BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EDUCATION & TRAINING

Not Just A Hobby:

Exploring The Behavioral Risks Of Modern Collecting

Alyx Effron, Founder, Collectors MD

A Training For Behavioral Health, Prevention, & Recovery Professionals

Support. Accountability. Change.

Presenter Perspective



Alyx Effron

Founder, Collectors MD

- **Lived experience and hobby education**
- Founder of Collectors MD and The CMD Foundation
- CMD provides education, peer support, and referral pathways for individuals experiencing gambling-adjacent harm
- CMD helps bridge the collectibles, behavioral health, and problem gambling industries

Drawing from lived experience and firsthand hobby knowledge, Alyx Effron founded Collectors MD to bridge the collectibles, behavioral health, and problem gambling industries through education, peer support, and prevention.

Learning Objectives

01

Describe four purchasing formats used in modern collecting

02

Identify five indicators of impaired control or functional harm

03

Apply CARE questions to a collecting-related case

04

Identify three prevention, intervention, or support strategies, including appropriate referral pathways

The Clinical Question

What is this activity doing in this person's life?

01

Meaning and enjoyment

02

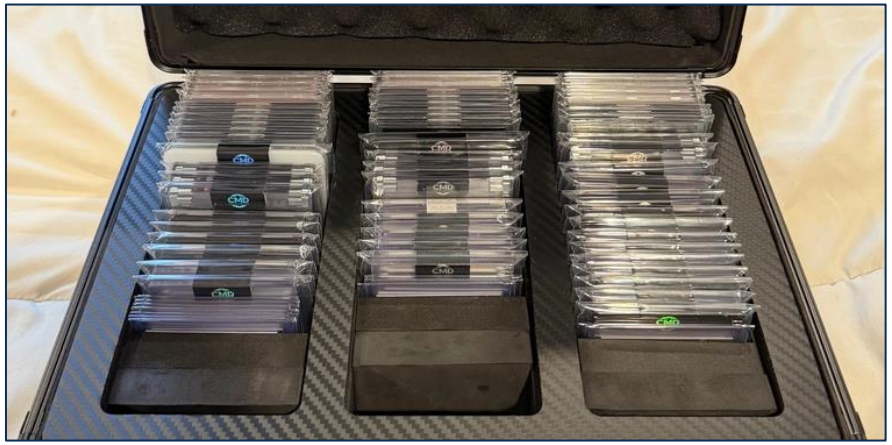
Control over participation

03

Consequences and safety

My Experience Of The Shift





When The Chase Became The Goal

Purity and nostalgia gave way to overspending and chasing losses. Financial, mental, emotional, and relational fallout alongside guilt, shame, isolation, and secrecy made it harder to ask for help.

What No One Could See



- Life looked intact from the outside
- Behind the scenes: hiding purchases, debt, shame, and compulsive behavior
- A clinical history may miss the pattern unless someone asks

An intact appearance can hide significant harm. Looking like you have it together doesn't mean you aren't struggling. The right questions can reveal what guilt, shame, and loneliness keep hidden.

Turning Pain Into Purpose



- Recovery showed me I wasn’t alone
- I discovered there were no resources built specifically for collectors
- That realization led to the creation of Collectors MD

Today, we’re helping collectors, families, clinicians, treatment centers, councils, coalitions, recovery organizations, and the hobby itself recognize these risks before more people fall through the cracks.

Turning Lived Experience Into Action





- From lived experience to national initiative.
- 20+ years immersed in hobby environments, my gambling disorder migrated into my collecting.
- I founded Collectors MD to address a growing gap in education and support.

We now work with clinicians, recovery organizations, hobby businesses, and collectors nationwide. We provide peer support, group chats, education, editorial content, and podcasts to our growing community.

My Experience Wasn’t Unique





- The more I openly shared my story, the more other collectors began reaching out
- Many described the same patterns: chasing, secrecy, financial harm, shame, and loss of control
- Some had histories of gambling addiction; others had never considered themselves gamblers

Families, clinicians, and recovery groups often struggled to recognize what was happening. Different products and language were leading people toward the same consequences. I wasn’t alone.

What Collecting Can Provide



- In its purest form, collecting can support identity and connection
- Knowledge, nostalgia, creativity, and shared enjoyment can all be positive and meaningful
- Assessment asks what changes when the person loses control

Collecting is rooted in childhood nostalgia, family, community, camaraderie, and shared joy.

A Global Market With Substantial Reach

$320.3B

Estimated Global Market, 2026

$535.5B

Projected Global Market, 2033

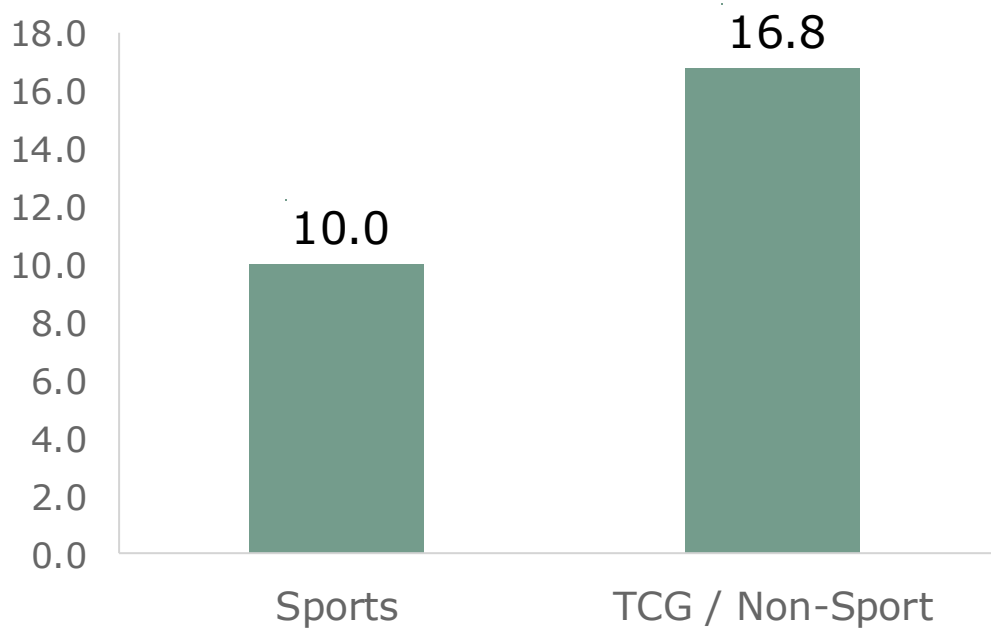


The global collectibles market is projected to grow by 67.2% between 2026 and 2033, highlighting its expanding reach and economic significance.

SOURCE: Grand View Research. Collectibles Market, 2026-2033.

Card Grading Shows The Volume Of Activity

2025 Grading Volume (Millions)



26.8M

Cards Graded In 2025

16.8M

TCG / Non-Sport

10.0M

Sports Cards

Card grading volume reflects the scale of the modern collectibles market, with 26.8 million cards graded in 2025, led by TCG and non-sports cards.

SOURCE: GemRate. 2025 Grading Year in Review, January 2026.

The Purchasing Format Changes The Experience



Known Item

The buyer knows the item before paying.



Sealed Pack

The contents stay unknown until opening.



Live Break

The buyer purchases a share in an opening.



Mystery Product/Repack

Physical or digital products with uncertain contents or outcomes.

Gambling-adjacent mechanics have become increasingly prevalent throughout the modern collecting ecosystem.

A Livestream Break, Step By Step

01 The host announces the product and allocation rules

02 Buyers purchase random or chosen teams, players, spots, or another share

03 The host opens the contents of the product on camera

04 Results go to buyers under the stated rules



Every spot comes at a cost, but there's no guarantee of receiving an item worth what you paid.

Rips, Auctions, & Mystery Products



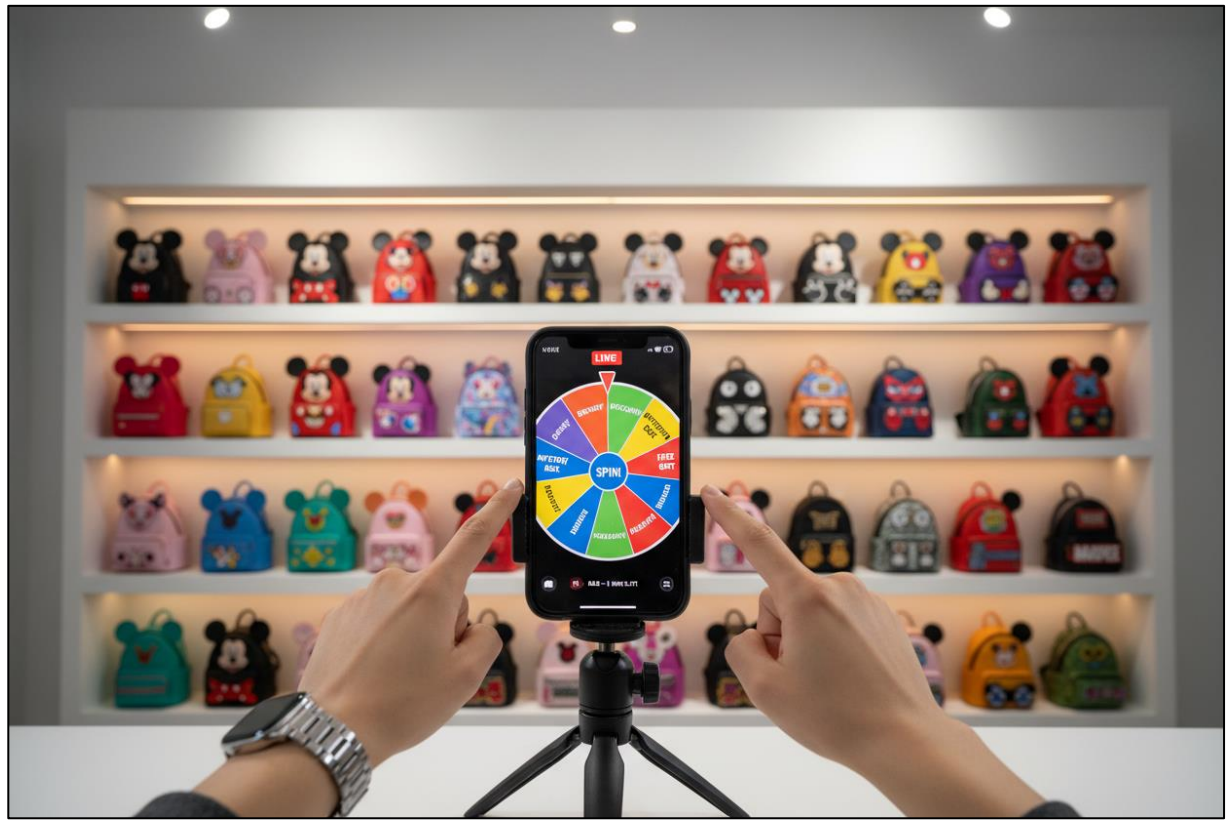




- Rip-and-Ship: a seller opens a buyer's product on camera
- Live Auction: competing bids occur within a short time window
- Mystery Box or Repack: contents and value vary across purchases
- Each format calls for a different follow-up question

Each format introduces distinct purchasing dynamics, behavioral risks, and considerations for responsible participation.

Surprise Sets: Randomized Commerce



- **Randomized Purchases:** buyers purchase a spot without knowing which item they'll receive
- **Variable Outcomes:** items can differ significantly in desirability, rarity, and market value
- **Platform-Based Reveals:** results are assigned and revealed through the platform's designated process
- **Repeated Participation:** rapid transactions and uncertain rewards can encourage chasing or repeat purchases

The item is guaranteed under the stated rules, but its identity and value may remain uncertain until the reveal. The uncertainty itself can become the product.

Digital Rips & Virtual Mystery Boxes



- Users purchase mystery boxes with randomized outcomes
- Virtual animations reveal prizes without physically opening products
- Some platforms allow prizes to be exchanged for credit or cash and used for additional purchases
- Instant outcomes and repeat-purchase options can reinforce chasing behavior

Digital interfaces can accelerate the cycle of anticipation, reward, and repeated spending.

Digital Mystery Boxes: Step By Step

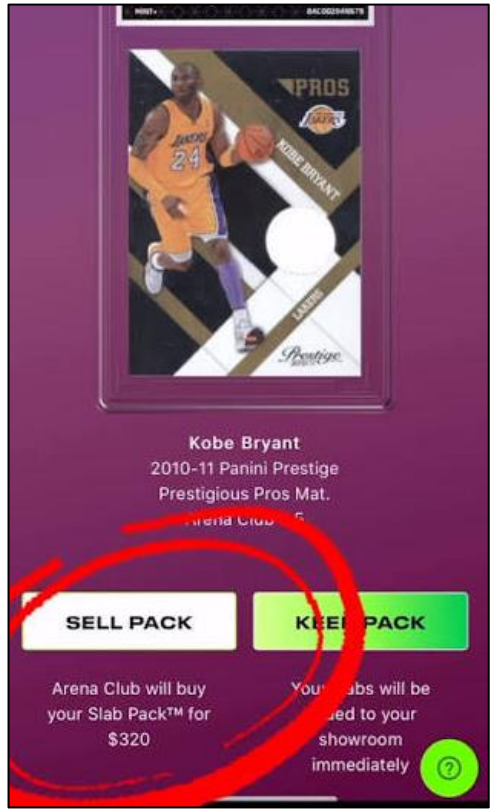
01 **Select A Box:** user views the price, advertised prizes, and available probability information

02 **Purchase & Reveal:** a randomized result is displayed through a virtual opening animation

03 **Keep Or Exchange:** depending on platform rules, the item may be shipped or exchanged for site credit or cash

04 **Repeat The Cycle:** credits and immediate access can make another purchase easy







Clinical Question: ***is the person collecting the items, or repeatedly purchasing the chance of obtaining a desirable outcome?***

Hobby Language In The Therapy Room

Hit / Chase

A desirable outcome the buyer hopes to obtain

PC

Personal collection, often valued for meaning

Comp / Flip

Comparable sale price / resale for profit

Filler

A smaller purchase used to allocate remaining break spots

Understanding modern hobby terminology helps clinicians communicate with collectors, ask the right questions, recognize purchasing behaviors, and better assess potential risks and motivations.

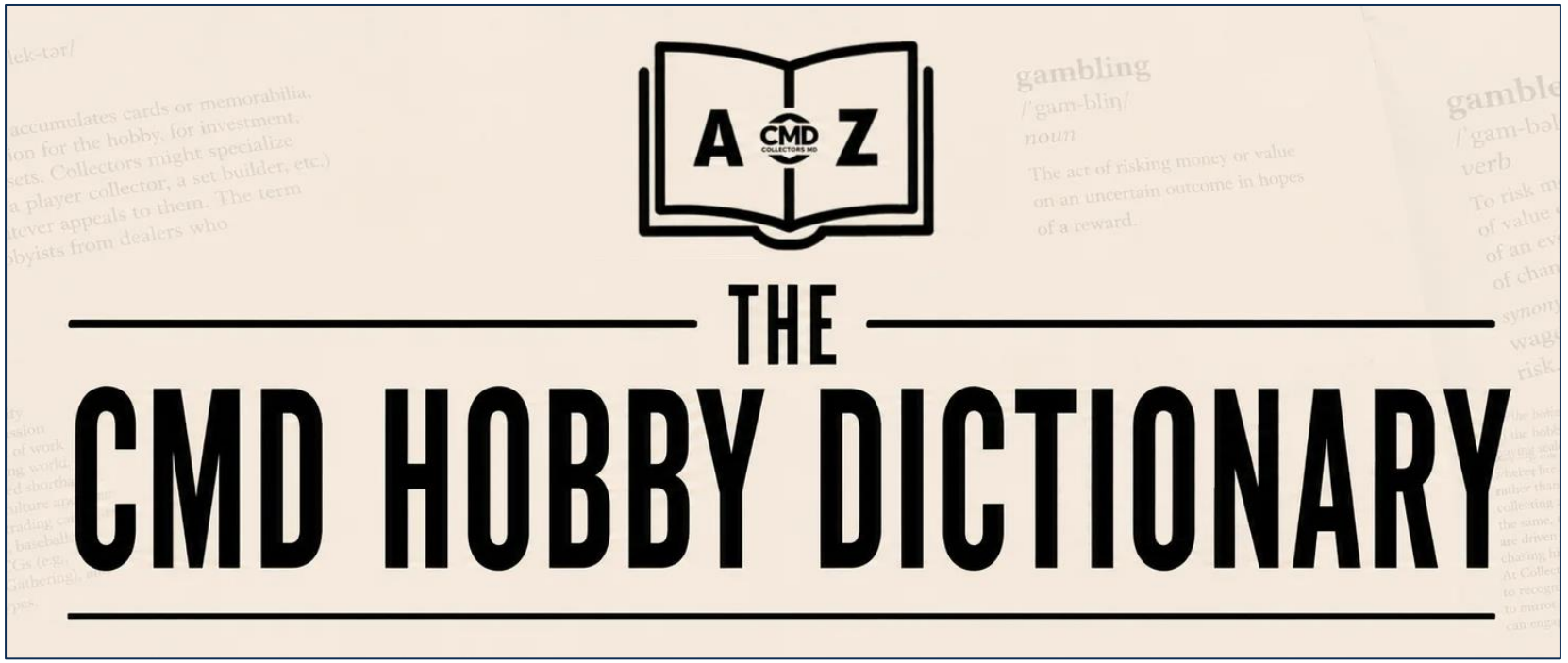
The Modern Hobby Guide



collectorsmd.com/the-modern-hobby-guide

The Modern Hobby Guide helps collectors, families, and professionals understand the modern hobby, highlighting evolving purchasing formats, potential behavioral risks, and strategies for informed, intentional participation.

The CMD Hobby Dictionary



collectorsmd.com/hobby-dictionary

The CMD Hobby Dictionary helps collectors, families, and professionals better understand modern hobby terminology, purchasing formats, and behaviors to support informed conversations and intentional participation.

Gambling Mechanics & Modern Collecting



Shared Mechanics

- Uncertain Rewards
- Unpredictable Outcomes
- Psychological Triggers
- Chasing Losses
- Repeat Purchases
- Variable Reinforcement
- FOMO & Urgency
- Near Misses
- Social Validation
- Anticipatory Excitement

While certain collecting formats share behavioral features with gambling, these similarities do not necessarily mean an activity meets the legal or clinical definition of gambling.

Built in partnership with the Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado (PGCC), July 2026.

Familiar Uncertainty, Faster Access

What Has Long Existed

Uncertain outcomes in sealed products

Scarcity and limited availability

Anticipation and excitement of discovery

What Technology Amplifies

24/7 access, saved payments, live streams, and notifications

Instant purchasing and reduced friction

Social engagement, urgency, and repeated exposure

Uncertainty has long been part of collecting, but technology has made these experiences more accessible, immediate, and continuous.

Features That Can Sustain Repeated Buying

01

Uncertain rewards keep attention on the next outcome

02

Countdowns and limited availability create urgency

03

Public celebration makes selected wins highly visible

04

Immediate repurchase leaves little time to reconsider

05

Frictionless environments make repeated purchases fast and easy

06

Near misses reinforce the feeling that a desirable outcome is imminent

Belonging Can Become Part Of The Purchase



- A host remembers a buyer's name and treats them like a VIP.
- Chat celebrates purchases and rare pulls, creating social validation.
- Leaving the stream can feel like losing a community, creating FOMO.
- Lasting change requires finding new sources of connection, community, and belonging beyond the behavior.

The lines between gambling and collecting are becoming increasingly blurred.

The Chase Can Change The Goal

"I only need one good hit to get even."

- Spending continues to recover early losses.
- The collection's estimated value becomes a justification.
- Expected resale proceeds can hide current cash strain.

The pursuit of recovering losses can shift collecting from enjoyment to financial chasing, where anticipated resale value and the hope of a big hit justifies continued spending despite mounting financial consequences.

What Current Research Can Establish

DIRECT	Direct Evidence: physical card-pack spending
RELATED	Related evidence: digital microtransactions
TREATMENT	Treatment evidence: compulsive buying-shopping
UNKNOWN	Major gap: prevalence and outcomes across collecting formats

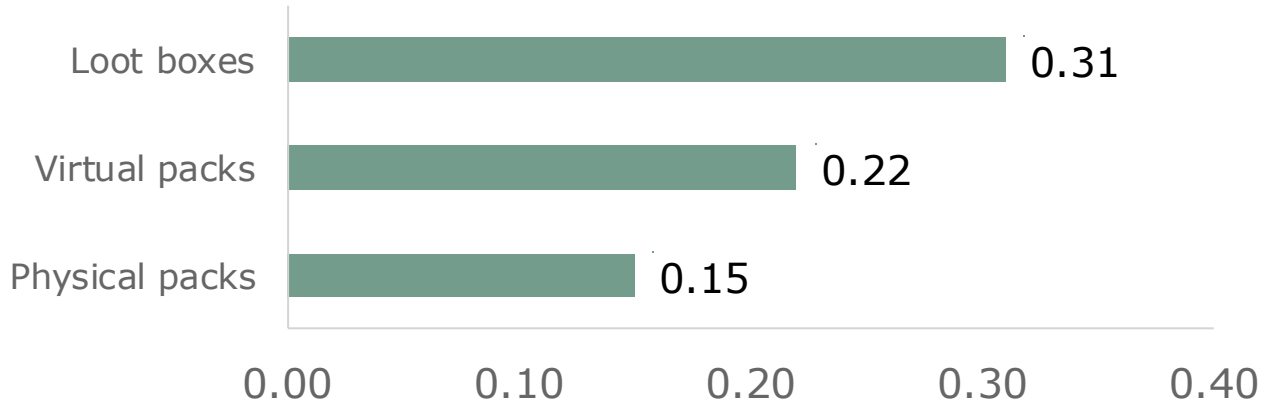
Existing research identifies potential behavioral risks, but significant gaps remain in understanding their prevalence and impact across modern collecting formats.

Physical Card Packs & Problem Gambling

1,961

Card-Game Players In An International Survey

Correlation With Problem Gambling (r)



What The Study Found

A small association for physical packs. A stronger association for loot boxes.

The measures of negative mental health showed no association with spending.

Correlation does not establish cause or population prevalence.

SOURCE: Xiao et al. (2026, online 2025). Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 40(1), 66-85.

Related Evidence: Microtransactions

14

Studies In A Systematic Review

Finding

Associations were more pronounced for loot boxes than other microtransactions.

Limitation

Sampling and study design limit generalization.

Clinical Relevance

Physical collectibles require their own assessment. Applying digital findings is an inference.

SOURCE: Raneri et al. (2022). Addictive Behaviors Reports, 15, 100415.

Related Evidence: Buying-Shopping Treatment

13

Treatment Studies In A Systematic Review

Finding

Group CBT showed promise for reducing symptoms.

Limitation

Methods and reporting quality limit confidence.

Clinical Relevance

Compulsive collecting may involve overlapping patterns of repeated buying and impaired control. These findings offer a related treatment perspective, not direct evidence for collecting-specific interventions.

SOURCE: Müller et al. (2023). Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 12(3), 631-651.

Evidence Limits Belong In The Conversation

01

An association does not establish cause

02

Conference findings differ from peer-reviewed studies

03

Help-seeking counts differ from population prevalence

04

CARE and CMD programs require evaluation

Recognizing the limitations of current research is essential to interpreting findings responsibly, avoiding unsupported conclusions, and identifying areas requiring further study and evaluation.

Clinical Harm & Legal Classification

Legal Classification

Depends on the product, rules, and jurisdiction.

Clinical Assessment

Focuses on control, distress, safety, and functional consequences.

Harm can warrant care even when the product’s legal status is unclear.

A Spectrum Of Participation & Harm



Collecting can remain recreational, become difficult to control, or cause significant harm.

Assess the person's experience. This diagram does not establish a diagnosis or a universal progression.

Collecting can exist on a spectrum, from recreational enjoyment to potentially harmful or compulsive behaviors, emphasizing the importance of assessing each individual's experience without assuming a universal progression.

Built in partnership with the Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado (PGCC), July 2026.

Warning Signs Concern Control & Consequences



- Repeated spending beyond the individual's plan
- Attempts to stop or cut back that do not hold
- Concealed purchases, accounts, or debt
- Health, sleep, work, relationships, and other essentials suffer
- Buying continues despite recognized harm

collectorsmd.com/collecting-addiction | Information & Resources For Individuals & Families

What A Client May Actually Say

"I quit betting on games, but I join card breaks every night."

"It's inventory. I'll sell it when the market recovers."

"I watch to relax, then spend more than I planned."

"My partner sees the packages, not the credit accounts."

Clients may minimize or obscure underlying collecting-related concerns, making it essential to look beyond the language to identify patterns of harm, financial consequences, and potential loss of control.

A Useful Opening Question

"Do you spend money on card packs, blind boxes, digital rips, surprise sets, mystery boxes, live breaks, or online auctions?"

"Have those experiences become harder to control, or have they affected your finances, physical health, sleep, relationships, mental state, or emotional well-being?"

Asking specific, nonjudgmental questions about collecting activities can help uncover patterns of compulsive spending, overindulgence, difficulties maintaining control, and potential impacts on an individual's well-being.

CARE: A Structured Conversation Guide

C

Control

Can the person follow their own limits?

A

Affect

What feelings precede and follow buying?

R

Reinforcement

What keeps the pattern going?

E

Effects

What happens to functioning and safety?

The CARE framework provides a structured, nonjudgemental approach to exploring behavioral control, emotional triggers, reinforcement patterns, and the potential consequences of collecting-related activities.

Built in partnership with the Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado (PGCC), July 2026.

Control & Affect

"What limit did you set, and what actually happened?"

"What happens when you try to stop watching or participating?"

"What are you feeling before you open the app?"

"How do you feel after a disappointing purchase?"

Exploring personal limits, emotional triggers, and responses to purchasing experiences can help assess behavioral control, identify underlying patterns, and recognize potential signs of harm.

Reinforcement & Effects

"What keeps you coming back after a loss?"

"Would you still want the item without its resale potential?"

"What has changed in your finances, health, sleep, or relationships?"

"What feels most urgent to protect this week?"

Exploring what reinforces purchasing behaviors, the motivations behind continued participation, and their impact on daily life can help identify patterns, priorities, and opportunities for meaningful change.

Case 1: The Returning Chase

- **Jordan, 34, stopped sports betting two years ago**
- Now buys random-team break spots after work
- Plans $50, spends $400, and borrows to continue
- Sleeps four hours a night and hides bank statements from partner

"I'm not gambling. I'm building an investment."

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Case 1: Assessment & Response

Immediate Priorities

Safety, essentials, and current borrowing

Working Hypothesis

An uncertain-outcome purchase pattern

Next Questions

Trigger, control, consequences, other activities

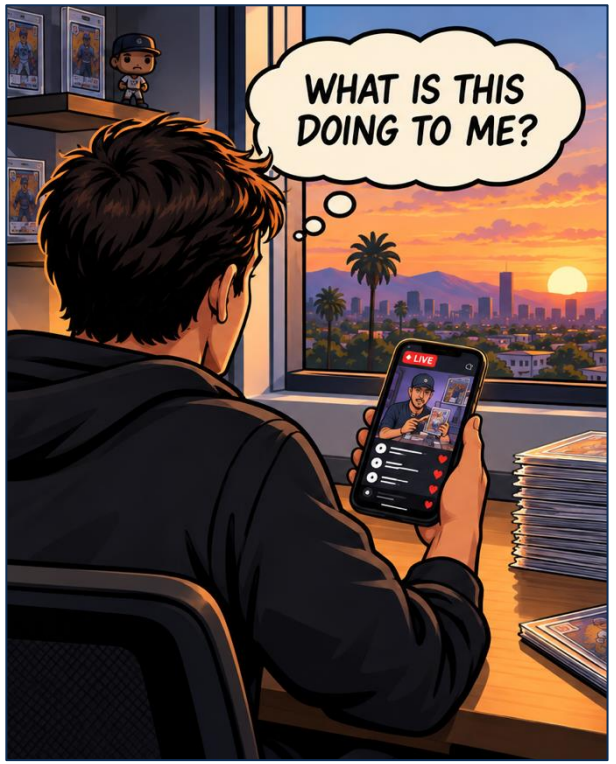
First Plan

Reduce access and connect with appropriate care

A structured assessment helps identify immediate safety and financial concerns, explore underlying behavioral patterns, and develop a practical, individualized plan for support and intervention.

Differential Assessment & Co-Occurring Needs

- Gambling history and current participation elsewhere
- Compulsive spending and the function of acquiring
- Mood changes, impulsivity, and substance use
- Hoarding concerns when difficulty discarding causes impairment
- The clinician determines diagnosis and treatment needs



Effective assessment requires understanding overlapping behavioral patterns, identifying potential co-occurring concerns, and tailoring support to each individual's needs.

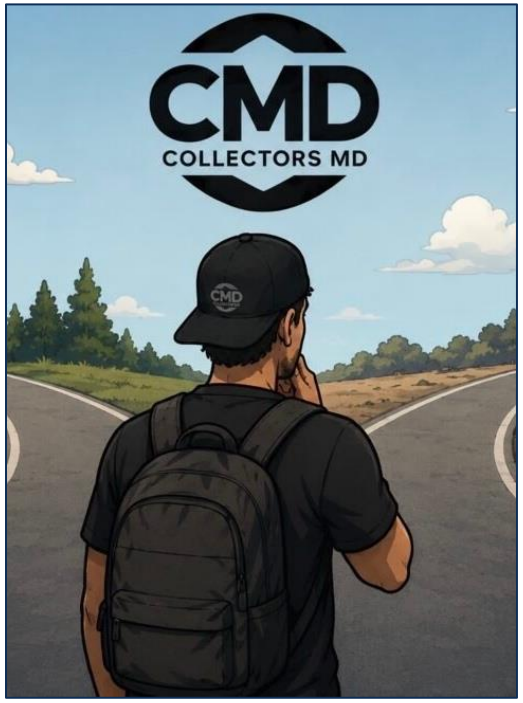
A Collaborative Clinical Response

01 Understand what the behavior provides

02 Connect the person’s goals with observed consequences

03 Choose a specific, achievable change

04 Review what happened and adjust the plan accordingly



A collaborative, person-centered approach helps individuals understand their behaviors, establish achievable goals, and make sustainable changes through ongoing assessment and support.

Possible Treatment Targets

01

Purchasing beliefs and expectations about getting even

02

Triggers, routines, and alternatives to buying

03

Emotional coping and social connection

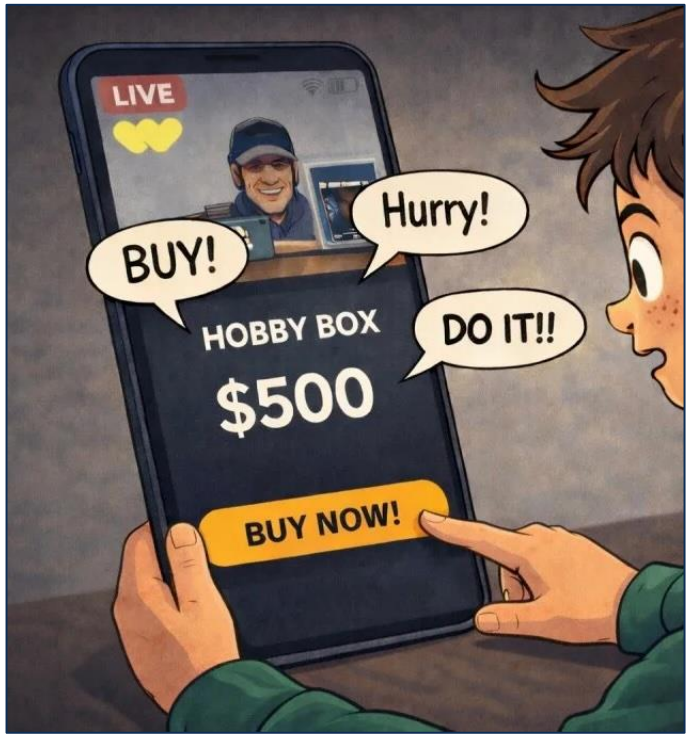
04

Relapse planning across related activities

Treatment can address underlying beliefs, purchasing triggers, emotional coping strategies, and relapse prevention to support healthier behaviors and sustainable recovery.

Creating Distance Before The Next Purchase

- Remove saved payments and turn off purchasing notifications
- Leave live streams or restrict access during vulnerable hours
- Use a waiting period before discretionary purchases
- Agree on money safeguards with consent
- Match the safeguards to the actual purchasing route



Introducing practical safeguards and intentional barriers between the urge to purchase and the decision can help reduce impulsive behavior and support healthier collecting habits.

#RipResponsibly Initiative



- Promotes intentional engagement over impulsive participation.
- Encourages collectors to set personal limits, budgets, and healthy guardrails.
- Reinforces that ripping should remain fun, recreational, and within your means.
- Creates a recognizable prevention and awareness message across the hobby ecosystem.

collectorsmd.com/ripresponsibly

#RipResponsibly encourages collectors to enjoy the hobby with awareness & intention.

Abstinence & Intentional Collecting

Pause Or Abstinence

An abstinence-based approach focused on stepping away from collecting-related activities, reducing exposure to triggers, and protecting recovery and well-being.

Intentional Collecting

An individualized approach focused on informed decisions, personal limits, ongoing self-assessment, and maintaining healthier collecting behaviors.

Review Safety, Functioning, And Whether The Agreed Limits Hold

Family Support Without Confrontation



- Understand the activity before debating its label
- Describe specific impacts on the household
- Offer support for the family member’s own needs
- Set boundaries that protect essentials and safety

A supportive, non-confrontational approach helps families communicate concerns, establish healthy boundaries, and protect their well-being while encouraging understanding and positive change.

Case 2: A Parent's Concern

- **Sam, 16, watches collectible openings every evening**
- Uses a parent's saved payment method without permission
- Talks about flipping a rare pull to repay the spending
- A parent asks for help with trust, access, and boundaries

What would you assess before recommending a plan?

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Youth & Family Prevention

01

Age-appropriate education about uncertain outcomes

02

Clear permission and payment boundaries

03

Attention to resale claims and highly visible wins

04

Activities that preserve connection without repeated buying

05 **Suitable professional help when impairment appears**

Effective youth and family prevention combines age-appropriate education, clear financial boundaries, and meaningful engagement to promote healthier collecting habits and recognize when additional support is needed.

Safety Comes Before Routine Referral

988

Mental Health Crisis Or Suicide-Related Distress

911

Immediate Danger Or Life-Threatening Emergency

Ask Directly. Follow Your Setting's Procedures.

CMD contact forms and meetings do not provide emergency response.

Additional Pathways For Ongoing Care



1-800-GAMBLER
National Problem Gambling Hotline



1-800-MY-RESET
National Problem Gambling Hotline

Both hotline numbers work nationwide and connect to the same call center.

Help Now: One Starting Point



Crisis Contacts
Free Peer Support
Professional Referrals
Family Resources

collectorsmd.com/helpnow | Immediate Support Pathways For Those In Crisis

The CMD Bridging Model

01 Hobby literacy helps professionals understand the activity

02 Early inquiry brings overlooked behaviors into assessment

03 Peer support can complement professional care

04 Referral pathways connect the person with suitable help



collectorsmd.com/get-help | **Connecting Collectors And Families To Trusted Professionals**

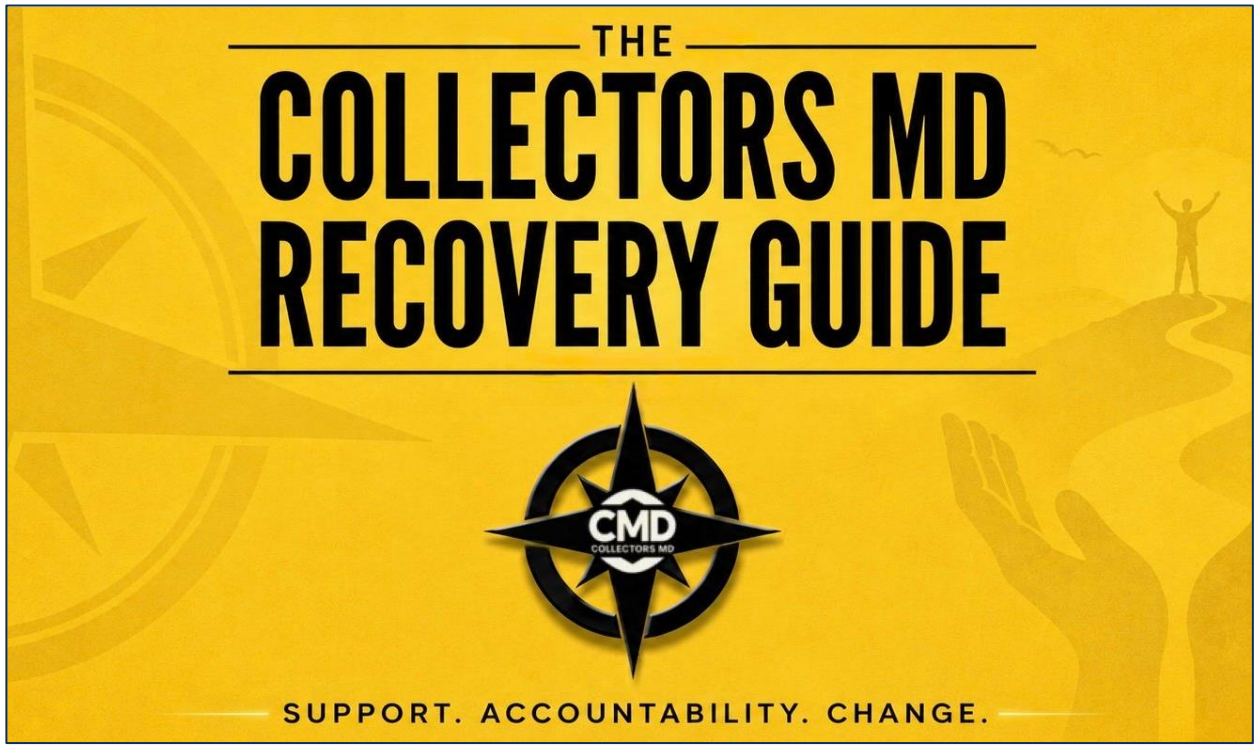
Peer Support Alongside Professional Care



- CMD peer support meetings offer a place to listen and connect
- No diagnosis is required to explore support
- Participation is optional, guests are welcome to remain anonymous
- Peer support complements professional care
- It is not a replacement for therapy, a crisis service, or professional support

collectorsmd.com/peer-support-meetings | A Judgment-Free Space To Share Lived Experiences

The CMD Recovery Guide



- Recognize patterns and triggers
- Set boundaries around spending
- Manage urges and reduce access
- Build support and accountability
- Explore care and recovery pathways

collectorsmd.com/recovery-guide | A 12-Step Guide That Serves As The Foundation Of Recovery

Peer Support Meetings & Unboxed Resources



Unboxed Curriculum

Participant And Facilitator Guides

CMD Wednesday Peer Support Meeting | 5-6 PM PT

Unboxed: Powered By Collectors MD Meeting | 4-5 PM PT

collecting.cogamblerhelp.org | Current Access And Suitability Matter

Built in partnership with the Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado (PGCC), July 2026.

The CMD Framework



Recognize The Mechanics

Identify Signs Of Harm

Support Individual Goals

Connect People With Support

collectorsmd.com/the-cmd-framework | **Bridging The Hobby And Behavioral Health Industries**

What CMD Screening Responses Reveal

Self-reported experiences among people seeking CMD peer support

88%

Shame, guilt, or secrecy

87%

Difficulty stopping

86%

Financial distress or debt

73%

Mental health struggles

54%

No prior support-group experience

CMD screening responses reveal significant self-reported emotional, financial, and behavioral challenges among individuals seeking peer support, highlighting the importance of accessible resources and early intervention.

SOURCE: Collectors MD Peer Support Meeting Screening Form (239 submissions, March 2025-October 2026). Self-reported, multiple-response data; repeat submissions possible.

Adapting The Framework





Recognize that collecting-related harm can affect individuals across different ages and backgrounds.

Tailor education and prevention strategies to the individual's collecting environment and experiences.

Adapt conversations to account for individual, financial, family, and social influences.

Use community feedback and ongoing evaluation to strengthen support pathways.

Adapting The CMD Framework to different audiences, backgrounds, and collecting environments helps ensure education, prevention, and support strategies remain relevant, accessible, and responsive to individual needs.

How People Currently Find Us: Search Engines (SEO/GEO), Social Media, Podcasts, Media Coverage, Word-of-Mouth, Flyers, Strategic Partnerships, Community Signposts, & Professional Referrals.

A Warm Referral Has A Next Action

01 Identify the need and the person’s preferred support

02 Explain what the receiving service can provide

03 Check fit and arrange the connection with consent

04 Agree on follow-up and an alternative if access fails



An effective warm referral goes beyond providing resources by connecting individuals with appropriate support, ensuring a clear next step, and establishing a plan for follow-up.

Application Check

A client denies gambling but borrows for repeated breaks

Which questions clarify control and effects?

Which information is still missing?

Which pathway fits immediate risk versus ongoing care?

Pause, then compare your reasoning with the debrief

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

Applying The CMD Framework to real-world scenarios helps strengthen assessment skills, identify immediate risks, and determine appropriate pathways for intervention and ongoing support.

Three Changes To Clinical Practice

Name The Purchasing Format.

Explore Control And Consequences.

Make The Next Support Step Concrete.

collectorsmd.com/helpnow

Collect With Intention. Heal With Support.

Where Do We Go From Here?

For Clinicians: learn the hobby, ask better questions, screen for collecting behaviors, refer to peer support.

For Organizations: partner with CMD, bring education to your state, share tools & resources, integrate responsible messaging.

For The Hobby: normalize conversations, integrate #RipResponsibly messaging, build healthier environments, promote collecting with intention, not compulsion.

For Individuals: sign up for peer support, join a group chat, link with an accountability partner, seek professional guidance.

Q&A

CMD
COLLECTORS MD

Support. Accountability. Change.

KEEP CONNECTED WITH US

THANK YOU!

Alyx Effron, Founder, Collectors MD

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Support. Accountability. Change.

Reference & Research

Grand View Research. Collectibles Market, 2026-2033. (Slide 11)

GemRate. 2025 Grading Year in Review. January 2026. (Slide 12)

Problem Gambling Coalition of Colorado (PGCC), July 2026. (Slides 22, 33, 37, 57)

Xiao et al. (2026, published online 2025). Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 40(1), 66-85. (Slide 28)

Raneri et al. (2022). Addictive Behaviors Reports, 15, 100415. (Slide 29)

Müller et al. (2023). Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 12(3), 631-651. (Slide 30)

Collectors MD. Peer Support Meeting Screening Form, 239 submissions, March 2025-October 2026. (Slide 54)