

Healing Together: Integrating Affected Others in Recovery

Wednesday 3pm - 4:30pm

Thank you to Northwest ATTC for co-sponsoring this session.

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WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON PROBLEM GAMBLING AWARENESS
FOCUS ON THE FUTURE



ATTC

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Healing Together: Integrating Affected Others in Recovery



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Veronica

- L&C
- PGS
- Emergence
- Training
- Presenting
- Licensed!

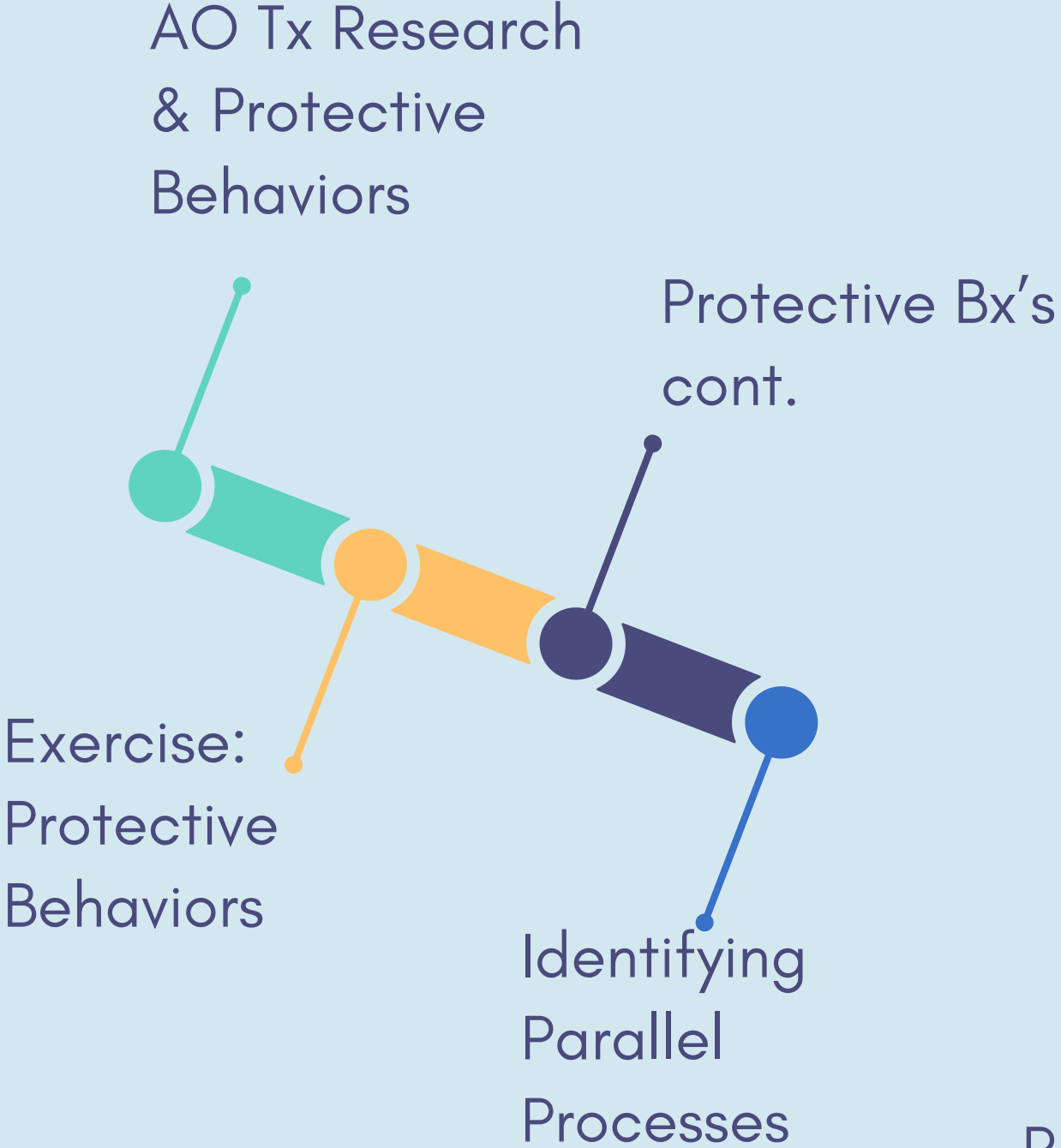
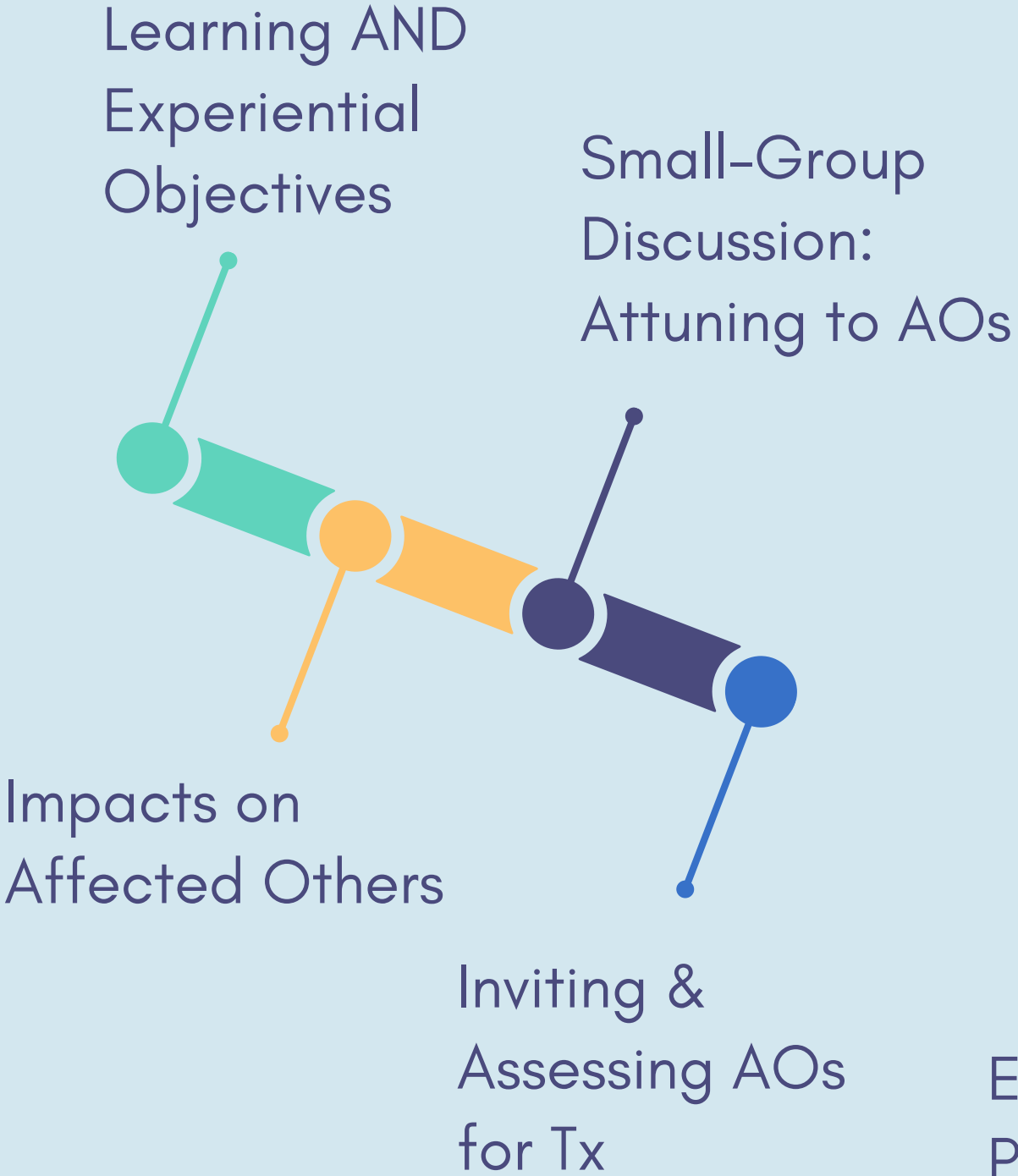


Brandie

- Working with gambling
- Working with addiction
- Working with couples
- L&C / PGS
- Yamhill County
- OHA



Schedule



Professional Learning Objectives:

- 1 Identify financial, mental health and relational impacts of Problem Gambling on Affected Others
- 2 Explore applicable ways to engage and target affected others through your own practice from entering to termination.
- 3 Identify parallel recovery processes of those in addictions treatment and affected others.
- 4 Gain tools to validate affected others experiences while simultaneously providing gambling psychoeducation.





Applied Experiential Objectives:

- 1 Move from the “either / or” to the “both / and”
- 2 Keep systemic parallel processes in mind (individual : relational; clients : counselor; SUDs : gambling, etc.)
- 3 Noticing biases toward or away from AOs
- 4 Notice discomfort when there are activating emotions and / or need to hold accountability rather than neutrality

“If addiction is loneliness, the opposite of addiction is connection” (Penfold & Ogden, 2023)

-Research Participant



- Addiction is socially and politically stigmatized and institutionally siloed
 - IP seen as “symptom carrier” (Van Wormer & Davis, 2014) within system (society, therapy and relationships)
 - IP takes focus
 - Other issues (ICOD sx's, intergenerational patterns) and OPs experiences are missed (Kauppila et. al, 2025)
- “AOs are not “passive witnesses” to gambling harms (Kauppila et. al, 2025).



“What’s missing in our world isn’t just justice it’s the recognition that healing is a collective process, not an individual one”

–Gabor Maté

- A systemic approach with family-focused strategies are critical to comprehensive and effective treatment (Kauppila et. al, 2025).
- Dysmantles structural barriers, is suicide prevention, reduces gambling, improves psychological distress and increases overall retention, relationship satisfaction and successful completion of goals (Côté et.al, 2021).

Gambling's Impact on Affected Others (AOs)

Anxiety and Depression Symptoms

Uncontrollable worry. Insomnia. GI issues. Investigating answers. Suicidality. Hopelessness. Depressed / Irritable mood (Kauppila et. al. 2025).

Substance Use / PG Symptoms

Increased substance use or "problem gambling transmission" to manage / cope with gambling impacts and precipitating symptoms (Kauppila et. al. 2025).

Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms

Taking blame. Hypervigilance. Fear. Dissociation. Distrust. Avoiding triggers. Angry outbursts. IPV (Kauppila et. al. 2025)

Financial

Loss of home / savings / retirement / children's college savings. Divorce / legal separation discernment.



Experiences of Affected Others

Emotional responses

Curious, confused, frustrated, angry, hurt, rejected, dismissed, taken advantage of, enraged, resentful, etc.

Cognitive responses

Ignore, justify, catastrophize, assume your loved one can stop or control the gambling, take responsibility for the gambling, preoccupation

Impact

Crazymaking, broken trust, suicidality, fear of gambling's return, legal problems, life changing debt, having to go without

Efforts to solve

Looking for answers, bailouts, handling 100% of finances and / or repayment discussions → Protective Behaviors cause more problems.



Words of Affected Others

"I still cannot trust him; I find myself still searching through his pockets and I think he is still hiding things from me. I will never ever trust him."

"I just despise him. I haven't trusted him for 13 years and I will never recover from that."

"I am an insomniac. I haven't slept properly for years. I think about things when I should be asleep. And I have nightmares about not having enough money."

"I wouldn't tell anyone about the gambling... I just coped alone until it all got too much for me. I was just defeated, and I didn't even have the energy to cry."

"If she's gambling, I sort of feel like it's my fault because I haven't stopped her."

"It really damaged my relationship with my sister and the rest of my family. I felt like an outcast at times, like they blamed me for not being able to stop him."

McCarthy et al., 2023; Dickson-Swift et al., 2005



Imagine the Following Scenarios

- Opening the mail and discovering a huge debt / accounts have been liquidated
- They didn't come home last night - Are they having an affair? Injured in the hospital?
- Believing progress in recovery only to experience their return to gambling
- Holding own anger about secrets / damage with compassion for their struggles and shame
- Hypervigilance of trying to prevent gambling's return / controlling finances
- Reaching out to community for support and receiving shame / stigma
- Seeking truth and not finding confirmation of the whole picture / what is actually happening
- Constant doubt - Wanting to trust them but scared gambling is happening
- Needing to work more to recover gambling debts
- Accepting the need of learning about recovery even though they aren't directly experiencing the addiction
- Fear of calls, texts or knocks on doors by AOs or random individuals asking for repayment
- Isolation in the processing experience as not many people understand the experience of AOs
- Will voicing my feelings about the impact trigger the gambling to flare up?
- Grieving loss of future plans and anger / resentment due to lack of control



Small-Group Discussion: Attuning to AOs



- What thoughts or curiosities are coming to mind?
- Do you notice biases or alliances with AO or person gambling?
- How do you maintain effectiveness / compassion through continued work with the person gambling after meeting with AO?

Not IF but WHEN to invite AOCs



At the beginning

- To make introductions and extend offer to attend therapy
- Psychoeducation

Throughout services

- Assess readiness and prepare for AC involvement
- As a treatment goal
- Work towards inviting AOCs as a source of support

After a gambling lapse

- Helping AOCs shift from protective behaviors to recovery behaviors

How to invite AOs



- Client invites AO to next session
 - When client is confident and willing
- Client and counselor make an invitation call together
 - Verbal permission from client needed; ROI needed before joint session
- Counselor calls on behalf of the client to extend invitation
 - ROI needed before call
 - May need to meet individually with AO before joint work
- Counselor calls and recommends AO's involvement in services
 - ROI needed before call
 - Attention to how AO's involvement will create change

Assessing AOs Level of Involvement

- Assessing
 - Readiness
 - Supports necessary
 - Goals
 - Safety
- Goodness of fit for Therapy Options
 - Individual therapy first?
 - Periodically reassess and check on everyone's progress with the ultimate goal of starting relational work
 - Congruent / Solely relational work?
 - Prevent or harm relational progress?
 - Group / Peer / Education?



When NOT to invite AOs into Relational Therapy at all or as only Option

- Intimate partner violence
- Sexual / Child abuse disclosed
- Active use of substances
- Unmanaged mental health / personality disorders
- Also gambling and are pre-contemplative
- AO has decided repair is NOT possible (distrust; denies capacity for: support, boundaries or compassion / empathy; and resentment)
 - Validate their experience
 - Normalize their experience
 - How services can help
 - Invite them to engage in individual session, group, etc.

** Does not mean that AO involvement is contraindicated forever, just means that individual work needs to occur before the relational work



AC Treatment Research

- Integrative couple treatment for pathological gamblers with an emphasis on forgiveness processes: A case study with three couples

(Côté et.al, 2021).

- “Forgiveness” is a process not a single event focused on:

- Equity; expressions of relational wounds and impacts caused by behaviors; empathy; accept past and commit to change

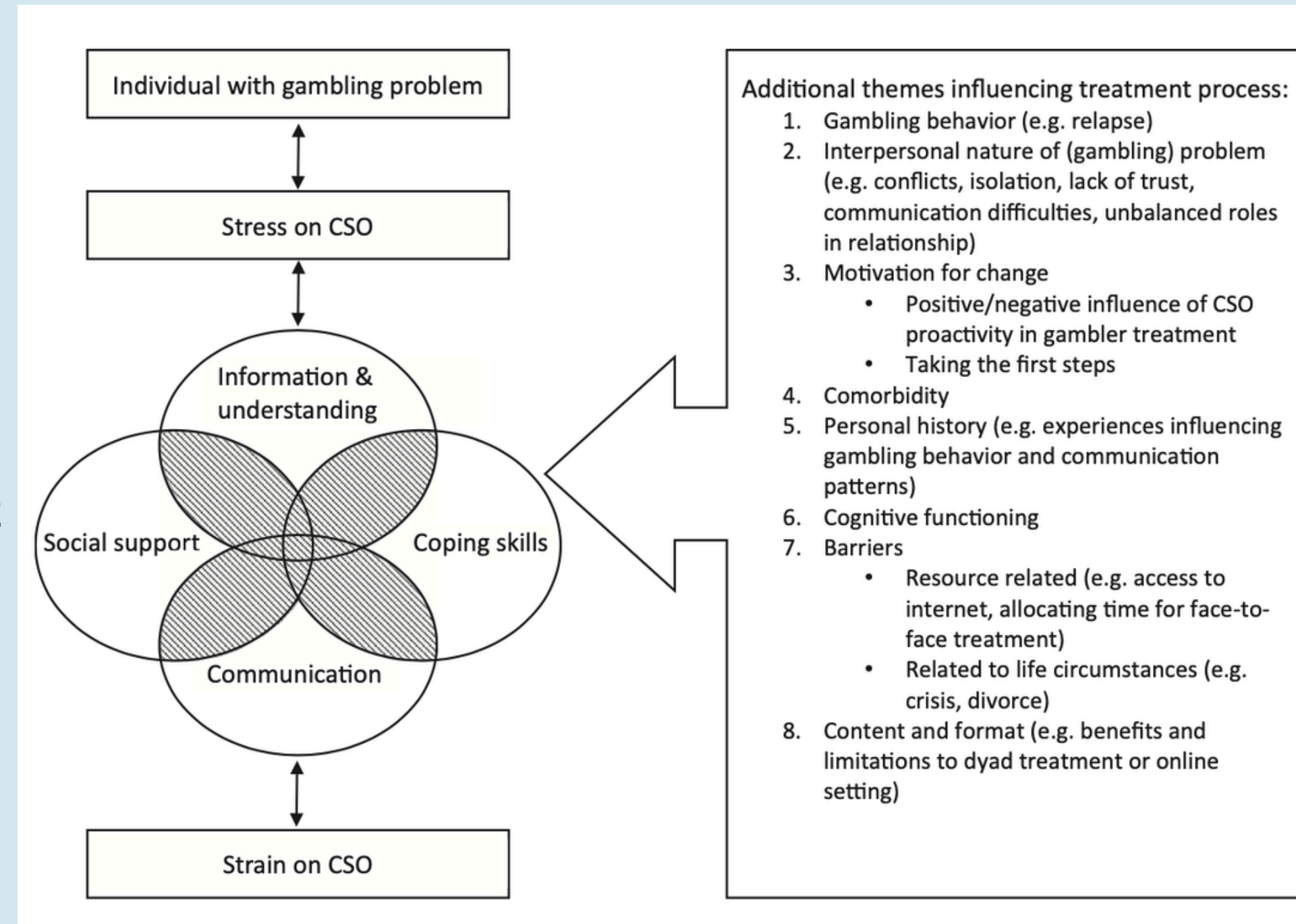
- Gambling Disorder and Romantic Relationships: The role of positive communication and emotional dysregulation in couple satisfaction

(Macía et al., 2025)

- Gambling increased abuse, emotional dysregulation, isolation and inequitable relationship dynamics.

- Emotional regulation and equitable relational responsibilities need further study
- Positive communication increased satisfaction

Treatment for the concerned significant others of gamblers: A systematic review (Edgren et. al, 2022).



Limitations of Relational Gambling

Treatment Research

- SOOOOOO many
- Just at the beginning of AO research
- Cisgender Heteronormative gender bias
 - Focused on Cisgender men with Gambling Disorder
- Lacking diverse intersectional experiences of the Global Majority (Macía et al., 2025) and folks in LGBTQIA2S+

AC individual work

Intrapersonal Focused

- Personal areas of wellness
- Preparing for relational repair
- Neurobiological Gambling Psychoeducation
- Processing grief
- Exploring hope
- Intergenerational patterns
- Interdependence and boundaries
- Identify money values / barriers
- Financial and legal resources
- Financial safety
- Expanding personal support system
- Exploring protective behaviors



Support Focused

- Support person for their recovery
- Preparing for relational repair
- Neurobiological Gambling Psychoeducation
- Interdependence and boundaries
- Identify money values / barriers
- Financial and legal resources
- Exploring protective behaviors

AC Individual Work: Protective Behaviors

Behaviors implemented to protect self, a loved one or family from an unwanted / unsafe outcome

Common Terminology Used

- Boundaries
- Expectations
- Rules
- (Co)dependence
- Low Differentiation
- Enabling
- "Protecting my peace"

Intention

- Rooted in love and care
- An attempt to solve a problem / consequence with no other foreseeable solutions
- "If I don't do X, then Y will occur" and Y is worse

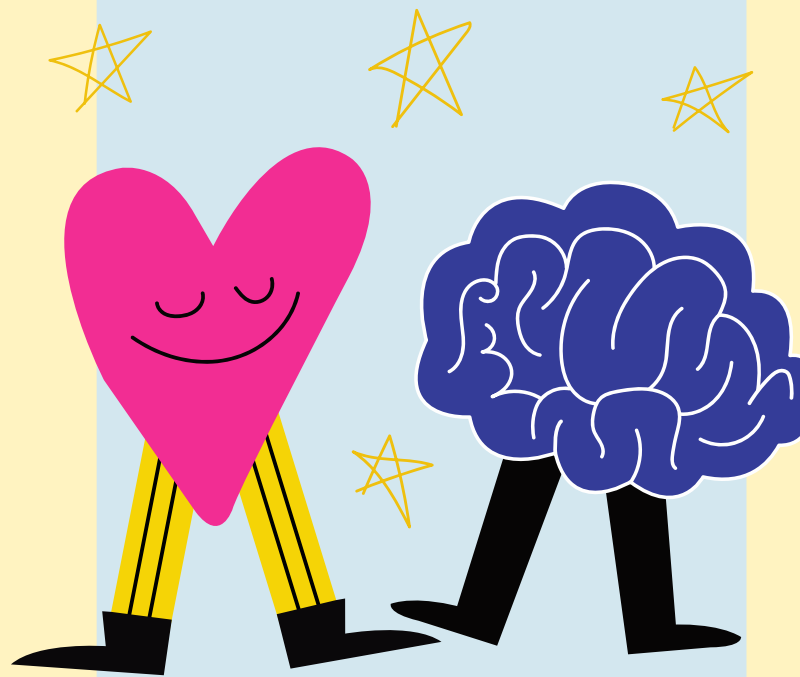
Impact

- "Enabling" blames family members
- Assumes important others are unaware or dismissing the problem
- Gambling finds a way to use these behaviors

How to Determine Protective Behaviors

Protective

- Are consequence more important than how it affects you or the person gambling?
- You do something that wasn't asked or feel obligated
- You are doing something a loved one has the capability to do
- Ask yourself: Will my action make gambling more likely to happen?



Recovery

- Considers loved ones AND personal needs / limitations
- Allowing discomfort for self and loved ones when:
 - holding them accountable
 - communicating impact
 - natural consequences unfold
- Money barriers for financial security.

Incongruent Protective Behavior Exercise

Gambling
consequence

Lost paycheck and can't pay rent

Protective
behavior

Short-term
impact

Long-term
impact



Incongruent Protective Behavior Exercise

Gambling
consequence

Lost paycheck and can't pay rent

Protective
behavior

Pay for it with credit

Short-term
impact

Long-term
impact



Incongruent Protective Behavior Exercise

Gambling
consequence

Lost paycheck and can't pay rent

Protective
behavior

Pay for it with credit

Short-term
impact

Prevent eviction and late fees

Long-term
impact



Incongruent Protective Behavior Exercise

Gambling
consequence

Lost paycheck and can't pay rent

Protective
behavior

Pay for it with credit

Short-term
impact

Prevent eviction and late fees

Long-term
impact

Bailout → Cognitive Distortions of no debt
→ pattern continues into future → resentment
builds



Protective Behavior Exercise

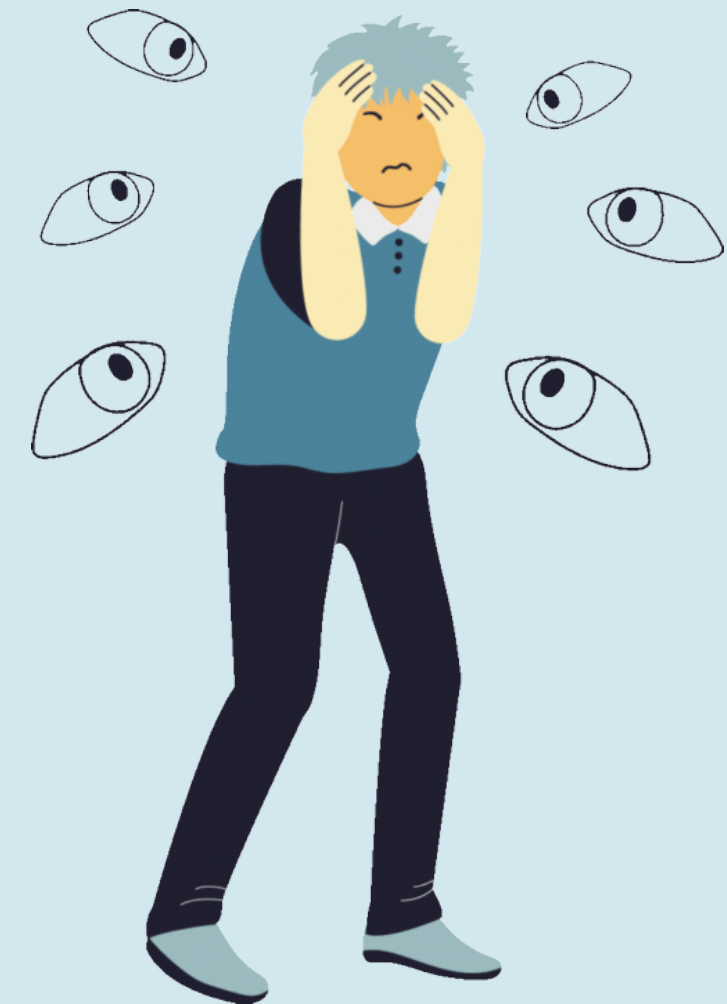
Gambling
consequence

Late for work due to losing track of time gambling and AC receives call from loved ones boss asking where they are.

Protective
behavior

Short-term
impact

Long-term
impact



Protective Behavior Exercise

Gambling
consequence

Loved one is short-tempered after a gambling episode

Protective
behavior

Short-term
impact

Long-term
impact



Common Protective Behaviors

- Secret keeping
 - Lying, covering up or hiding gambling's severity
 - Protects the reputation of the person gambling
 - Avoid worrying other family members
- Making excuses rather than hold accountable
- Avoiding gambling conversations /conflicts as to not trigger gambling behavior or feel uncomfortable emotions.
- Paying debt
- Handling responsibilities that would go undone
- Ignoring problems
- Isolating or avoiding social situations
- Monitoring them
 - Following / tracking them
 - Overly focused on checking accounts
- Enjoying the effects of a jackpot
- Not maintaining money barriers or ending them too early
- Leniency surrounding repayment plan

(Cote, Tremblay, & Brunelle, 2018)

Barriers to Implementing and Maintaining Protective Behaviors

- Current, Historical or Intergenerational Safety Concerns
- Fear of:
 - Confrontation
 - Rejection
 - Abandonment
 - Further ruptures
- Guilt
- Distrust
- Lack of capacity



Parallel Recovery Processes in Relational Gambling Therapy

- Between Clients
 - Isolation / Grief / Shame / Blame / Psychological distress
 - Secrets vs Truth / Pain vs Healing / Addiction vs Recovery
 - Cycle of Addiction for person gambling, for AO
 - Experiential Avoidance
 - Protective Behaviors
- Individual FOO
 - Intergenerational trauma
 - Childhood and Hx Attachment traumas
- Within Therapeutic Relationship
 - Discomfort with naming inequities
 - Challenges holding compassion for all experiences and/ or accountability
 - Wanting to “fix” and difficult to meet clients where they are at
 - Transference / Countertransference



Parallel Experience of Addiction

Person Gambling:

- Internal shame and guilt
- Financial pressure to fund gambling and cover gambling debts
- Addiction symptoms of minimizing, lying, and gambling despite negative consequences
- Gambling makes shame and guilt worse
- Under-functioning

Affected Others:

- External worry, concern, anger
- Financial pressure to maintain household
- Addiction symptoms of preoccupation, failed attempts to control, and providing quick fixes (“bailouts”)
- Gambling increases attempts to control and hypervigilance
- Over-functioning

Parallel Experience of Recovery

Person in Gambling Recovery:

- Changing addictive Bx's through harm reduction
 - Maintaining money, time and physical barriers to decrease harm
- Experiential Acceptance
 - Discussing triggers, urges or support needed and (co)regulating to cope
- Grief surrounding impacts
- Repair through consistency, equitable engagement and accountability to build trust

Affected Other Recovery:

- Changing protective behaviors
 - Prioritizing financial security
 - Holding loved ones accountable through discomfort.
- Experiential Acceptance
 - Letting natural consequences take place and (co)regulating to cope
- Grief surrounding loss
- Repair through trust building exercises of open communication, consistent follow-through and equitable responsibilities.

Joining in Relational Gambling Therapy

- Communicate relational expectations from the start
 - Boundaries (communication in and out of session, secrets, REPORTING!!!, etc.)
 - Expectations
 - Therapy is inherently relational, you WILL fuck up, so how will you repair? MODEL
 - Relationship being the client and what that means
- Holding Both
 - Differing values and beliefs
 - Compassion and Accountability
- Prioritize
 - Agency, Connection, Communication
- Identify Common Goals when:
 - Different stages of change
 - Different lengths of time within addiction-recovery process
 - Helping them get on the same highway, even if one is a hundred miles ahead



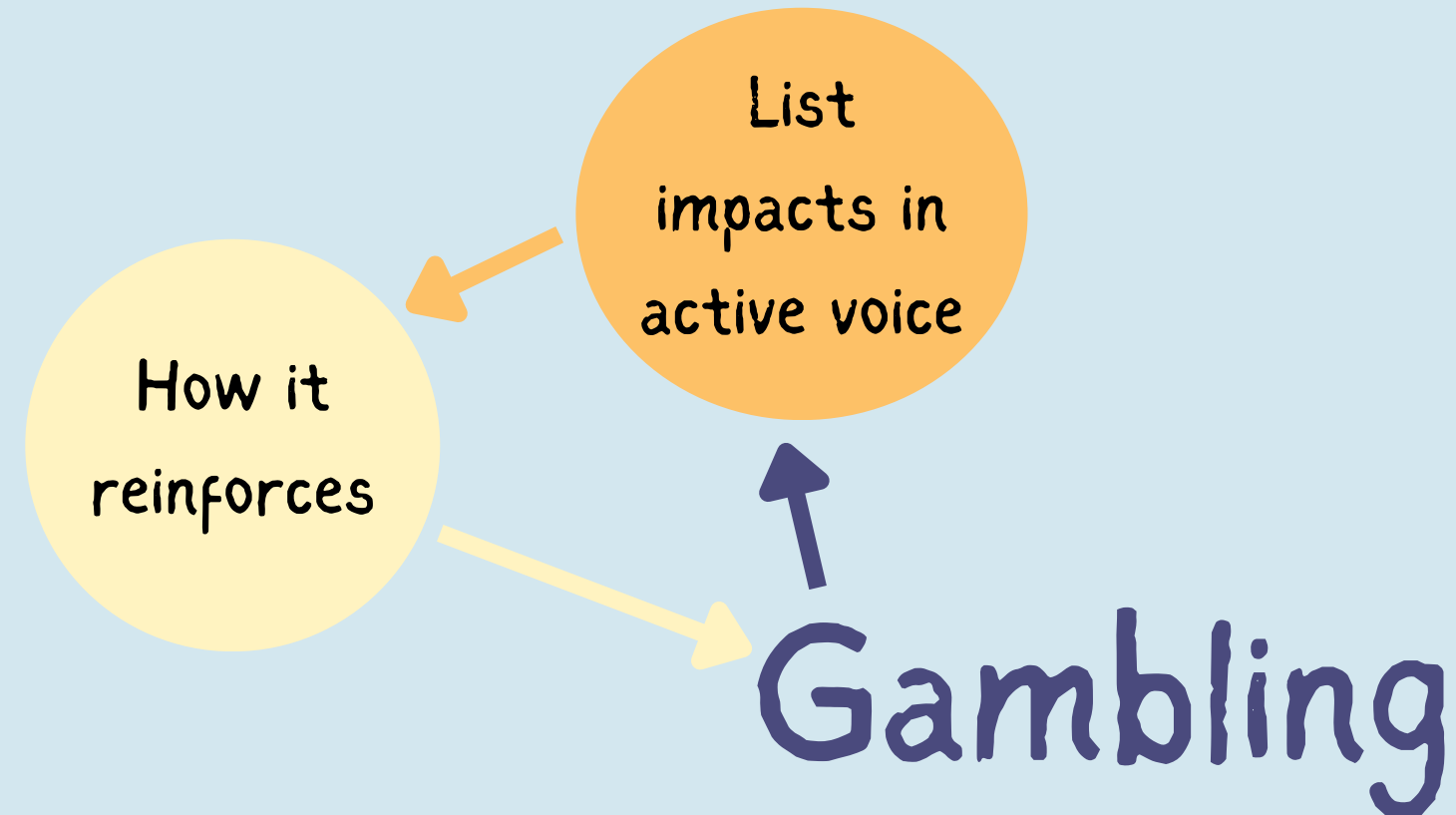
Tools to Attune in Relational Gambling Therapy



- Map the influence of gambling to show gambling's simultaneous influences on both person gambling and AOs (even if they are in different stages of change)
- Homeostasis: systems want to remain the same
 - Supportive fact to come back to when needing compassion OR accountability.
- Gambling vs. trauma triggers
- Discussing gambling regularly
 - Increases normalcy, trust, connection and communication
 - Decreases blame, guilt and accusations
- Identify individual values AND relational values
 - Can they collaboratively identify and define 5
 - Great for SMART goals and getting on same page even if they are in different stages of change

Mapping the Influence: How to

Interventions and
recovery actions



Mapping the Influence

Money barriers

Families fight gambling together



Accurate tracking win/losses

Truth and disclosure

Benefits of Mapping the Influence



- Shines a light on how cunning the gambling is
 - A meta-perspective on how gambling creates addiction
 - Changes the experience of engaging in gambling behavior
- Gives language to experiences and invites empathy and collaborative problem solving
- Shows us what to prioritize and informs the treatment plan
- When used as a “living document,” it can show recovery progress and new developments of gambling’s attempts to re-hook

Take Aways

- Healing occurs in community NOT isolation
 - AOs experiences need to be a focus in the therapy room.
 - SUD and GD bx's to cope with MDD, GAD & PTSD sx's.
 - Invite AOs into tx unless contraindicated
- Limited research (that's inclusive) on AOs in connection with relational work.
- No particular theory is necessary for individual AO work
 - Validating experience and grief of gambling's impact
 - Coping tools
 - Psychoeducation
- No particular theory is necessary for relational gambling recovery work
 - Remaining attuned to ALL clients
 - Holding parallel processes
 - Identifying a common connective goal
 - Compassionately holding clients accountable
- AO individual and relational work parallel gambling recovery and therapeutic relationship processes
 - Therapists PLEASE continue to process countertransference
- DO NOT remain neutral
 - Gambling wants to remain hidden

Contact Information

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