



BEYOND COLLATERAL CLIENT: CENTERING PROBLEM GAMBLING TREATMENT ON THE FAMILY


"A switch should go off in your head. This problem is not about one person. This problem is about the universe."

1. Start where the client is. Who is your client? The gambler? The family member? When it is the gambler, do you make plans to bring in the family? When it is the family, do you only talk about getting the gambler into treatment?
2. Think about doing the twenty questions for the family member of gamblers which will help your client understand the impact of the addiction on the entire system.




When your client is the family member:

1. Help your client learn what the facts are about problem gambling: do psycho-education to inform them of the disease and how to combat it.
2. Help your client take small steps about finances: calling credit cards to stop charges, closing joint accounts where possible, securing jewelry and other valuables, for example.
3. Encourage *GAMANON*. Stress the importance of making a commitment to more than one meeting, since many people are scared off by one meeting and the amount of information given.
4. Encourage your client not to rush! He/she may want to make quick decisions. Try to offer hope that these decisions will be easier to make when the crisis of the moment settles and he/she can think more clearly.



As things progress with the family member and the gambler, the perception of reality should begin to change. As your family member client works with you and understands and trusts his/her own perceptions, confidence can begin to come back, albeit slowly.

1. Continue to help your client learn about addictions in general and gambling in particular. Many clients are children of addicted people who then marry addicts, but still do not understand addictions, its causes and cures. Help this process.
2. Continue to encourage GAMANON and talk with your client about his/her experiences there.
3. Encourage your client to write down all questions emphasizing that no question is too trivial to be answered or discussed. Encourage using the phone, if he/she is attending GAMANON.



If your client continues, professional help with finances may be indicated. As a therapist, educate yourself as much as possible, know as much as possible, but know when you are over your head and the client needs more than you can offer. Many of these issues are very complicated, and legal advice may be sought.

1. You will deal with much more concrete issues in this therapy than elsewhere. Don't be fooled that because you focus on the practical aspects of life and ask questions like, "How many credit cards do you have and how much is the debt?" that you are not being "therapeutic." You are. This kind of knowledge is essential for you to help your client, and your client is probably anxious to tell someone the exact extent of the problems.



2. Help your client stay focused on stabilizing the situation and not changing everything at once. This will be very hard, but in the end rewarding, whatever the final decision about the gambler will be.

3. As you move through these few weeks, you and your client may begin to wonder together what in his/her life lead to this point. Insight-oriented therapy may begin sometime after this, and the rewards will be enormous for your client as he/she gain strength through self-understanding

4. It is also at this point that you may begin to see a need for couples therapy or family therapy. If your family client is stronger and more self-reliant, she/he may be ready to start putting the pieces back together.