

GROUP LIFE
& HEALTH

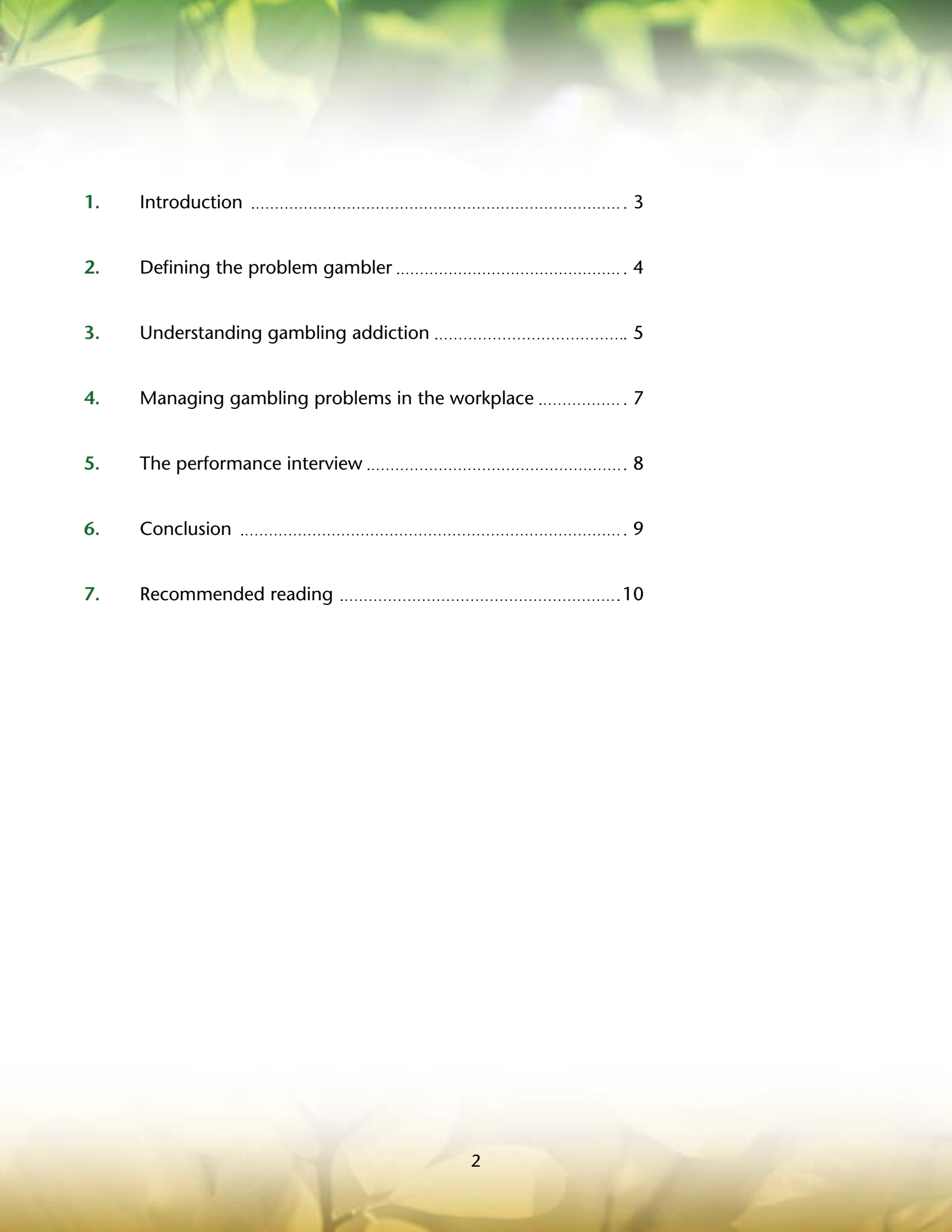
ONLINE EDUCATIONAL BOOKLET

MANAGING GAMBLING PROBLEMS IN THE WORKPLACE

Well.
And well worth it.



www.standardlife.ca



1.	Introduction	3
2.	Defining the problem gambler	4
3.	Understanding gambling addiction	5
4.	Managing gambling problems in the workplace	7
5.	The performance interview	8
6.	Conclusion	9
7.	Recommended reading	10

Introduction

Casinos, scratch tickets, bingo halls, lotteries, sports betting games, video lottery terminals (VLTs), on-line betting and even the stock market. All these betting activities can be fun, but for just over one in 20 of us (or 1.2 million Canadians) there's the potential to develop a serious problem with gambling – and those numbers are rising.

In 2002, Statistics Canada estimated that 18.9 million Canadians wagered \$11.3 billion on everything from VLTs, lottery tickets and bingos to blackjack and slot machines in casinos – a 400 percent increase over a decade.

The increase was due to the fact that during the 1990s, provincial governments began legalizing permanent casinos and VLTs. In 2002, 76 percent of Canadians reported that they had spent money gambling in the previous year, four in 10 on a weekly basis.

While problem gamblers represent just five percent of the population, that five percent can wreak havoc in the workplace. The costs include:

- higher rates of absenteeism
- more stress-related emotional and physical problems resulting in higher health benefit costs
- lack of concentration resulting in poor job performance
- eroded interpersonal relationships
- decreased workplace morale as co-workers increasingly “pick up the slack”

As managers, it is essential we understand the implications of problem gamblers in the workplace, recognize the signs that may indicate a problem and resolve the issue in a fair, impartial and timely manner.

More information and assistance is available through Expert-Aide, a service that offers professional coaching and consultation for managers to help them deal with employees who are having difficulties. Orientation sessions and online booklets are also available, as are referral services for employees who are facing difficulties that effect, or could effect, their job performance. Contact Expert-Aide at 1 866 314-9533 (English service) or 1 866 314-9534 (service en français).

Defining the problem gambler

Just as most of us can enjoy a glass or two of wine with dinner, so too can we enjoy an occasional visit to the racetrack or casino. We're able to regulate our behaviour. For compulsive gamblers, however, this ability to self regulate is either not present or has disappeared. These individuals often don't realize their gambling is out of control and is causing problems in their personal and professional lives.

Gambling is a chronic and progressive failure to resist impulses to gamble, and gambling behaviour that compromises, disrupts or damages personal, family or vocational pursuits.

It's difficult for people who are able to control their gambling to understand how anyone could lose control and face financial and personal ruin. But that's what addiction is all about: losing control in spite of everything you know or anyone else can tell you. It's not about logic.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association, pathological gambling is considered to be an "impulse control" disorder and people are considered to fit the category based (in part) on:

Persistent and maladaptive gambling behaviour as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

1. Is preoccupied with gambling (e.g., preoccupied with reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping, or planning the next venture, or thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble).
2. Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement.

3. Has repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling.
4. Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
5. Gambles as a way of escaping from problems or relieving a dysphoric mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression).
6. After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even ("chasing" one's losses).
7. Lies to family members, therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.
8. Has committed illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft or embezzlement to finance gambling.
9. Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job or educational or career opportunity because of gambling.
10. Relies on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling.

Understanding gambling addiction

What causes or precipitates gambling addiction?

While it may appear that addictions are pleasure-seeking behaviours, the roots of any addiction can usually be traced to a wish to suppress or avoid some kind of emotional pain. Getting lost for hours at a casino table, at videopoker, at the horse track, or in the fantasy of how one will spend those millions won on the lottery, may provide relief from an unhappy life. Addiction is a way to escape from reality, from something that is either too full of sadness or too devoid of joy.

Gambling provides a chemical “rush,” a feeling of excitement. If a person has “numbed out” emotions that have been too painful to process, other feelings have become dulled as well. Because the brain craves novelty and the body wants to feel “alive,” it is not surprising that risky behaviour such as gambling creates that emotional charge, and that the rate of adrenaline pumping through the body results in an intense “high” that becomes more and more desired, and as addictive as many kinds of drugs.

The progression from a social diversion to an all out addiction is similar to the progression of substance abuse. That is, the individual will experience withdrawal when the substance has been discontinued (a craving).

The progression of gambling addiction

Robert L. Custer, M.D., author of *When Luck Runs Out*, identified the progression of gambling addiction as including three phases:

- the winning phase
- the losing phase
- the desperation phase

During the **winning phase**, gamblers experience a big win or a series of big wins that leaves them with unreasonable optimism that their winning will continue. This leads them to feel great excitement when gambling and a feeling of invincibility as they increase the amounts of their bets.

During the **losing phase**, individuals often begin bragging about wins they have had, start gambling alone, think more about gambling and borrow or steal money. They still feel they are in control of the situation, but are not. They start lying to family and friends and become more irritable, restless and withdrawn. They are only thinking about gambling and, as a result, start neglecting family and professional responsibilities. Their relationships start to suffer. They are taking out loans and borrowing money from family and friends so they can seek more action and are unable to pay off these debts. The gambler begins to “chase” their losses, that is, continue gambling in order to win back what they’ve lost.

During the **desperation phase**, there is a marked increase in time spent gambling. This is accompanied by remorse, blaming others and alienating family and friends. They feel desperation and hopelessness as losses continue to mount, yet they cling to their fantasy of winning, hoping to make everything well again. The gambler finally realizes they can’t win, but continues to gamble. They have little concern for those around them and money becomes like Monopoly money. Eventually, the gambler may engage in illegal acts to finance his or her gambling.

The negative effects of problem gambling can spill over into the workplace. Co-workers and managers may notice the compulsive gambler:

- being too distracted to work
- scheduling work commitments in a way that accommodates the gambling – or provides additional opportunities to gamble
- bragging about their big wins and downplaying losses
- complaining about debts and being broke
- regularly taking extended lunch hours
- frequently borrowing money from co-workers
- making an unusually high number of personal phone calls
- having frequent or unexplained absences.
- exhibiting personality changes and mood swings: being irritable, secretive, dishonest

In the desperation phase, compulsive gamblers may even use company money to gamble or cover debts.

Managing gambling problems in the workplace

Recent Saskatchewan research indicated that 50 percent of problem gamblers are employed. This is significant because most gambling and gambling-related activities are carried out during work hours. The rise in Internet gambling provides one more lure to those employees with a gambling problem and many work hours can be spent engaged in this activity. The workplace also becomes a shield to hide the problem from family members and leaves managers and co-workers as the first line of defense.

The first step

If you, as manager, suspect a gambling problem might be behind an employee's poor work performance, tardiness and/or workplace conflicts, you may choose to take the person aside and explain the severity of the situation. The realization that their behaviour may result in disciplinary or legal action just might make him or her seek professional assistance. Your role is to offer understanding and support and to encourage the individual to seek help (for example, from their EAP or self help organization such as Gamblers Anonymous).

During the discussion:

- Be clear and non-judgmental. Speak only for yourself. For example, "I've been noticing changes in your work, and I am worried about you."
- Use work-related observations, such as "I see you coming in very late from your lunch every day and too distracted to work all afternoon."
- Be positive. "Your work is usually so good, and you always meet your deadlines."
- Explain how the problem affects others. "Mike had to finish two of your projects."

- Be clear about your position. "I won't protect you any more. I need you to pull your weight."
- Respect personal boundaries. "I don't want to pry into your life, but I have to let you know I'm concerned."
- Provide information, not advice.
- Be prepared for denial or a hostile reaction.

Whatever the employee decides to do, you have provided him or her with essential information and support.

DO NOT:

- judge
- counsel
- diagnose
- give your opinion
- lecture
- refer them to the Internet

If your intervention doesn't work, or if you prefer a more formal and documented avenue to resolving the issue, a performance interview is necessary.

The performance interview

Conducting a performance interview requires careful preparation. Begin by collecting essential information such as:

- job descriptions
- performance standards
- corporate mission, vision and value statement
- any information concerning previous discussions regarding performance and/or behaviour
- an outline that clearly states the problem, the business reasons the performance issues must be resolved and the consequences if the person decides not to address the problem
- an agenda outlining the points to be covered

A timely response reinforces to the employee and your staff the importance you attach to the situation. Select a location that is private and allows for a confidential discussion. Limit the number of people present, although in a unionized setting, a union representative usually attends and you may wish to include a representative from Human Resources.

Here are some tips to help ensure the meeting is not confrontational and will address the situation in a business-like and effective manner.

- Relax.
- On arrival, greet the person in a friendly manner, but do not engage in chit-chat. Open up the conversation quickly and get to the point.
- Work from the facts, not from what you've been told by others.
- Keep your emotions in check. Remain logical and impartial. Do not react to emotional behaviour but draw the line if the behaviour becomes abusive.
- Focus on the performance issue; do not accuse the person of having a gambling problem unless you have hard proof.

- Be polite, tactful and business-like.
- Listen actively. A successful performance interview hinges on good communication. Active listening techniques help establish a climate of co-operation and reduce the potential for misunderstanding. Essentially, active listeners practice clarification, confirmation and paraphrasing techniques. Remember to use "I" statements to diffuse defensive or aggressive responses. Try writing a few "I" statements prior to the meeting as an aid.
- Discuss the cause and effect of the performance issue and ways to deal with it. Ask questions and get information, rather than just stating opinions.
- Agree to what resolutions have been made and make sure the individual understands the consequences if the situation continues. Work towards a win-win situation for everyone.
- Finally, schedule a follow-up meeting to finalize the situation.

Conclusion

The effects of compulsive gambling are insidious and devastating – for the individual concerned, their family and their friends. The cost to the workplace can be equally devastating. Individuals with gambling problems become completely preoccupied with gambling. Their workday is often spent either in the act of gambling (by phone or Internet), planning the next gambling opportunity or plotting to get money for gambling.

Money is the gambler's key to action. Once all legitimate methods to obtain cash are exhausted, the gambler, in desperation, may resort to fraud or theft to acquire cash. The workplace becomes a primary avenue for the gambler to illegally finance his or her gambling. An individual addicted to gambling does not see the unauthorized taking of company money as stealing. They see it as "borrowing money" which they plan to replace – when they win.

If not handled promptly and effectively, the problem gambler's deteriorating work performance and professional relationships will take their toll on the rest of your staff and you, as manager, will have even bigger problems to face.

For assistance with, or more information on gambling, contact Expert-Aide at 1 866 314-9533 (English service) or 1 866 314-9534 (service en français).

Recommended reading

Sex, Drugs, Gambling & Chocolate: A Workbook for Overcoming Addictions

by A. Thomas Horvath, Impact Publishers, 1988

Pathological Gambling: Making of A Medical Problem

by Brian Castellani, State of New York Press, 2000

Workplace Intervention

by James Fearing, Hazelden, 2000

Willpower's Not Enough: Understanding & Recovering From Addictions of Every Kind

by Arnold M. Washton, HarperCollins, 1989

When Luck Runs Out: Help for Compulsive Gamblers and Their Families

by R. L. Custer, M.D., Facts on Fire, 1985

The Downside: Problem & Pathological Gambling

Editors: William Eadington and Judy Cornelius, University of Nevada, Reno Bureau of Business, 2002

Betting the House: Winners, Losers and the Politics of Canada's Gambling Obsession

by Brian Hutchinson, Penguin Books of Canada, 2000

This is Gambling (Addiction Series)

by Nick Constable, Sanctuary Publishing, 2003



Keeping our word is standard

