

The ‘Circles Concept’ of (Gambling) Addiction

***An empowered framework for change
Harry Mayr (May,2013)***

***as presented at the 15th International Conference on Gambling & Risk Taking
(Caesars Palace, Las Vegas, 27-31 May,2013)***

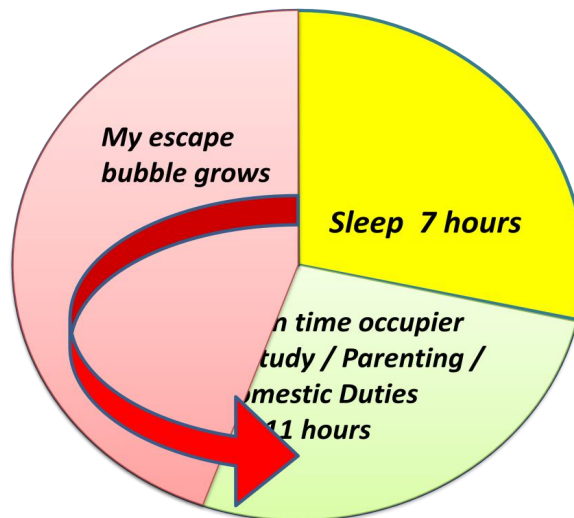


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An empowered framework for change ... Harry Mayr (May,2013)
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(Las Vegas, May, 2013)



History / Background

The original '**Circles Concept of (Gambling) Addiction**' was developed by Harry Mayr in 1982, while working as an addictions counsellor in a community-based health centre. It has always been a 'user friendly' concept ... applicable and understood by people from all cultures, across all ages, and with or without an addiction issue. Years later, people have informed Mr Mayr how they still remember 'those circles', and how the concept helped them.

The '**Circles Concept of (Gambling) Addiction**' is therefore a concept remembered as much for its visual cues as its verbal explanation – and thus applicable across languages, cognitive and literacy levels, and ages. ***Unlike most other problem gambling material, it relies on visual recognition rather than words, and seemingly therefore tends to be remembered more.***

Since its creation, the '**Circles Concept of (Gambling) Addiction**' has been used extensively by Mr Mayr in his educational, therapeutic and community development work.

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Mr Mayr has been the Principal Psychologist and owner of the St Marys / Penrith Psychological Services Pty Ltd, in the western suburbs of Sydney, since October 1995. He continues to utilise his 'circles concept' with his clients and their families; and the community at large. The developing breakthroughs in neural plasticity that emphasise the importance of new, innovative, creative ways of thinking and treatment support the 'circles concept' in its simplicity and effectiveness.

The '**Circles Concept of (Gambling) Addiction**' continues to be refined as new experiences, research, thinking, application and discussion occur around it. In preparation for the 15th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking in Las Vegas (May 2013), Mr Mayr has incorporated it with his concept of the '**escape bubble**' – a necessity in our normal lives.

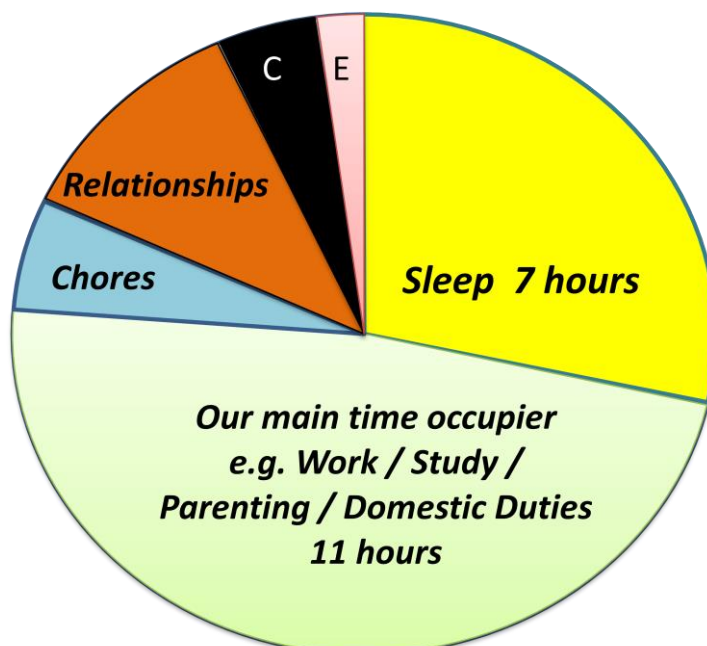
It is hoped that the 15th International Conference on Gambling and Risk Taking (Las Vegas, May 2013) can expand the 'Circles Concept' of (Gambling) Addiction further, and take it to the rest of the world.

Harry Mayr

The 'Circles Concept' of (Gambling) Addiction

Our normal life circle

Whether we are considering a normal day, month, year or longer, we can conceptualize what primarily occupies us in this time period by the following circle:



Our life circle

The first part of this circle is occupied by **sleep**. Acknowledging that people sleep varying hours, we are going to assume that most people sleep an average of 7 hours per night. This means therefore that sleep occupies approximately 29% of the normal life circle.

The second and **primary time occupying sector** of the circle, is usually occupied by a **work situation**. For most this is a formal job occupation. However it can also be filled by study, parenting and/or domestic duties. It is the sector that is filled with the activity that occupies most of our time. The total time commitment to this activity from start to finish is usually around 11 hours or 46% of the circle. If we focus only on normal waking hours, this sector then occupies 65% of our time.

The last 6 hours or 25% of our normal life circle is usually filled with a large number (and variety) of people and activities. In this sector we mostly address and put time into:

- Chores (household, including money management and bills)
- Relationships with ... partner, children, extended family, friends, community. This sector also incorporates the respective relationship-associated routines and commitments (e.g. meetings, weekend sports, visits, celebrations, church, choir ...).
- Crises
- Relationship with self (including self-care **escape*** time)

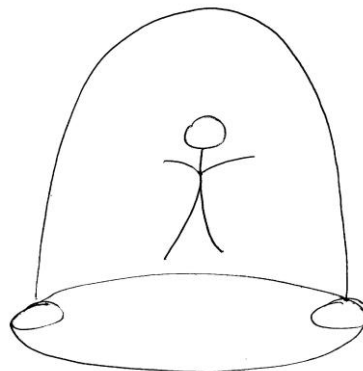
If these remaining four major areas were given equal importance and time occupation, they would all receive 6.25% of our daily time. This would translate into 90 minutes each daily, 2 days each a month, or 23 days each a year. As we all know, these categories do not usually occupy our time equally, and their sector sizes therefore fluctuate regularly - responding to what is happening 'at the time'. For most of us, the sector that comes last in our life circle is that related to our relationship with ourselves. So much so, that the rest of the circle seems to be squashing this sector into oblivion at times. For this reason, our need to self-care and to symbolically stay alive becomes crucial. We need to then assert and activate our **escape** time. 'Escape' being the appropriate word, as we are feeling somewhat trapped by the demands of the rest of the circle.

In escaping, we take action to gain power in our life, shut the rest of the world out, and 'feel good'. We place ourselves in **OUR** escape bubble:

Our *escape bubble

SHUTS THE WORLD OUT

**IS STIMULATING,
REWARDING,
EXCITING,
'FEELS GOOD',
ENERGISING,
'GIVES TO ME !!!'**



**PROVIDES A SENSE
OF CONTROL AND
POWER OVER OUR
LIVES, FOR A
PERIOD OF TIME**

**IDEALLY, ASSISTS ME TO RETURN TO THE REST OF MY LIFE
CIRCLE (WITH RENEWED ENERGY), CONFRONT ANY ISSUES OF
CHALLENGE THERE, AND EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS THEM**

Our escape bubble

In our escape bubble, we are the boss. We are away from all the concerns and demands our lives are presenting us. We are 'doing our own thing', and feeling a sense of power, control and enjoyment. After spending time in our escape bubble, we usually become more energized and content. We are then ready to return to the rest of our life circle, confront any issues of challenge there, and effectively address (adapt and hopefully resolve) them.

Escape bubbles are essential to our health. They can occupy small and long periods of time. They help stabilise and balance our lives. They often allow us to 'lose ourselves in the endless moment'.

If we however become reluctant to go back and address the rest of our life circle, our escape bubble can become a major problem in our lives. We can become used to avoiding and denying our other life circle realities. We then try to live more and more within our escape bubble reality, in the hope of gaining prolonged power, control and enjoyment. In turn, we then commit more energy and time into this escape bubble, along with the associations of self-image, emotions, momentary power, relationships, purpose, direction, and future.

By doing this, we then form neural pathways that risk becoming known, familiar, negative, and destructive 'loops'. These loops gaining energy and sustenance from the stimulating 'feel good' neurotransmitters of cortisol, adrenalin and serotonin. Despite having a negative effect on the rest of the individual's life circle, these negative escape bubble loops also provide the individual with feelings of familiarity, pleasure and excitement. This is why they are often very difficult to change.

If the escape bubble we choose to enter into becomes a greater occupier of time and energy than we initially wanted it to be, and a means of not returning to the rest of our life's circle, it becomes unhealthy and problematic. It also grows in strength and influence, and starts to significantly dominate our time, thinking and behaviour. Symbolically, we then begin to see it as a means of 'fighting back' against the perceived pressures, challenges and injustices of the rest of our life circle. In reality, these pressures, challenges and injustices are found in most people's life circles; and are best identified, confronted and resolved quickly.

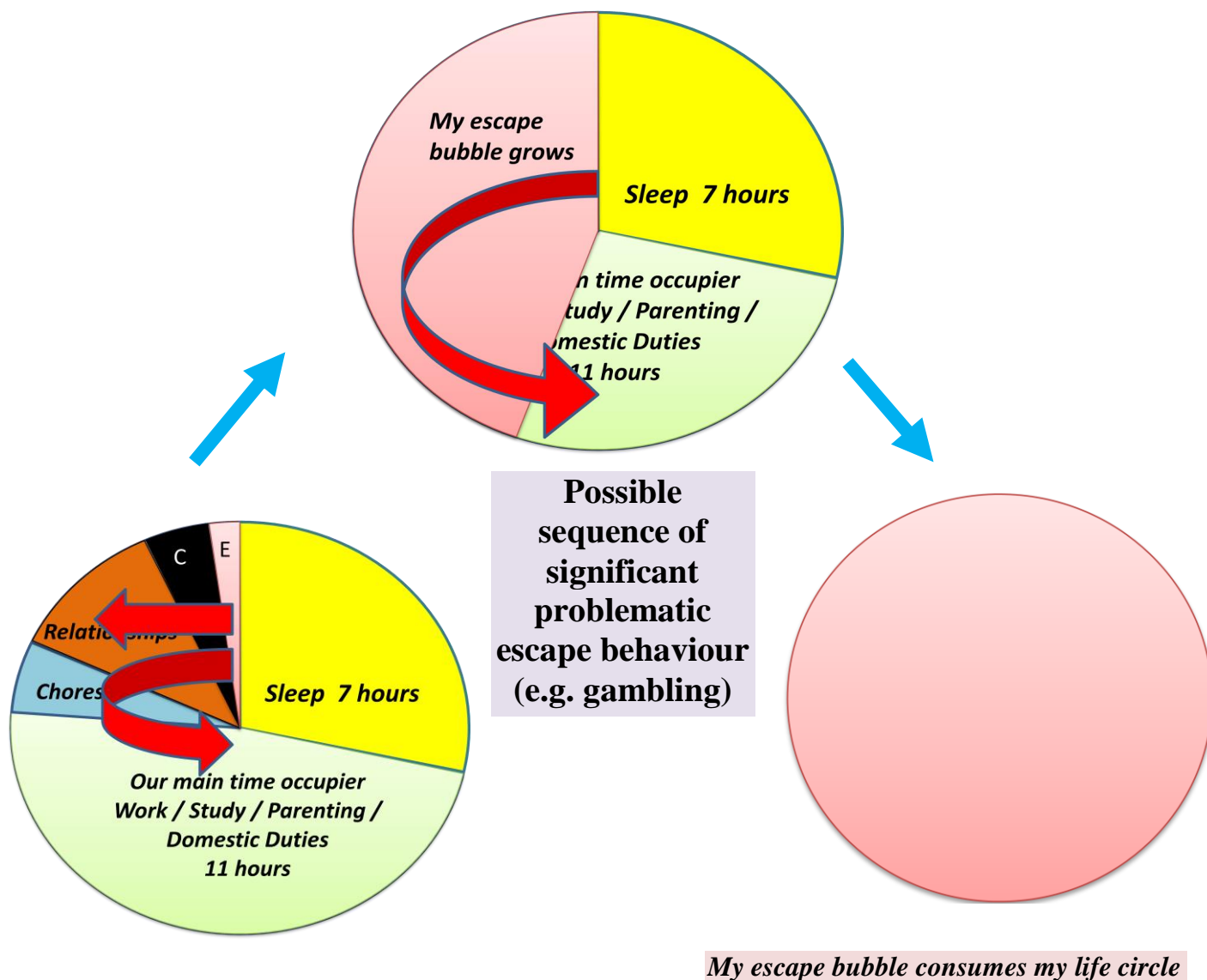
Symbolically fighting back **(Problematic escape bubble, growing)**



As our escape bubble sector symbolically attempts to gain more power, control and enjoyment in our lives, it slowly grows and invades into the other sectors of our life circle. This produces an **initial squashing of these sectors**, and in the long-term their loss and destruction. Because this process takes time, and involves the loss of one sector after another until the whole circle is overwhelmed, it can be somewhat paralleled to the 'rock bottom' concept of the fellowship movements.

Addiction / significant problematic escape behaviour

'Addiction', or problematic escape behaviour, is usually found and symbolically represented within the following sequence of life circles:



Within this sequence or progression of increasing problematic escape behaviour, it is clear that the gambling escape sector significantly grows. It goes beyond the stage of significantly squashing the other sectors of the life circle. They become fully contracted, with the increasing problematic escape section totally overwhelming and consuming them. They become significantly changed or destroyed. Thus addiction / significantly problematic escape behaviour can often be described as a sequence of **significant losses** in an individual's life circle ... to a potential end point of oblivion.

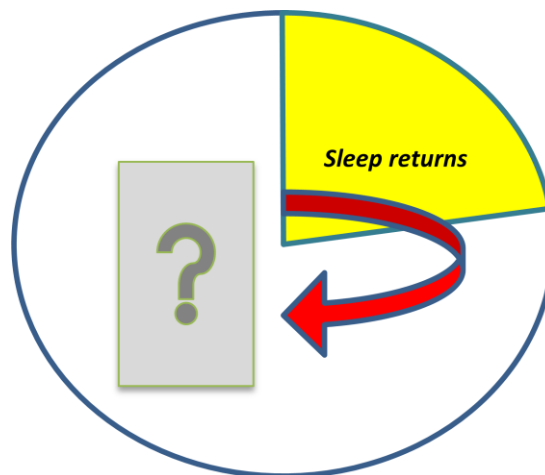
Recovery / Rehabilitation

Once the previous point of significant problematic escape behaviour (or addiction) is reached, recovery or rehabilitation from it can potentially begin. Whether it does or not, relies primarily on the willingness of the individual involved to **acknowledge and accept** the reality of their significantly problematic escape behaviour. **They need to be able to admit that they have a significant problem, that requires change ... and that they want to change it.** Without such acknowledgement, desire and commitment, any effort to begin their recovery will be easily thwarted by the 'power' of their now established and familiar problematic escape bubble. It will seem to 'seduce them' back into a world of denial, avoidance and negative escapism. Their negative cognitive looping continuing to function and strengthen, as the alternative (i.e. the absence of the negative escape behaviour) remains unknown, unfamiliar, risky, 'strange' and thus avoided. The establishment of new neural pathways requires a safe beginning, calculated risk, ongoing support and reinforcement; and is a process over time.

Recovery / rehabilitation therefore begins with an acknowledgement from the individual involved, that they have 'lost enough' from their life circle ... because of their problematic escape behaviour. Along with such acknowledgement, and commitment to change, should also come a significant reduction or ceasing of the ***time, accessibility and thinking*** being invested into their significant problematic escape behaviour.

Once the above occurs, recovery / rehabilitation can effectively begin. No matter what stage this is, in relation to the rest of the individual's life circle, the empowered '**refilling**' of the life circle then becomes the therapeutic aim and goal.

'Refilling' of the life circle

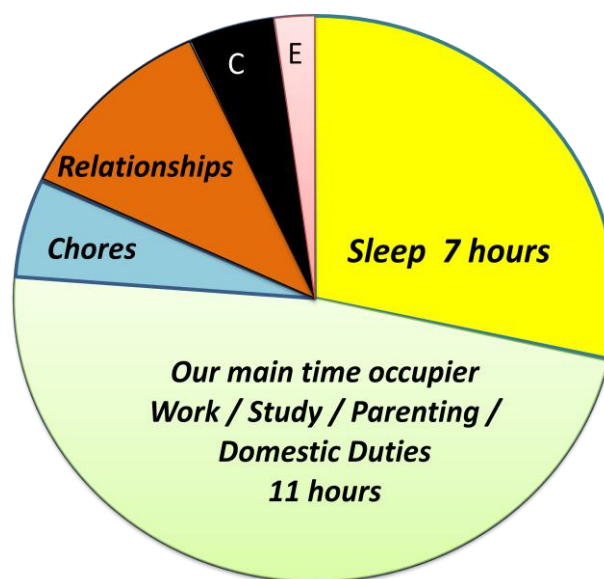


Sleep (and its associated physical recovery) tends to be the first 'lost' sector that becomes re-established once the problematic escape behaviour is acknowledged and willingly confronted. Once this sector is established, the process of 'filling in' the rest of the individual's life circle becomes the challenge. The sector associated with the problematic escape behaviour usually then ceases to exist, or is significantly reduced.

The next elements with which to fill in the rest of the individual's life circle, tend to be those that initially structured and filled it i.e. a main time occupier (work / study / parenting / domestic duties), chores and financial responsibilities, relationships, crises, and self-care activities. For most people therefore, this 'filled in' circle closely resembles the circle they were living in before their escape behaviour e.g. gambling, became problematic. It is however crucial that this new 'filled in' circle no longer carries the disempowerment that their previous life circle possessed – and that previously identified challenges are resolved or absent. Otherwise, it is likely that their new (or previous) escape behaviour will become significantly problematic again, and ultimately destructive with time.

Refilled life circle

similar to the previous life circle,
but with identified challenges resolved / absent,
and a new empowered escape behaviour



As simple as it is to say, and difficult in practice to achieve, the maintaining of balance in one's life is a major component in creating and sustaining health and happiness. Such balance occurring between work and play, others and self, mind / body and spirit, being active in your life circle versus escaping from it, thinking / feeling / doing and 'be-ing', sleeping and staying awake, and giving and taking. A sense of empowerment through goal achievement, in both logical and emotional ways, is also beneficial.

When crises arise, or life's challenges become significant and problematic, they seem best addressed via a balanced lifestyle and way of functioning. In turn, this minimizes the risk of an escape behaviour such as gambling becoming significantly problematic and destructive ... and helps maintain its enjoyment factor.

Effective uses for the 'Circles Concept' of (Gambling) Addiction

Because of its simplicity, creativity, visual component, versatility and world-wide appeal to the 'ordinary person', the potential applications of the 'Circles Concept' of (Gambling) Addiction are endless.

Following, are just a few examples of this:

a) Within problem gambling campaigns / within gaming venues themselves.

The visual trigger of the problematic gambling escape circle, allows individuals to quickly and simply **self-assess their behaviour at any time**. It allows established neural pathway loops to be challenged and potentially changed, in a self empowering manner. The symbolic problematic gambling escape circle is easily taught and remembered. It can be circulated and exposed extensively at gaming venues/sites themselves, via banners, brochures, stickers, cards and so on. Because it relies mostly on visual instead of verbal cues, it is more easily remembered and associated with all forms of gambling escape behaviour - and also gambling venues, helping agencies and telephone numbers. Due to a greater reliance on symbols than words, it is a concept that can be easily adopted throughout the world, irrespective of a country's languages.

b) In **promoting** gambling as a responsible and enjoyable escape behaviour

By emphasizing the need and importance of individuals regularly accessing their escape bubble, gambling can be presented as a fun and exciting behaviour that people chose. The reasons behind how and why it can become problematic, can be explained at the same time to limit such potential.

c) In **educating** people about gambling and other potentially problematic escape behaviours (addictions)

The circles concept of (gambling) addiction can be taught at all levels of health intervention. It can be taught to the whole population through media campaigns (television, multi-media, internet), and via the various education systems. People already gambling can be targeted through point a) previous. Problem gamblers can be treated and rehabilitated under the framework of this concept, with their progress readily monitored and assessed.

d) **Treating** individuals with developing and/or identified gambling problems

The circles concept of (gambling) addiction can be easily introduced to these individuals, and form the basis of effective psycho-education, therapy, monitoring, relapse prevention and/or long-term success evaluation. It is not dependent on any one theoretical model of problem gambling (or other addictive behaviour), and can be used with all of them. It is not confined to the therapy office or rehabilitation program. It is a concept that can be presented to these individuals, via many different ways and places.

e) **Treating** those affected by individuals who have developing and/or identified gambling problems

The circles concept of (gambling) addiction helps educate and empower those around 'the gambler' to assess what is occurring in their own lives. It can promote self-assessment, communication with the gambler, an understanding of how gambling is effecting their life circle, the dynamics behind gambling, and what steps to take next.

f) University **research**

The circles concept of (gambling) addiction could form the basis of a multitude of research projects. These projects could include ... the development of a psychometric assessment tool in addictions and risk taking behaviour; the effectiveness of the concept in changing negative neural loops and creating new lasting productive pathways; how easily the concept is remembered (over time, in detail), and in comparison to other more verbally-based frameworks; its effectiveness as a health intervention; its effectiveness in promoting gambling; comparing different addictions; documenting the variety and importance of escape bubbles; the role of power in an individual's life; and cross-cultural studies in relation to all of the previous.

Harry Mayr (May, 2013); harrymayr@hotmail.com; www.stmaryspsychservices.com.au

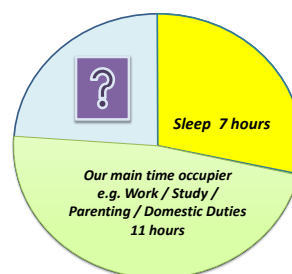
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The 'Circles Concept' of Gambling Addiction

An empowered framework
for change

Harry Mayr (May 2013)



The 'Circles Concept' of Gambling Addiction

Our life circle

1

2

Our life circle



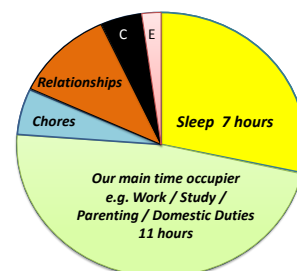
6 remaining hours

TIME FOR :

- **Chores / responsibilities**
e.g. shopping, bills ...
- **Relationships** i.e. partner, children, extended family, friends, community ...
and associated events
e.g. celebrations, meetings, weekend sport, church

* Crises

- Self-care / Escape



The 'Circles Concept' of Gambling Addiction

Our life circle

3

4

MY 'ESCAPE BUBBLE'



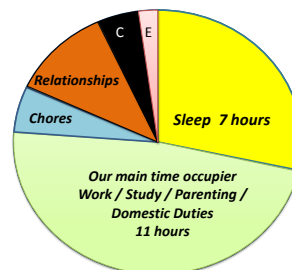
Shuts the world OUT !!!

Gives me a sense of POWER over
my own life ... 'In control'

IS STIMULATING, REWARDING,
EXCITING, 'FEELS GOOD',
ENERGISING,
GIVES TO ME !!!

is time framed

Ideally, my 'escape bubble' assists me to return to the rest of
my life circle (with renewed energy), confront any issues of
challenge there, and effectively address them



The 'Circles Concept' of Gambling Addiction

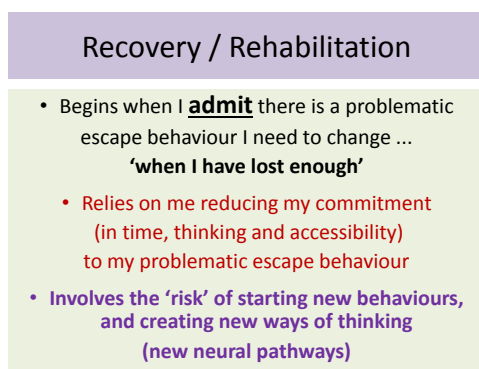
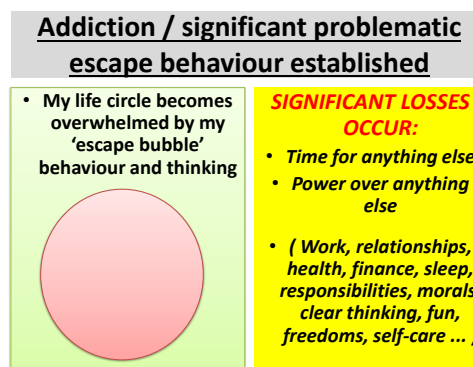
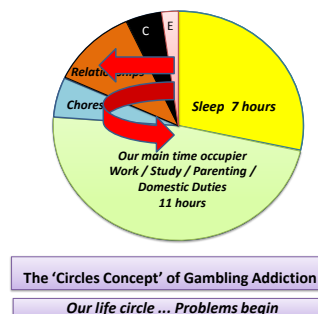
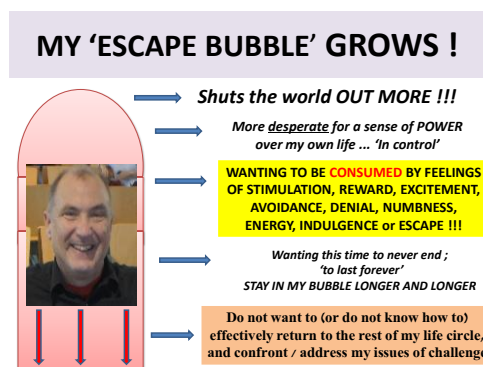
Our life circle

5

6

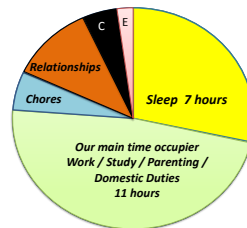
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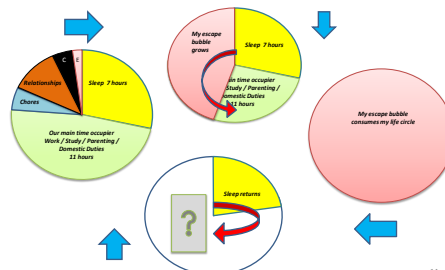


The 'Circles Concept' of Gambling Addiction

Our life circle

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The 'Circles Concept' of Gambling: Fun, Addiction, Recovery/Rehabilitation.

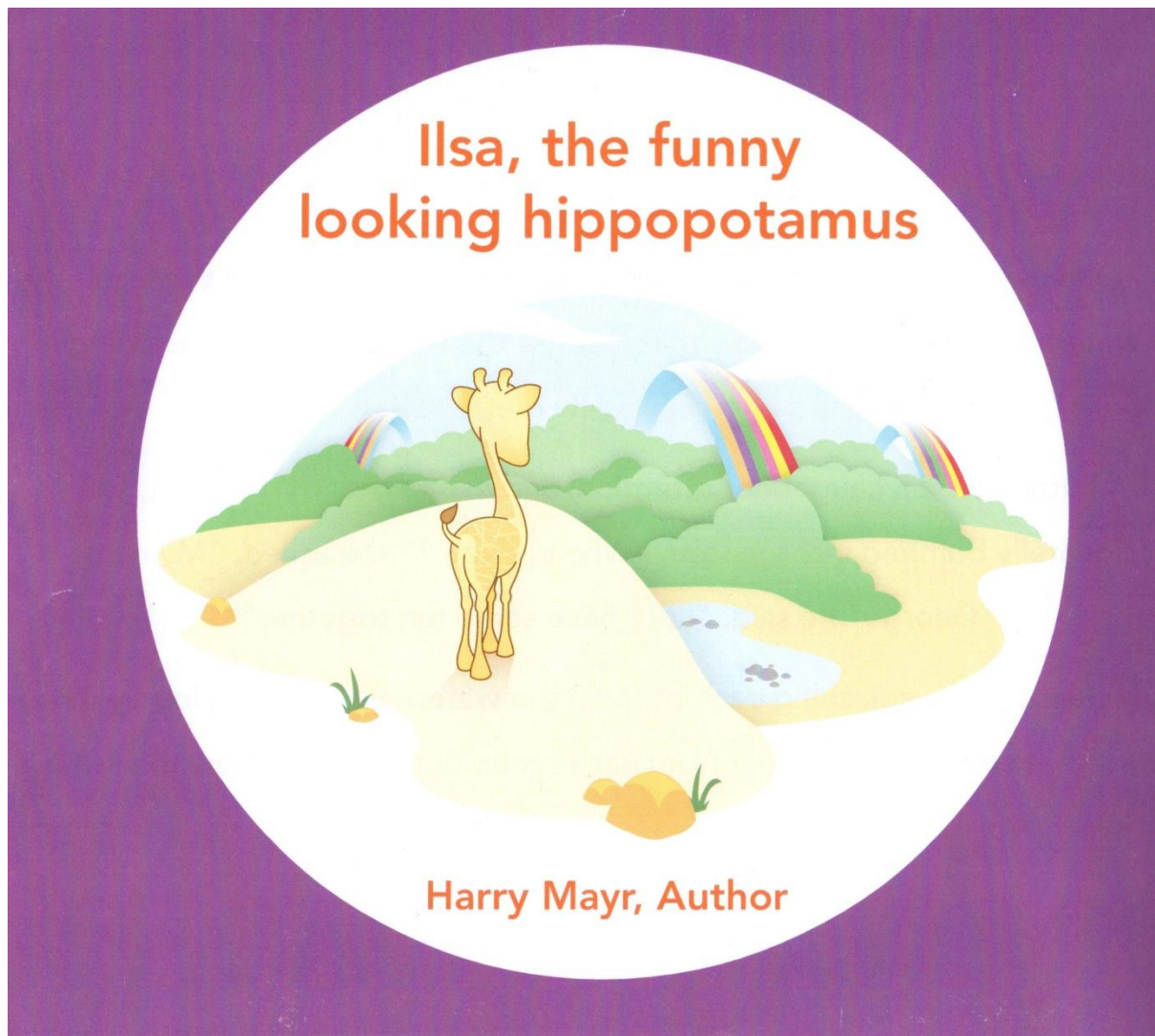


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Effective Applications for the 'Circles Concept' of Gambling Addiction

- a) Within problem gambling campaigns / within gaming venues themselves due to its EASE OF VISUAL RECOGNITION
- b) In promoting gambling as a responsible and enjoyable escape behaviour
- c) In educating people about gambling, and other potentially problematic escape behaviours (addictions)
- d) Treating individuals with developing and/or identified gambling problems
- e) Treating those affected by individuals who have developing and/or identified gambling problems
- f) University research (e.g. addiction generally / gambling specifically; role of escape bubbles in life ...)

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