

Holidays can be a tempting time for problem gamblers

By Margaret Williams

The holidays are a time of celebration and joy for many people. However, for individuals who are struggling with problem gambling, the holidays may be especially challenging.

“People with gambling issues may use the season’s demands for extra cash as a reason to increase gambling,” said Christy White, supervising health education coordinator with the Public Health Division of the El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency. “Family-related stress over the holidays can also act as a trigger and send problem gamblers to bars, bingo parlors and racetracks to escape.”

According to White, problem gambling is sometimes called a “hidden” addiction because the gamblers themselves often don’t realize they have a problem. Problem gambling can lead to other problems such as substance abuse and depression. Some warning signs of problem gambling include:

- Losing time from work due to gambling
- Repeatedly promising to stop gambling, yet returning to it again and again
- Borrowing money to gamble or to pay gambling debts
- Lying to cover up gambling activity
- Suffering from feelings of remorse or depression due to gambling
- Gambling until the last dollar is gone.

White says that help is available for people who are

struggling with problem gambling. The California Office of Problem Gambling Helpline offers free, confidential help over the phone at 800.426.2537. The helpline is open 24 hours a day, including weekends and holidays. Callers to the helpline can receive over-the-phone counseling, referral to a treatment therapist, and information about resources such as Gamblers Anonymous, and other help. The Office of Problem Gambling has additional information regarding gambling online.

Margaret Williams is the health program manager/communications officer for the El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency.