

Role of Cognitive Distortion in Disordered Gambling

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Gambling & Fantasies

The
Dictionary
Defines
Fantasy
As...

Imagination

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graph TD; A[Imagination] --> B[Daydream or Illusion]; B --> C["A fanciful mental image, typically one which a person dwells at length or reflects their unconscious or unconscious wishes"]; C --> D[An idea with no basis in reality];
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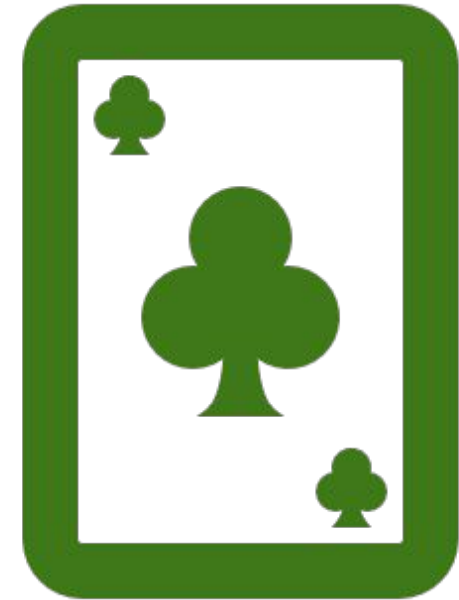
Daydream or Illusion

A fanciful mental image, typically one which a person dwells at length or reflects their unconscious or unconscious wishes

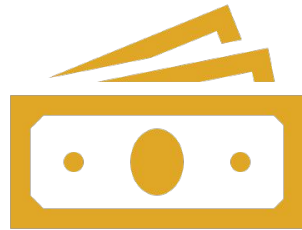
An idea with no basis in reality

Everyone lives with unrealized fantasies

- An unrequited love? (HS or college sweetheart)
- A plan that didn't materialize? (Neighbor Dreamer)
- Trying to pass a test without studying?
- Always wanting that trip or that car or that... but knowing it cannot happen? (Always wanted a SAAB)



Lottery Win



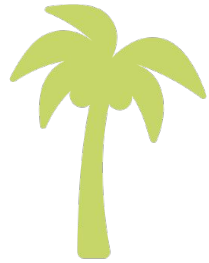
Let's say you won \$200,000,000
(after taxes \$100,000,000)



Take five minutes and write down
everything you would buy after
winning the Powerball.

Recovering Gamblers **DO NOT DO THIS EXERCISE.**

Fantasy: A World We All Live In



Each of us takes mini vacations.

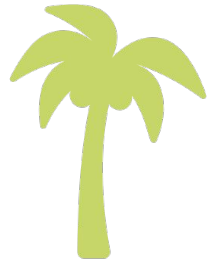


Therapeutic assignment for many stressed clients (happy place).



Embraced in all phases of our education, work and entertainment life.

A Gambling World We All Live In



Gambling is a mini vacation.



For many it takes them to their happy place.



Embraced in all area of our lives .

People with Gambling Issues Live in Their Own World of Fantasy

- If gambling is fantasy and they live in a gambling world, they live in a fantasy world.
- Getting a glimpse into their world requires time figuring out what they liked about that world and how gambling kept them satisfied. Even at the end when more and more pain is experienced.



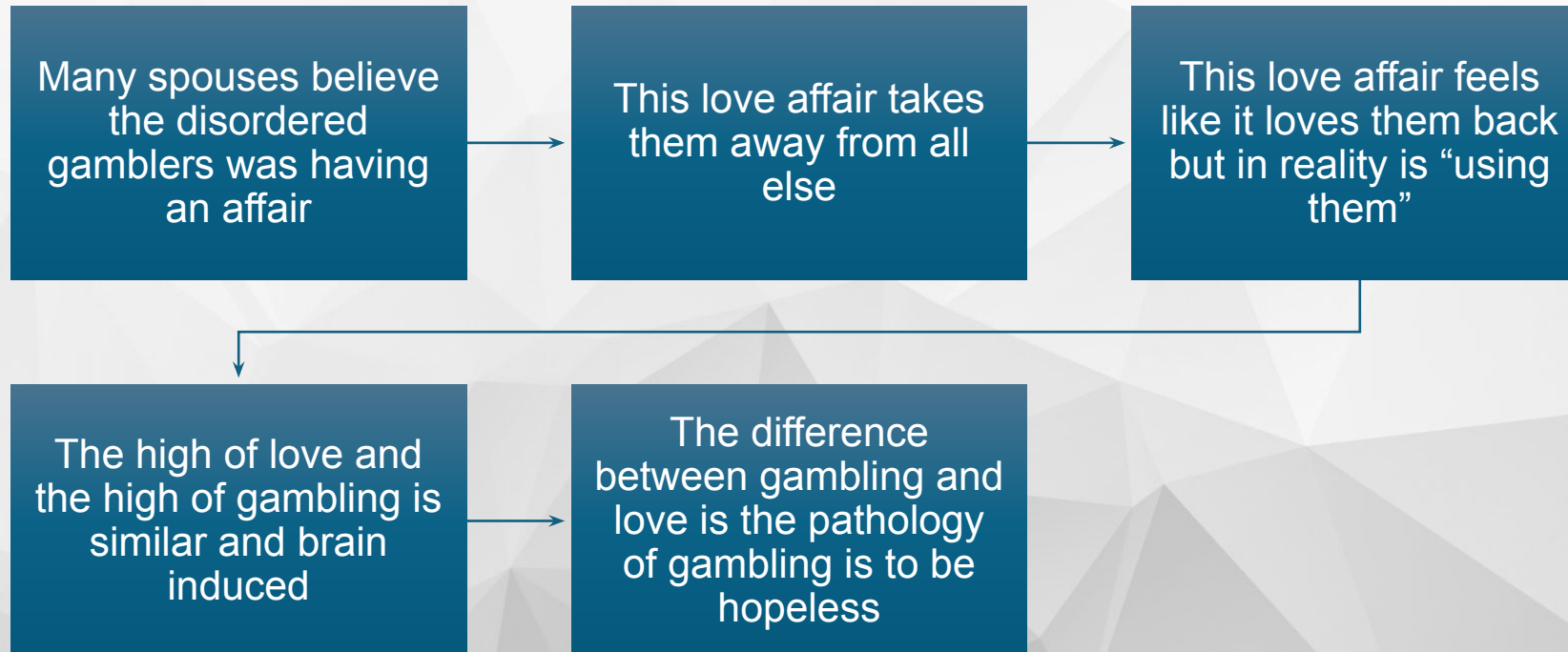
Counselors Live their Fantasies too

Excuses for not addressing gambling:

**Fantasy has
built-in
cognitive
distortions.**



Disordered Gambling is a love relationship



Playing
the
odds:
Flipping
a coin 10
times

What are odds of it
being heads?

What are odds of it
being tails?

Do the odds ever
change?

Let's start with how do they feel about gambling

- It is important to identify how much and what about gambling they liked and didn't like

- This will help identify the barriers to early recovery when cravings and fantasies about gambling are the strongest

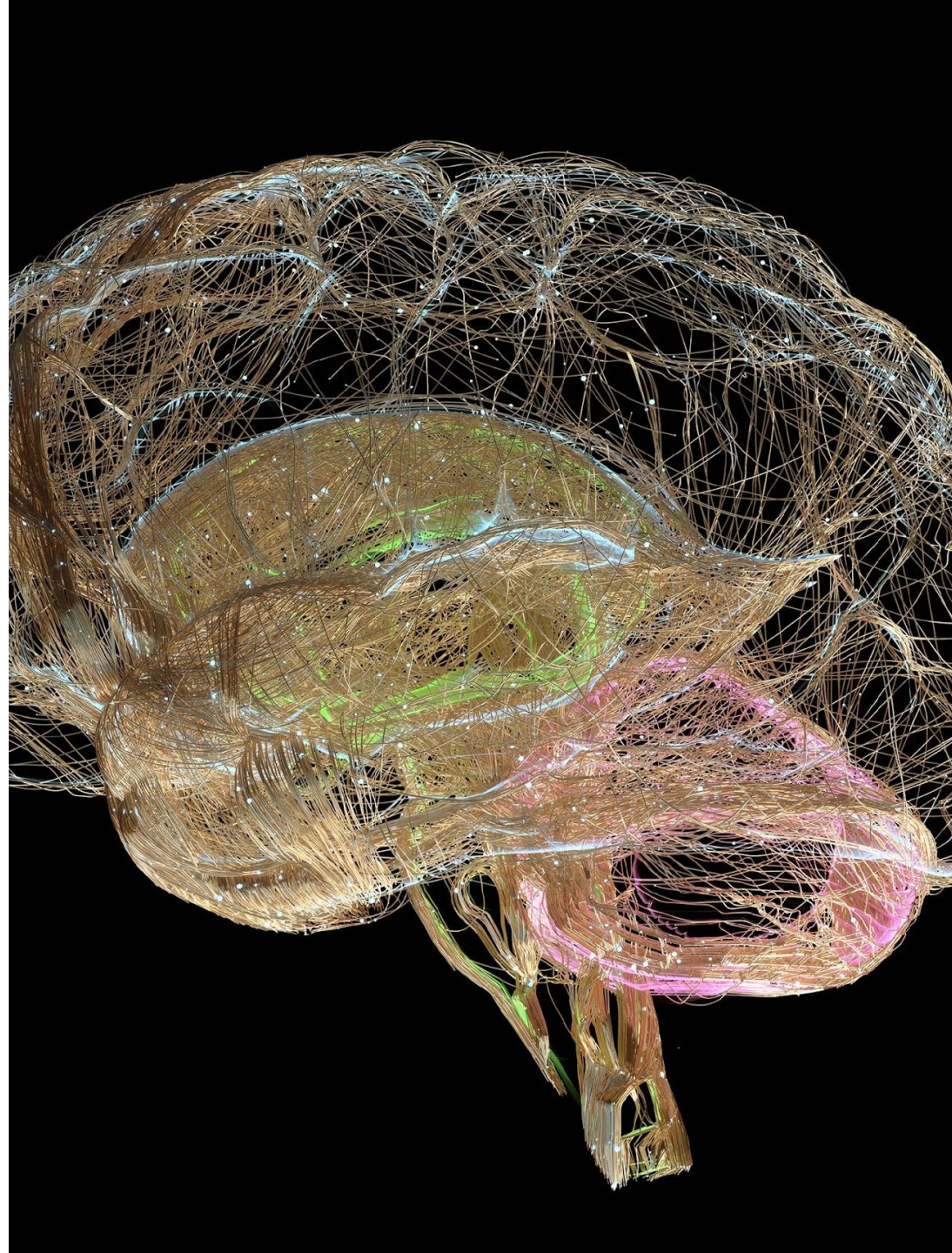
What about gambling did you like?

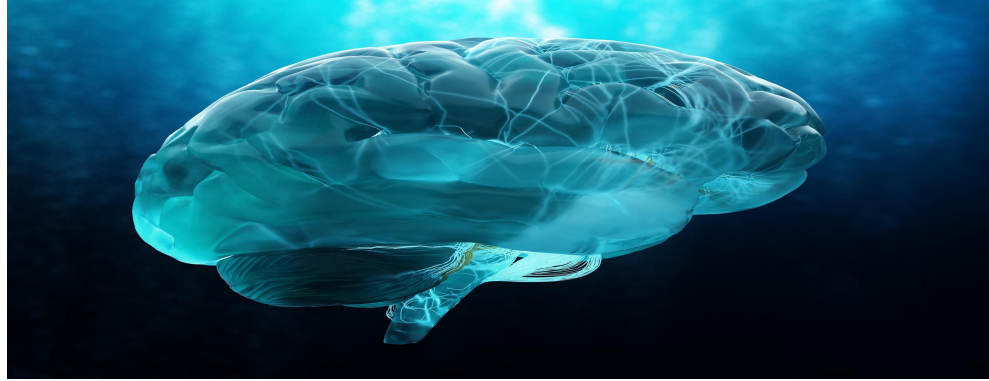
- “I liked the high of winning”
- “I escaped all my problems”
- “I liked how everyone treated me as if I were important”
- “It gave me something to do”

- How often did you experience this high?
- Did the problems disappear forever or did they return?
- Do you miss this and does anyone else treat you this way?
- So were you bored previous to gambling?
- What didn't you like about gambling?

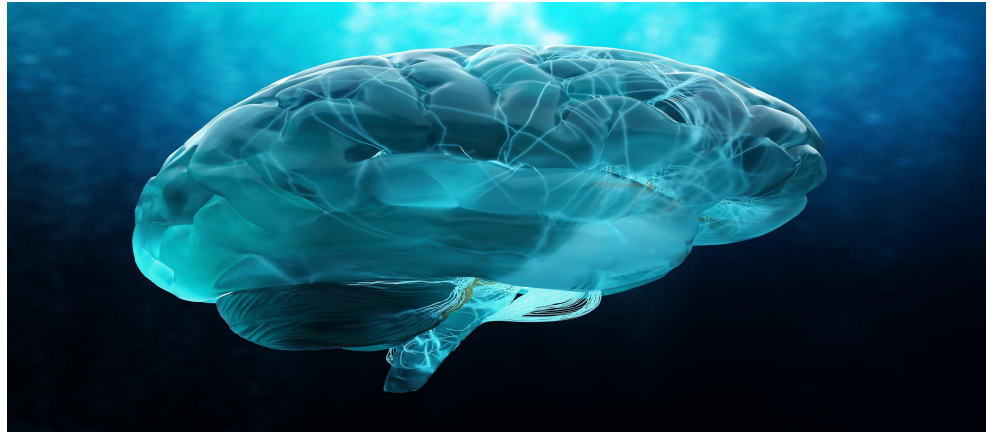
Your brain on gambling

- Amygdala, Flight or flight lights up
- Amygdala is the go go go part of your brain
- Amygdala says yes keep going to gambling
- Amygdala is the part of your brain that has no brakes it pushes the pleasure center and the endorphins and the adrenaline responses





- I have a desire to gamble
- I am struggling to not gamble
- The brain working from amygdala is asking a repeat of the previous behaviors
- The pleasure centers and the amygdala are working together to get back to chemical high and escape behaviors



- I am drinking/drugs more often than before when I was gambling
- The brain is missing all the chemical reactions that gambling caused and sees similar brain reactions from alcohol or other drugs
- How if I am in treatment do I miss gambling
- Stopping the brains chemical reactions causes the brain to crave past reactions



Let's play Roulette!
(recovering gamblers
beware this may be a
trigger)

- Black has come up 7 times in a row.
- What color do you play?
- Why do you play that color?
- The odds are 48% for each color with 1% green 0 and 1% double green 00
- Now which color do you play? Why?

The difference
between
cognitive
dissonance and
cognitive
distortion

Cognitive Dissonance: the discomfort a person feels when their behavior does not align with their values or beliefs

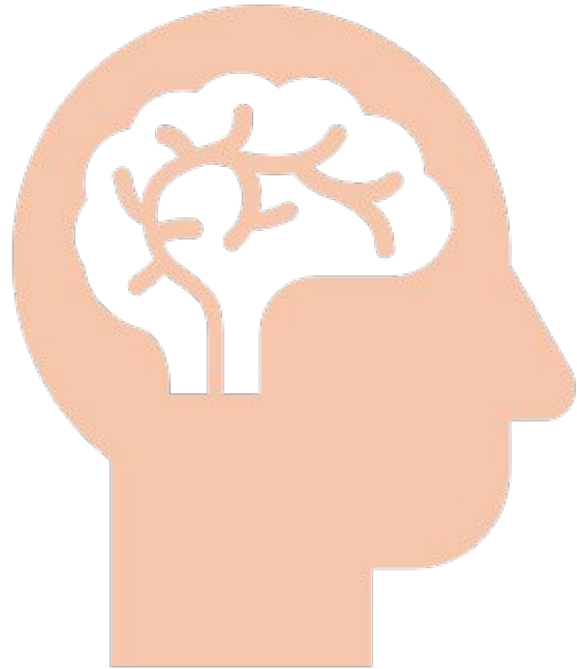
Cognitive distortions are irrational or exaggerated thoughts that can cause a person to perceive reality inaccurately

Can a disordered gambler have both cognitive dissonance and cognitive distortions?

Yes? How?

No? why

You answer this yes or no and why?



Let's talk: Cognitive Distortions

Exaggerated and Irrational Thoughts

All or nothing thinking

- Win or lose mentality.
- Even close is like winning.

Overgeneralization

- “A lot is due” and “I am a winner” thinking.

Jumping to conclusions

- Drawing conclusions with little evidence (1-180,000,000 lottery odds)
- Mind reading - assuming special knowledge.
 - **Example:** “This machine is getting hot!”
- Fortune telling - exaggerating how things will turn out before they happen
 - **Example:** They buy a Cadillac before they win money for the car.

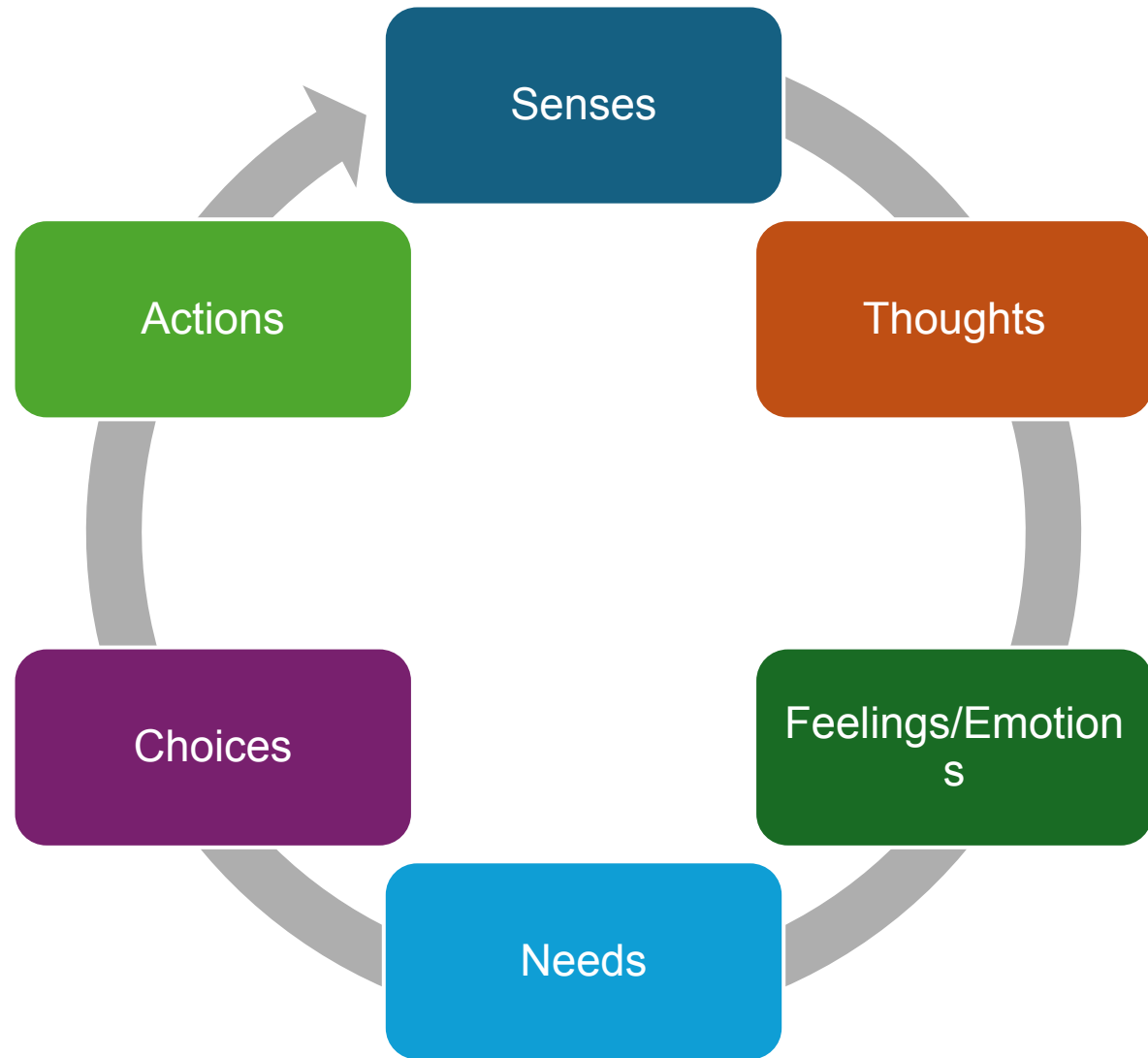
Minimization

- Redirecting impact on self or others
 - “They always have food on the table”

All or Nothing Thinking

- If I can't pay all my bills...
 - I play all the time at this venue you owe me...
 - My money is my money...
 - Those who spend a fixed amount are losers
- I'll win at the gambling venue and pay them off in full
 - My losses equals me getting special privileges
 - Regardless of who else is in the family
 - I know more about gambling, and you need to invest to win big

Thought Process Wheel



Overgeneralization

- Everyone gambles...
- I don't really lose that much
- I win more than I lose...
- I don't see or want to see that most do not gamble like me
- I only see the amount I've lost recently or the amount you have seen me lose
- I only remember the wins

Jumping to conclusions

- This machine is due
 - This treatment cannot work...
-
- I have invested or watched others invest a lot of money and I need a return
 - I Have no idea what this is about, but I am still protecting my ability to gamble
 - Also I know Bob went to treatment and he is still gambling so...

Minimizing

- My problem is a credit issue
 - I'm not as bad as ...
 - I don't want anyone else to know
-
- My credit cards are maxed out due to my gambling
 - There is someone always worse so I'm ok
 - If I keep it a secret the damage will be less

Exaggerated and Irrational Thoughts

Emotional Reasoning

- Make decisions based on intuition rather than evidence/rationale.
 - **Example:** “I can feel the win!”
 - “7 times black it **has** to be red next”

Labeling

- Explaining behaviors and/or events merely by naming them.
- Changing reality to perception of event.
 - **Example:** Only a fluke kept me from winning, my system works!

Personalization

- Attribution of personal responsibility for events for which no control.
 - **Example:** Lucky charms around bingo cards.

Emotional Reasoning

- My spouse would be better off not knowing the full extent of the problem
- I can gamble on??? (type of game) as it isn't an issue
- At least I'm not an alcoholic..

They might leave me if they knew the problem

I am protecting my ability to gamble as I prefer the other type but will gamble on this type if needed

Minimizing the impact and hoping you will agree with me

Labeling

- I had a bad gambling day/week that doesn't mean I need to stop
- The only reason I gamble is I'm bored/lonely/happy
- I know I can gamble successfully if you teach me to follow my system

I need you to understand I am I winner not a loser

I have reason why my current gambling is suspect but if I handle those I can gamble normally

I just need some minimal guidance and I'll be fine

Personalization

- I Have a favorite machine that is my go to if I need to win
- I always tap the machine twice and that helps me win

I have won on this machine before so it is lucky

I am using “lucky” charms or behaviors that I believe will help me as they helped before

Exaggerated and Irrational Thoughts

Rationalization

- Defense mechanism; may be subconscious to create a block against internal feelings of guilt.
- **Example:** My stash is just in case this treatment doesn't work.

Cognitive Bias

- Pattern of deviation in judgment.
- **Example:** "Everyone gambles like me."

Evolved Mental Behavior

- Adaptations of misapplication of a successful behavior.
- **Example:** Slots successful against pain becomes a painful euphoria.

Cognitive Distortions: Exaggerated and Irrational Thoughts



Decision Making Biases

Anchoring: Common human tendency to rely too heavily on one trait or piece of information in decision-making.

Example: Gambling will get me out of this mess.



Biases in Probability and Belief

Band wagon effect: Tendency to believe things because many other people believe the same (myopic).



Cognitive Distortions: Exaggerated and Irrational Thoughts

• **Gamblers Fallacy**

- Tendency to think that future probabilities are altered by past events when they are unchanged.
- Example: “This machine is due to hit... No way the dice crap out again.”

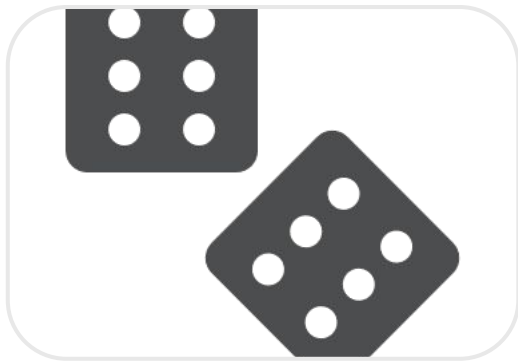
Treating Cognitive Distortions

Remember the higher brain functions are reduced due to gambling.

Patients are used to fight or flight and pleasure-centered thinking.

Patients may express the desire to quit or change but the brain will be rebelling early on.

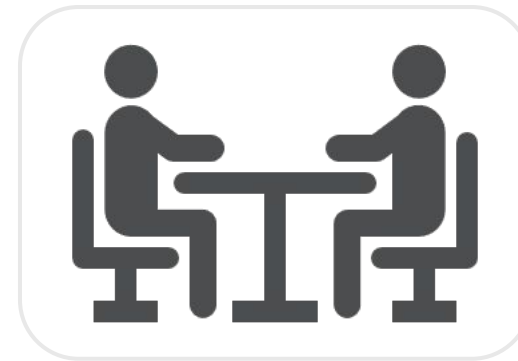
Confronting Fantasy



No better high than
gambling to a
gambler



Utilization of thought
wheel



Cognitive behavioral
therapy (Ladouceur)

Example of treatment cognitive distortion

Patient Bob lost \$1million
dollars sports betting

His average bet was
\$500 per game

He believes he can still
win it back

Where is the distortion?

Patient continued

Answer: He will need to win 2000 straight wins to get even!

If he bets Football, Basketball Baseball 4 bets per day it will take him?

Answer: 500 days of straight winning

No one has ever in the span of time been that good !

Treating Cognitive Distortions



Develop a communications plan with patients that allow you to correct distortions.



Ask patients why they think the distortions are real so you can better understand how to dispel the distortion.



Allow the patient to explain their rationale so they hear themselves. This helps to dispel the distortion.

Suicide and Irrational Thoughts

Cognitive distortion goes lethal

- All in mentality.
 - I am out of options as I see it.

Overgeneralization

- I finally admit I'm a loser.

The decision is for the best

- Suicide: I have no way out of this mess and everyone will see me for what I am
- This is best for everyone
- No one will miss me
 - I am helping everyone .

I am the better person for this

- My death will ease everyone's pain

Assignment: Timelines of gambling

- Remember the first win or escape and try to recreate it
- No one knows about my gambling behaviors
- I can't remember my losses

- Develop a detailed memory of actual events not “wins only”
- Add to timeline all they borrowed from and didn't repay or hurt along the way
- Start with first gamble and look at losses from designated milestones

Timelines of Gambling

- Timelines are hard to write down
- Can't I just tell you my timeline?
- I don't want anyone else to see this
- Start with first gamble and add it year by year or significant changes
- Writing it down show the patient their own past "Swallow it"
- When we are done we can decide to tell others or burn it as part of our past
- This process can take weeks or months

Moving from "I" to WE

Gambling high from others

- Transparency of decisions
- Accepting feedback from other (individual and group included)
- All assignments need to be completed and gone over

Changing the thought process

- Moving from 1-2-6 to 1-2-3-4-5-6
- Put copy of the thought process wheel on your wall and refer to it when discussing decisions
- Change anything determined to be a trigger for gambling including route home if needed

Use of cognitive brain

- Discussing decisions with others
- Pros vs cons use this when going over potential decisions
- Do I need help in making this decision? Who is there to give him/her sound counsel?
- Transparency of my decisions
- Who is with me in my recovery and who is against me. Continual discussion due to fact as they add people back into their lives some will want them to begin gambling again

New activities

List of things they want to try/do in recovery

- 30 60 90 6month and 1 year goals developed
- Work, social, spiritual, emotional, physical areas to be address in goals
- Repeatable activities not one time ultimate highs

Changing the thought process for recovery

- Moving from impulsive thinking to planning and long term thinking plans and goals are cognitive functions not Amygdala
- Moving from intermittent reinforcers to deferred gratification planning for retirement or vacations or new car etc...

Use of cognitive brain

- Discussing goal decisions with others(spouse , Group, parents,etc...)
- Are the goals and activities reachable and achievable?
- Do they fit with my current living situation (marriage etc...)

What are your goals?



Cognitive Distortions Contribute to Urgent Thinking

1

Work through decisions with the patient starting with the simplest decisions.

2

Point out how the distortions can be based on less-than accurate information.

Cognitive Distortions Contribute to Urgent Thinking Continued

1

Patience and more patience is required.

2

Judge the behavior not the person. Be an advocate for recovery

- Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Pathological Gambling: Cultural Considerations
 - Mayumi Okuda, M.D., Iván Balan, Ph.D., Nancy M. Petry, Ph.D., Maria Oquendo, M.D., and Carlos Blanco, M.D., Ph.D.
- [Cognitive Therapy for Problem Gambling](#)
- [ScienceDirect - Cognitive and Behavioral Practice : Cognitive therapy for problem gambling](#)
 - Ladouceur, Stella Lachance

There is so much more! But we have no more time

- Thank you for your time and your dedication to helping those afflicted and affected by disordered gambling!
- Jerry Bauerkemper

Extremely Rare Iceberg spotted in Antarctica...

