the condition.

Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen Questions:

1. During the past 12 months, have you become restless, irritable or anxious when trying to stop/cut down on gambling?
2. During the past 12 months, have you tried to keep your family or friends from knowing how much you gambled?
3. During the past 12 months did you have such financial trouble as a result of your gambling that you had to get help with living expenses from family, friends or welfare?



Access the Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (BBGS)

Print BBGS Available through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Clearinghouse.



Massachusetts Problem Gambling Helpline

GamblingHelplineMA.org
800.327.5050



Massachusetts Technical Assistance Center for Problem Gambling Treatment

M-TAC.org
MTAC@hria.org



The MA Problem Gambling Helpline and M-TAC are funded by the Office of Problem Gambling Services, MA Department of Public Health

Mass.gov/OPGS