

Is There Help for Problem Gambling? You Bet.

"I figure that you have the same chance of winning the lottery whether you play or not."

-- Fran Lebowitz, U.S. writer and humorist

On October 24, 2007, the president and CEO of the Tennessee Lottery announced that over \$1 billion in proceeds had been raised for education since January 20, 2004.

Less widely announced, however, is the fact that problem gambling behavior sometimes accompanies lottery play.

The State of Tennessee Department of Health website notes that "Gambling addiction is a significant public health problem," according to Stephanie Perry, M.D., assistant commissioner for the State's Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services.

Here are some Q's and A's about problem gambling resources in Tennessee.

Q. What is "problem gambling"?

Problem gambling is gambling behavior which causes disruptions in any major area of life: psychological, physical, social or vocational. Problem gambling sometimes develops into addictive disorders.

Q. Can the Tennessee Lottery spend its money to fight problem gambling?

No. The purpose of the Tennessee Lottery has been to raise funds for scholarships for Tennessee students. The Tennessee Lottery is limited by law to its education purpose, so it cannot use any funds to help treat the spread of problem gambling in Tennessee.

In fact, the Tennessee Legislature passed a law which keeps the Tennessee Lottery from being defined as "gambling." As a result, the word "gambling" does not appear anywhere in the Tennessee Lottery website – except on one page. To their credit, Tennessee Lottery staff members have placed a short list of "Problem Gambling Resources" on their "Play Responsibly" page. (Go to www.tnlottery.com and click on "Play Responsibly".)

Q. What help does Tennessee provide for problem gambling?

Tennessee has a free service called the REDLINE

to help combat problem gambling. The telephone number is 1-800-889-9789 and provides Tennesseans with 24-hour, 7-day referral information about a limited number of resources for gambling problems.

The REDLINE service is provided by the Tennessee Department of Health and the Tennessee Association of Alcohol, Drug and Other Addiction Services (TAADAS).

Unlike some other state lotteries, however, Tennessee's toll-free helpline number is not printed on the backs of printed tickets and scratch-off tickets.

Q. When should someone seek help with a gambling problem?

The National Council on Problem Gambling has identified criteria for problem gamblers. If a person exhibits any of the signals below, he or she should consider calling the REDLINE at 1-800-889-9789:

- You have often gambled longer than you had planned.
- You have often gambled until your last dollar was gone.
- Thoughts of gambling have caused you to lose sleep.
- You have used your income or savings to gamble while letting bills go unpaid.
- You have made repeated, unsuccessful efforts to stop gambling.
- You have broken the law or considered breaking the law to finance your gambling.
- You have borrowed money to finance your gambling.
- You have felt depressed or suicidal because of your gambling losses.
- You have been remorseful after gambling.
- You have gambled to get money to meet your financial obligations.

Please share this column lovingly if you see one of these signs. Help may be available.

by Jim Hawkins, Managing Attorney, Gallatin office, Legal Aid Society

Note: This column is not intended to take the place of legal advice. All cases are different and need individual attention. Consult with a private attorney of your choice to review the facts and law specific to your case.

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