

About Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a form of talk therapy often used with people experiencing gambling problems. There are several goals of CBT, including increasing people's awareness of how their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and situational contexts influence their gambling, developing new ways of thinking about gambling, engaging in alternatives to gambling that are consistent with people's values, and increasing people's confidence in controlling their gambling.

Our research shows that people experiencing gambling problems who participated in CBT had more accurate beliefs about gambling, engaged in healthier alternatives to gambling, and reported more confidence in controlling their gambling than people experiencing gambling problems who did not participate in therapy (Free et al., 2024).



How CBT Works



It is completely normal for people to wonder what exactly it will look like to participate in CBT. As a person participating in CBT, it is important for you to take an active role in therapy and engage in the various activities to the fullest. It is also important for your therapist to take an active role in listening to your concerns and collaborate with you to develop the best course of action.

If these assumptions are met, CBT may involve a combination of different activities:

1. Enhance your motivation

Your therapist should work with you to identify the reasons that you want to make a change in your gambling. These reasons are different for every person, but the most common reasons are because people want to improve their financial situations or relationships (Suurvali et al., 2012). Once these reasons are identified, therapists should work with you to explore any hesitations about change; after all, changing a behavior like gambling is not easy and may even be uncomfortable.

2. Set goals

One of the most important steps for changing any behavior (including gambling) involves setting a clear goal. In the context of gambling, people commonly make one of two goals in CBT. One goal is to abstain from gambling completely. The other goal is to limit gambling in some way, such as the amount of money they will gamble or the number of days they will gamble.

The selected goal will be different for every person, but it is important that the goal is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and anchored in time. Regardless of the goal, research supports that people experience less significant gambling harm at the end of CBT (Ladouceur et al., 2009).



3. Feedback

A common element to CBT is providing you with data-driven feedback about your gambling behavior in the months leading up to therapy. Feedback often requires people to retrieve bills, credit card statements, and/or bank statements to report the number of times they gambled and how much money they gambled over a period of several months.

Many people worry about the usefulness of this activity and the potential discomfort of looking back on their gambling. However, our research shows that feedback about gambling (even in absence of other activities described here) will help people reduce their gambling behavior (Peter et al., 2019).

4. Change your environment

Changing your environment is a common activity in CBT for gambling, but what this activity looks like will depend greatly on your situation. Most people think of this activity as controlling “people, places, and things.”

For example, you may minimize or avoid interactions with people who gamble, you might voluntarily ban yourself from gambling apps on your phone or the local casino, or you could allow a trusted loved one to temporarily control your finances. Not all these changes to your environment may be relevant to you or even feasible to change in your life, but what matters is that a therapist helps you to identify the changes that are best for you.

5. Change how you think about gambling

While participating in CBT, people often begin to change how they think about gambling. Gambling is inherently risky because it involves taking chances on events with random outcomes. However, many people experiencing gambling problems begin to believe that they can control the outcomes of gambling games or possess gambling skill (Goodie & Fortune, 2013).

Examples of these beliefs include “I am one win away from hitting it big” or “I can win my money back if I keep playing.” CBT helps you recognize that this thinking is not entirely accurate and helps you reframe to more accurate beliefs such as “Gambling is supposed to be a fun activity and not an alternative income source.”

6. Engage in values-based alternatives

As people begin to change their gambling, many of them soon notice that they have more time on their hands. Engaging in alternatives to gambling becomes important to fill that new time. However, engaging in alternatives to gambling does not mean that you should simply do anything else like clean the house or watch television.

These alternatives are OK occasionally, but your therapist will encourage you to develop alternatives that help you lead a meaningful life. For example, if the most important reason for you to change is to become a better significant other, then you will be expected to generate alternatives consistent with your definition.

7. Future planning

At some point in time, many people participating in CBT begin to feel more confident that they can control their gambling. This feeling is a good sign because CBT is intended to be a time limited therapy, and the hope is that the activities described above will translate to long lasting changes in your life. That said, future planning helps people reflect on the progress they have made during CBT and forecast any future challenges that could arise when therapy is finished.

Some clients plan for worst case or novel scenarios that may arise after therapy, such as an unplanned work trip to Las Vegas or the opening of new casino in town. The hope is that you will develop effective plans for these situations before they happen. However, please note that therapists often encourage you to come back if you ever need a refresher or extra help; things happen and we cannot always plan for every future outcome.



Why CBT is Helpful for Gambling Addiction

- ✓ **Proven to Work:** CBT is the most effective treatment for gambling addiction, outperforming no therapy, advice, Gamblers' Anonymous, and medication. The American Psychological Association endorses CBT as an effective therapy for gambling addiction.
- ✓ **Reduces Gambling & Spending:** Research shows CBT helps individuals gamble less often, spend less money, and experience fewer gambling-related problems.
- ✓ **Improves Mental Well-Being:** CBT also reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, which commonly affect those struggling with gambling addiction.

CBT at The Gambling Clinic

The Gambling Clinic offers a safe, supportive place to get help with gambling.

Here's what makes our program special:

Therapists Who Care and Understand

Our therapists are trained to understand gambling issues, and they work with you to make sure you feel understood and supported.

Simple, Affordable Pricing

Treatment at The Gambling Clinic is **free** for residents of Tennessee. Residents of other states who come to Tennessee for treatment are asked to pay a comprehensive fee of \$800 if they can. Financial assistance is available to all who need it. Cost is never a barrier to getting the treatment you need at The Gambling Clinic.

Flexible Appointments

We offer in-person appointments at our Memphis, Johnson City, or Nashville clinics and telehealth options so you can talk to your therapist from anywhere in Tennessee. This way, you can pick the option that's best for you.



Get Started with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

[Schedule a
Consultation](#)

[Treatment at TGC](#)

If you or someone you care about is struggling with gambling, CBT can be a helpful step toward lasting change. The Gambling Clinic is here to support you every step of the way.

