

# Assessing and Addressing Danger in Problem Gamblers

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## Statistics

### RESOURCES

Alabama Council on Compulsive Gambling

[www.alcg.org](http://www.alcg.org)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance

[www.northstarproblemgambling.org](http://www.northstarproblemgambling.org)

## Contributing Factors

### *Suicide*

➔ Mental Illness

➔ Isolation

➔ Depression

➔ Helpless and Hopeless

### *Threat to Others*

➔ Diminished Empathy: Mirror Neurons + Weakened Control Mechanisms + Exposure to Violence

➔ Mental Illness

➔ Externalization of Blame

**Every  
Time:  
  
Stressors  
Exceed  
Resources**

### NOTES

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## Identifying Red Flags

### *Suicide*

#### ➡ Behavior Changes

- Isolation
- Aggression
- Substance use
- Risk-Taking
- Acting Out
- Shutting Down

#### ➡ Multiple Stressors

- Financial
- Professional/School
- Emotional
- Legal
- Health
- Friends/Family

#### ➡ Statements

- “I’ll never” (be normal, fit in, fix this)
- “I can’t” (live like this, stand feeling this way)
- “They’ll be better off without me”
- Saying good-bye (giving away items, making final arrangements)

#### ➡ Tying Up Loose Ends

**Confusion  
is not an  
Option:  
  
When in  
Doubt,  
Assess  
Danger**

### *Threat to Others*

#### ➡ Fascination with Violence including

Killers/Crimes

#### ➡ Difficulty Controlling Anger

#### ➡ Victim/Martyr Self-Concept

#### ➡ Violent Fantasies

#### ➡ Anhedonia

#### ➡ Lack of Empathy

#### ➡ Paranoia

### NOTES

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## How to Respond

### Do NOT

- ➔ Offer False Reassurance      “It will be OK” (Will it?)
- ➔ Judge, Shame or Guilt      “You’re selfish – you’re going to upset everyone”  
“That’s a sin!”
- ➔ Minimize      “Other people have it so much worse”
- ➔ Create Distance      “What’s wrong with you? I will never feel that way”

### Steps to Responding

- ➔ SPECIFICALLY Acknowledge      “You’re thinking of killing yourself”  
“You’re planning to kill him/her/them”
- ➔ Empathize      “You don’t see any other way out”  
“You need him/her/them to know how much you’re hurting”
- ➔ Support      “We will figure this out. I’m here with you”
- ➔ Pact      “Do you promise to call me before you hurt yourself/anyone?”

### NOTES

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**Steps to Responding (continued)**

- ➡ Safety Plan                      Remove Dangers (Weapons, Ammunition, Sharps, Poisons, Medications, Drugs, Alcohol)  
   Arrange Observation/Check-ins  
   Replace Comfort
- ➡ Referral and Follow-Up              Caregivers, Documentation, Self-Care

**Assessing Risk**

➡ When                                      Now, tomorrow, if I lose my job  
*\*\*Determines next steps. Now = call police; Next Week = pact and continue engagement*

➡ How                                        Is the method realistic, available?  
*\*\*Influences Safety Planning. Lock up guns vs. remove bedroom door*

➡ Protective Factors                      What has stopped you from hurting yourself/others so far?  
  
   Common Factors are: Not wanting to hurt family, religious/spiritual beliefs, goals and future plans  
  
*\*\*Influences Safety Planning, Follow-Up, and Referrals*

**Cognitive  
Dissonance  
is the  
Gateway to  
Hope**

**NOTES**

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## How to Respond – Special Considerations

### *Manipulation*

- Remain Empathic                      “You are hurting and trying to get what you need”
- Identify What They Need            Acknowledgement, nurturance, a place to stay, an escape
- Offer Alternatives                     Find legitimate and safe ways they can meet their needs
- Maintain Transparency              “My gut says there is still danger. Let’s talk about why you’ve changed your mind.”

### *Threat to Others*

- Remember Mirror Neurons            Do not dwell on violent thoughts  
Look for empathy and nurture it
- Paranoia and Grandiosity           Support the perception while challenging reality
- Tarasoff                                 Clearly label duty to warn from the beginning
- Continue Collaboration              “Let’s take these steps so that bad things don’t happen to you”  
Empower them to report (with verification)

### NOTES

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