

National Child Abuse Prevention Month

Children of Disordered Gamblers

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All states with the exception of Utah and Hawaii have some form of legalized gambling. With increased gambling availability and the advent of casinos, also come the increased risks for gambling-related problems. As we look at the month of April which is 'National Child Abuse Prevention Month' we would like to bring awareness of the effects gambling has on children. There is evidence that disordered gambling is associated with a child maltreatment-neglect:

- Children left unattended at home
- Children left in parked cars at the casino
- Children left on the casino premises

Disordered gambling also has the potential for emotional and physical abuse towards children.

The link between disordered gambling and child neglect is the gambler sometimes may report experiencing "brown outs" where they suffer time disorientation and memory loss with respect to their gambling episodes. Another link is related to the gambling environment where there are often no clocks or windows and the gambler will lose track of how much time they have spent gambling. Consequently, a child can be left alone for very long periods of time.

Disordered gamblers may also adversely impact their children in other ways such as:

- Children start presenting behavioral problems
- Inconsistent academic performance and delinquency in school
- Direct anger and depression on peers
- Engage in escape behaviors (smoking, alcohol/drug use, overeating and gambling)
- Poor social and inter-personal skills
- Learn to keep secrets and protects gambler (don't tell)
- Sense that something is wrong-what did I do?
- Fear of abandonment
- Frequent moves- relocating
- Learn not to answer the phone or door
- Children display happy surprises or angry outbursts
- See money as expression of love
- Find someone to blame for lack of possessions-become angry
- See other adults as role models

It is important for family members to intervene and protect the children by:

- Alerting Child Protection Services (in New Jersey, The Division of Child Protection and Permanency 1-877-NJ ABUSE or 1-877-652-2873)
- Contacting the local police
- Encouraging the children to attend Gam-Anon or seek professional help

Sources:

NAPAFASA Problem Gambling Prevention Technical Assistance and Training Project Funded by the California State Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, Office of Problem Gambling.

New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect Opening Doors Conference “Children of Compulsive Gamblers”. Frances L. Gizzi, LCSW, C-CATODSW, CCGC and Jeffrey M. Beck, LPC, CCGC, JD, ABD, CART