



Understanding Joy: The Devastation of a Gambling Addiction

Understanding Joy enters the mind of a 57 year old woman whose gambling addiction has overcome her sense of morality and driven her to embezzle over \$700,000 during a seven year period from two employers. As she awaits sentencing for her crime, she struggles to explain her disease to her children, to the world and to understand it herself. National experts on-screen review Joy's symptoms and actions to address: the addictive nature of pathological gambling; the neurobiological evidence showing the brain's addiction; the need for clinical interventions to control addictive behavior; and, the optimal response to gambling addiction from societal and legal perspectives. Joy is currently incarcerated at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women in Jessup, Maryland, sentenced to 25 years serving all but 17.

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association reclassified pathological gambling as an addiction, a revision reflecting recent research that revolutionized the understanding of the effects of addictive gambling. Gamblers sometimes say they don't "feel addicted," but their behavior is often similar to that of other addicts as they chase their next high. Problem gambling can lead to other addictions and often spells financial disaster and family devastation as well. "Most people can gamble without it becoming an addiction, just as most people who drink alcohol do not become alcoholics," the University of Maryland School of Medicine's Chris Welsh, M.D. explains. "This film helps build awareness of the signs of addiction and, we hope, also will underscore the need to train clinicians to better serve the gambling-addicted population."

Commissioned by the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling (the Center), produced by MedSchool Maryland Productions, and funded by the Maryland Department of Health, *Understanding Joy* aired on Maryland Public Television (MPT) on March 19, 2014. Over 200 people called into the studio phone bank for information during the show.

**This DVD is available at no cost for your agency staff and client groups.
Contact the Center at (667) 214-2120 to order a copy.**

HELPLINE: 1-800-GAMBLER
www.helpmygamblingproblem.org

Understanding Joy: The Devastation of a Gambling Addiction

Questions and Discussion Guide

1. What do the responses of Joy's adult children tell us about society's perception of gambling addiction?
2. What similarities and differences exist between gambling and substance use addictions?
3. Discuss triggers for gambling behavior that were noted in the video.
4. Shame is based on belief that I am a bad person, guilt is based on belief that I did a bad act; discuss how Joy is torn between the two.
5. Why might a person with a gambling disorder experience deeper shame than a person with a substance use disorder?
6. How does Joy's gambling behavior impact her self-esteem and her state of mind?
7. Identify some signs and symptoms of gambling addiction that Joy evidences.
8. Talk about the depths and despair of a gambling addiction; how did Joy's manifest itself?
9. Discuss the role of money in development and maintaining of a gambling addiction; how was Joy able to finance her gambling adventures?
10. What responsibility, if any, did Joy's employer have to have a work place asset protection plan in place?
11. What are the difficulties for Joy in working on her recovery within the criminal justice system?
12. What do you think would be appropriate and therapeutic consequences for Joy's illegal actions?