

New Online Treatment Program Offers Help For Hard-To-Reach Problem Gamblers

Historically, there are many reasons why problem gamblers don't always get the help they need. Some of these challenges include access to counselors, dealing with the burden of stigma and shame, concerns about privacy, and uncertainty about whether a problem really exists. But thanks to a new online treatment program, it's possible for more people to overcome these obstacles and access treatment.

Gambler Healing is an online course based on a 12-step recovery process that addresses the needs of problem gamblers, allowing them to receive help from the convenience of their computer. Details about the comprehensive program can be found on GamblerHealing.com.

The program is the only one of its kind according to Lisa Vig, LAC, ICGC, counselor at Gamblers Choice who helped develop the curriculum. "The idea came to us when it became apparent that there were not a lot of relevant and educational resources about gambling addiction available," says Lisa. "The original thought was to simply create updated educational DVDs, but the advent of e-campus modules made it possible and practical to create an actual class that would have greater impact."

Program Components

The program includes a variety of components considered critical for success. One key feature includes videos of recovering gamblers discussing their experiences. "We want people to know that they're not alone and that others feel the same things that they might be feeling," says Lisa.

The program also includes a section for journaling. "Journaling is something we encourage in our own treatment program," says Lisa. "It provides an opportunity for self reflection and a chance to inventory one's own behavior and thought processes."

Enrollees also have the chance to read testimonials from those who have benefited from treatment. This helps to instill hope and remind participants that others have overcome similar challenges. There's also an educational aspect of the curriculum to help gamblers understand how the process of addiction works.

Advantages of An Online Program

As a program that's administered online in the privacy of peoples' homes, there are several advantages to Gambler Healing. Perhaps most important is the access to treatment it provides those living in rural areas. "It can be particularly helpful for people living in places where there may be limited counselors or access to support groups and treatment," says Lisa. The program is also convenient for the elderly or others who may have trouble getting to treatment.

The privacy of the program may be useful for people who feel a sense of shame due to their gambling activity and would otherwise be reluctant to reach out for help. Similarly, the online aspect of the program can be attractive for high-profile individuals who don't want to be seen around others who might recognize and judge them.

Gambler Healing also provides a way for people who might want to simply explore their gambling behavior and consequences to determine whether they have a problem. "In this respect, it can be used as an early intervention to stop a continued progression that might result in employment, family or marital problems," says Lisa. People who choose to work the program on their own may also share their information with a counselor should they later decide to seek outside help.

Mental health professionals may find benefit in Gambler Healing as well. It allows those who are newer to the problem gambling population and who lack appropriate resources to structure a client's counseling or treatment program.

Gambler Healing is a collaboration between Luther Social Services of North Dakota and the North Dakota Department of Human Services. The program may be used by virtually anyone regardless of where they live. The cost is \$99 and includes access to the entire treatment program for a lifetime.

Additional topics are being planned for the program. These may include relapse prevention, budgeting and financial management tips for recovering gamblers, and information specifically designed for family members to help them learn how to approach gamblers.

For more information about Gambler Healing, contact Lisa Vig at 701-271-3279 or LisaV@lssnd.org.