

ILAPSC 2026 CONFERENCE

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING

Gambling Disorder: Should Problem-Solving Courts Care?

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Learning Objectives

1. Attendees will understand the how gambling disorder intersects with the presentation and conceptualization of individuals with substance use disorders and severe mental illness.
2. Attendees will be able to describe how gambling disorder can help or hinder the treatment of substance use disorders and/or severe mental illness.
3. Attendees will be able to characterize the relationship gambling disorder has to offending and recidivism.

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Defining Gambling

Gambling is defined as an activity that involves placing something of value at risk in the hopes of gaining something of greater value.



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Ecosystem of Modern Gambling: Three A's

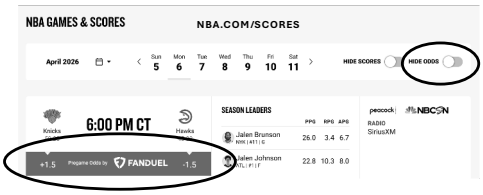
1. **Availability:** Gambling is everywhere; even places you do not expect it!



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Ecosystem of Modern Gambling: Three A's

1. **Availability:** Gambling is everywhere!
2. **Advertising:** The industry heavily advertises and markets gambling products, normalizing and encouraging the behavior!



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Sports Betting Marketing Promotions

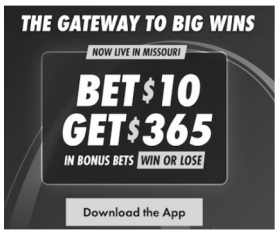
Free Money Bets

- $365 "risk fee" bets. House money!

Profit Booster

- A promotional token that increases the winnings on a wager by a specific percentage (e.g., 50%). If a winning bet pays $100, profit booster turns it into $150 or $200!

How might these promotions change my betting behavior?



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Ecosystem of Modern Gambling: Three A's

1. **Availability: Gambling is everywhere!**
2. **Advertising: Normalizes and encourages gambling!**
3. **Accessibility: It is easy to bet on anything, anytime, and quickly!**

<u>In-game betting:</u>
New bets once the sporting event is underway



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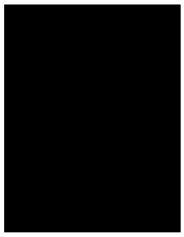
Is This Gambling?



Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDBy4cm2LWw

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Why Do People Gamble?



All behavior is functional:
"I've lost thousands of dollars, and I don't care."

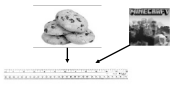
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What Is The "Drug" of Gambling?

Anticipation!

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Brain Chemistry - Dopamine



Linnet, 2020; Worhunsky et al., 2014

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Brain Chemistry - Dopamine

Exposure to highly rewarding activities rescales the brain's chemistry around dopamine!



Now what does it take to feel pleasure/reward?

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Gambling Disorder – Diagnostic Criteria

1. Tolerance
2. Restless/irritable when cutting down or stopping
3. Unsuccessful attempts to quit
4. Preoccupation with gambling
5. Gambles when distressed
6. Chasing losses
7. Lies to conceal gambling behavior
8. Jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or education opportunity
9. Needed financial bailout due to gambling

***Must endorse 4 of 9 criteria to be diagnosed with a gambling disorder**

American Psychiatric Association (2022)

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Gambling Disorder vs SUD

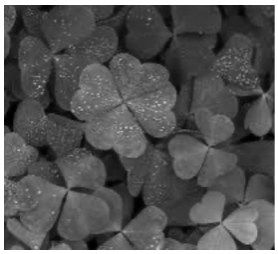
No obvious signs of intoxication!
- Harder to detect; no UDS

Cravings can be tied to specific sporting events and marketing promotions.

Chasing losses

Cognitive distortions
- *Feeling lucky or due*
- *I hit big before, I can do it again!*

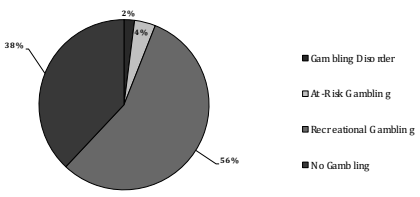
Theoretically possible that continued gambling will solve their problems!
- **But, what's the definition of insanity?**



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Adult Past Year Gambling Prevalence

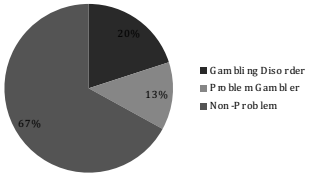


Almost 7 million Americans have a gambling disorder; on average, the disorder affects six other individuals.

Goodwin et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2024

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Prevalence in the Criminal-Legal System



Tørdal et al., 2024; Westphal & Johnson, 2006

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Gambling Disorder's Intersection with the Legal System Learning Objective 3



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American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA guarantees that people with disabilities have the same protections and access in employment, government services, telecommunications, and our built environment.

Defines disability – history or current physical or mental impairment, including SUD.

Provides reasonable accommodation – time off from work, alternative work schedule to attend treatment.

Americans with Disability Act (1990); ADA Amendments Act of 2008

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American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Gambling disorder is explicitly excluded from the protections afforded by the ADA in Title V.
- "The term disability shall not include…compulsive gambling."

Individuals with gambling problems are not eligible for reasonable accommodations to seek treatment and can be "discriminated" against in the workplace.
- Trammell v. Raytheon Missile Sys., 721 F. Supp. 2d 876, 876–77 (D. Ariz. 2010). Sued his employer for wrongful termination.

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Bankruptcy

About 20% of individuals who seek treatment for gambling problems declared bankruptcy.

Introduction of online sports betting is associated with:
- 2.75 point decline in credit scores (mostly due to higher debt)
- 10% increase in bankruptcy filings (Chapter 7 & 13)

Hollenbeck, Larsen, & Proserpio (2025)

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Gambling-Related Crime

About 25-43% of individuals who seek treatment for gambling problems have engaged in gambling-related illegal acts:
- Writing bad checks/payment with insufficient funds
- Theft related-offenses
- Embezzlement
- Forgery
- Fraud
- Tax issues
- Sex work

Ex-Jaguars employee who ~~allegedly~~ stole $22 million bet on football, daily fantasy, attorney says

Grant & Chamberlain, 2022; Ledgerwood, Weinstock, Morasco & Petry, 2007

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Gambling-Related Crime

Australian community-level study found that for each 10% increase in gambling expenditure:

- 11.0% increase in motor vehicle theft
- 10.5% increase in residential break-ins
- 10.3% increase in non-residential break-ins
- 8.2% increase in theft from motor vehicles
- 7.4% increase in fraud
- 7.4% increase in assaults

Wan, Wang, & Weatherburn (2024)

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Gambling, Crime and Recidivism

100 individuals previously convicted of a crime

- 8% past year gambling disorder
- 22% past year moderate subclinical gambling problems
- 13% of individuals reported a direct relationship between gambling and their crime

After adjusting for years since release, greater past-year gambling severity was associated with increased risk of recidivism.

April & Weinstock, 2018

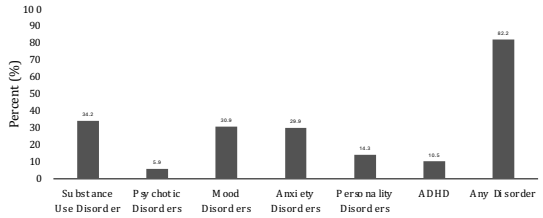
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Gambling Disorder's Intersection with Substance Use Disorders Learning Objectives 1 & 2



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Gambling Disorder Comorbidity



Lorains, Cowlishaw, & Thomas (2011); Salonen et al. (2025)

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How Are GD & SUD Related?



Sensation seeking
- Desire to experience strong feelings and arousal

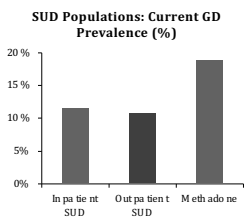
Impulsivity
- Rash decision making without considering consequences

Interaction between the two
- Gambled more when using substances
- Used more substances when gambling
- Overall, greater problem severity

Kovács et al., 2021; Ledgerwood et al., 2009

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Individuals with SUD



Some individuals with GD & SUD report:
1. Use substances and gamble at the same time
2. Doing both, but never at the same time
3. A history of SUD

Cowlishaw et al., 2014; Baxley et al., 2019

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Individuals with Comorbid SUD & GD

In 2012, assessed problem gambling in patients (N = 962) living in 13 residential SUD treatment facilities.

Prevalence of gambling disorder was 15%. A third (5% overall) had concerns that gambling would interfere with their SUD recovery efforts.

These concerns are valid. GD in SUD clients increases likelihood of positive urine drug screen and treatment drop out.

Leavens, Marotta, & Weinstock, 2014; Ledgerwood & Downey, 2002

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Co-Located GD & SUD Treatment

Petry and colleagues (2016) conducted a clinical trial examining brief non-integrated gambling disorder treatment during ongoing SUD treatment.

217 individuals endorse gambling-related problems

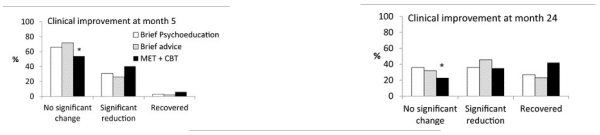
Offered GD treatment:

- Brief Psychoeducation (10 minutes)
- Brief Advice (10 minutes)
- Motivational Interviewing + CBT (4 sessions)

Petry, Rash, & Alessi (2016)

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Co-Located GD & SUD Treatment





Petry, Rash, & Alessi (2016)

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Next Steps

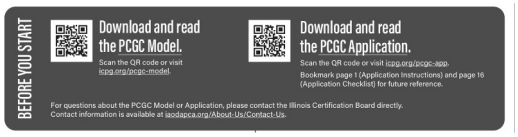
Screening for GD in your caseload:
- Brief Biosocial Gambling Screen (BBGS)
- Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI)



Incorporate GD into the treatment conversation
- Does not require a radical overhaul of a treatment program.
- Ask how gambling relates to client's substance use.
- Example: DBT Skills Group – include a gambling example!

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Interested in Becoming a Certified Problem and Compulsive Gambling Counselor (PCGC)?



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Thank you!

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