

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF
COMPULSIVE GAMBLING
AND THE
G.A. RECOVERY PROGRAM

FORWARD

Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of thousands of men and women who have joined together to do something about their own gambling problem and to help other compulsive gamblers do the same.

This pamphlet represents an effort by its members to answer some of the specific questions that have been asked about the nature of compulsive gambling and the Gamblers Anonymous Fellowship.

After reading this pamphlet you may have further questions that seem unanswered in this brief summary. If there is a Gamblers Anonymous group close to you we suggest you contact its members for additional information. If no Gamblers Anonymous group is near you, please feel free to write to . . .

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COMPULSIVE GAMBLING AND GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

What is compulsive gambling?

The explanation that seems most acceptable to Gamblers Anonymous members is that compulsive gambling is an illness, progressive in its nature, which can never be cured, but can be arrested.

Before coming to Gamblers Anonymous, many compulsive gamblers thought of themselves as morally weak, or at times just plain "no good". The Gamblers Anonymous concept is that compulsive gamblers are really very sick people who can recover if they will follow to the best of their ability a simple program that has proved successful for thousands of other men and women with a gambling or compulsive gambling problem.

What is the first thing a compulsive gambler ought to do in order to stop gambling?

The compulsive gambler needs to be willing to accept the fact that he or she is in the grip of a progressive illness and has a desire to get well. Our experience has shown that the Gamblers Anonymous program will always work for any person who has a desire to stop gambling. However, it will never work for the person who will not face squarely the facts about this illness.

How can you tell whether you are a compulsive gambler?

Only you can make that decision. Most people turn to Gamblers Anonymous when they become willing to admit that gambling has them licked. Also in Gamblers Anonymous, a compulsive gambler is described as a person whose gambling has caused growing and continuing problems in any department of his or her life.

Many Gamblers Anonymous members went through terrifying experiences before they were ready to accept help. Others were faced with a slow, subtle deterioration which finally brought them to the point of admitting defeat.

Can a compulsive gambler ever gamble normally again?

No. The first bet to a problem gambler is like the first small drink to an alcoholic. Sooner or later he or she falls back into the same old destructive pattern.

Once a person has crossed the invisible line into irresponsible uncontrolled gambling he or she never seems to regain control. After abstaining a few months some of our members have tried some small bet experimentation, always with disastrous results. The old obsession inevitably returned.

Our Gamblers Anonymous experience seems to point to these alternatives: To gamble, risking progressive deterioration or not to gamble, and develop a better way of life.

Does this mean I can't even participate in a little penny ante game or a World Series pool?

It means exactly that. A stand has to be made somewhere and Gamblers Anonymous members have found the first bet is the one to avoid, even though it may be as little as matching for a cup of coffee.

Why can't a compulsive gambler simply use will power to stop gambling?

We believe that most people, if they are honest, will recognize their lack of power to solve certain problems. When it comes to gambling, we have known many problem gamblers who could abstain for long stretches, but caught off guard and under the right set of circumstances, they started gambling without thought of the consequences. The defenses they relied upon, through will power alone, gave way before some trivial reason for placing a bet. We have found that will power and self-knowledge will not help in those mental blank spots, but adherence to spiritual principles seem to solve our problems. Most of us feel that a belief in a Power greater than ourselves is necessary in order for us to sustain a desire to refrain from gambling.

Do Gamblers Anonymous members go into gambling places to help former members who are still gambling?

No. Families and friends of these people have asked us to intercede but we have never been able to be of any real help. Actually, sometimes we felt we retarded a member's eventual recovery by giving them this unsolicited attention. It all goes back to the basic principle that a gambler ought to want help before he or she is approached by us.

I only go on gambling binges periodically. Do I need Gamblers Anonymous?

Yes. Compulsive gamblers who have joined Gamblers Anonymous tell us that, though their gambling binges were periodic, the intervals between were not periods of constructive thinking. Symptomatic of these periods were nervousness, irritability, frustration, indecision and a continued breakdown in personal relationships. These same people have often found the Gamblers Anonymous program the answer to the elimination of character defects and a guide to moral progress in their lives.

GAMBLING, for the compulsive gambler is defined as follows: Any betting or wagering, for self or others, whether for money or not, no matter how slight or insignificant, where the outcome is uncertain or depends upon chance or "skill" constitutes gambling.

If I join Gamblers Anonymous won't everyone know I am a compulsive gambler?

Most people made quite a name for themselves as full-fledged gamblers by the time they turned to Gamblers Anonymous. Their gambling was not usually a well kept secret.

It would then be unusual if the good news of their abstinence from gambling did not cause comment. However, no disclosure of any affiliation with Gamblers Anonymous can rightfully be made by anyone but the member themselves. Even then, it should be done in such a way that will work no hardship on the Gamblers Anonymous fellowship.

If I stop gambling won't it make it difficult for me to keep some desirable business and social contacts?

We think not. Most of the world's work of any consequence is done without the benefit of monetary wagering. Many of our leaders in business, industry and professional life have attained great success without knowing one card from another or which way the horses run around the track. In the area of social relationships, the newcomer will soon find a keen appreciation of the many pleasant and stimulating activities available – far removed from anything that is remotely associated from gambling.

How does someone stop gambling through the Gamblers Anonymous program?

One does this through bringing about a progressive character change within oneself. This can be accomplished by having faith in – and following – the basic concepts of the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program.

There are no short cuts in gaining this faith and understanding. To recover from one of the most baffling, insidious, compulsive addictions will require diligent effort. **HONESTY, OPENMINDEDNESS, AND WILLINGNESS** are the key words in our recovery.

Can a person recover by himself or herself by reading Gamblers Anonymous literature or medical books on the problem of compulsive gambling?

Sometimes, but not usually. The Gamblers Anonymous program works best for the individual when it is recognized and accepted as a program involving other people. Working with other compulsive gamblers in a Gamblers Anonymous group the individual seems to find the necessary understanding and support. They are able to talk of their past experiences and present problems in an area where they are comfortable and accepted. Instead of feeling alone and misunderstood, they feel needed and accepted.

Does Gamblers Anonymous look upon compulsive gambling as a vice?

No.

Is knowing why we gambled important?

Perhaps, however insofar as stopping gambling, many Gamblers Anonymous members have abstained from gambling without the knowledge of why they gambled.

What are some characteristics of a person who is a compulsive gambler?

- 1. INABILITY AND UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT REALITY.**
Hence the escape into the dream world of gambling.
- 2. EMOTIONAL INSECURITY.** A compulsive gambler finds he or she is emotionally comfortable only when "in action". It is not uncommon to hear a Gamblers Anonymous member say: "The only place I really felt like I belonged was sitting at the poker table. There I felt secure and comfortable. No great demands were made upon me. I knew I was destroying myself, yet at the same time, I had a certain sense of security."
- 3. IMMATURITY.** A desire to have all the good things in life without any great effort on their part seems to be the common character pattern of problem gamblers. Many Gamblers Anonymous members accept the fact that they were unwilling to grow up. Subconsciously they felt they could avoid mature responsibility by wagering on the spin of a wheel or the turn of a card, and so the struggle to escape responsibility finally became a subconscious obsession.

Also, a compulsive gambler seems to have a strong inner urge to be a "big shot" and needs to have a feeling of being all powerful. The compulsive gambler is willing to do anything (often of an antisocial nature) to maintain the image he or she wants others to see.

Then too, there is a theory that compulsive gamblers subconsciously want to lose to punish themselves. There is much evidence to support this theory.

What is the dream world of the compulsive gambler?

This is another common characteristic of compulsive gamblers. A lot of time is spent creating images of the great and wonderful things they are going to do as soon as they make the big win. They often see themselves as quite philanthropic and charming people. They may dream of providing families and friends with new cars, mink coats and other luxuries. Compulsive gamblers picture themselves leading a pleasant gracious life, made possible by the huge sums of money they will accrue from their "system". Servants, penthouses, nice clothes, charming friends, yachts and world tours are a few of the wonderful things that are just around the corner after a big win is finally made.

Pathetically, however, there never seems to be a big enough winning to make even the smallest dream come true. When compulsive gamblers succeed, they gamble to dream still greater dreams. When failing, they gamble in reckless desperation and the depths of their misery are fathomless as their dream world comes crashing down. Sadly, they will struggle back, dream more dreams, and of course suffer more misery. No one can convince them that their great schemes will not someday come true. They believe they will, for without this dream world, life for them would not be tolerable.

Isn't compulsive gambling basically a financial problem?

No, compulsive gambling is an emotional problem. A person in the grip of this illness creates mountains of apparently insolvable problems. Of course, financial problems are created, but they also find themselves facing marital, employment, or legal problems. Compulsive gamblers find friends have been lost and relatives have rejected them. Of the many serious difficulties created, the financial problems seem the easiest to solve. When a compulsive gambler enters Gamblers Anonymous and quits gambling, income is usually increased and there is no longer the financial drain that was caused by gambling, and very shortly, the financial pressures begin to be relieved. Gamblers Anonymous members have found that the best road to financial recovery is through hard work and repayment of our debts. Borrowing and/or lending of money (bail outs) in Gamblers Anonymous is detrimental to our recovery and should not take place.

The most difficult and time consuming problem with which they will be faced is that of bringing about a character change within themselves. Most Gamblers Anonymous members look upon this as their greatest challenge, which should be worked on immediately and continued throughout their lives.

Does Gamblers Anonymous want to abolish gambling?

No. The question of abolishing gambling is a controversial issue, about which Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion.

Who can join Gamblers Anonymous?

Anyone who has a desire to stop gambling. There are no other rules or regulations concerning Gamblers Anonymous membership.

How much does it cost to join Gamblers Anonymous?

There are no assessments in connection with Gamblers Anonymous membership. The newcomer signs nothing and pledges nothing. However, we do have expenses relative to our group meeting and our Gamblers Anonymous service facilities. Since Gamblers Anonymous has traditionally been fully self supporting and declines outside contribution, these expenses are met through voluntary financial support by the members. Experience has shown that acceptance of these financial responsibilities is a vital part of our individual and group growth process.

How does Gamblers Anonymous support its service centers?

These facilities receive their support from Gamblers Anonymous groups and from individual members. The International Service Office, because it is an international service center, is supported by groups and members from all over the world. Local services are supported by groups and members in the areas which are served.

Who runs Gamblers Anonymous?

Gamblers Anonymous is a unique spiritual fellowship having no central government and but little formal organization. There are no officers or executives who wield authority over the fellowship or the individual. Even though Gamblers Anonymous is an informal organization, certain jobs have to be done. In the local group someone has to be responsible for the meeting place, keep an accounting of the group finances, arrange for refreshments and keep in touch with local and national service centers. This means that a group needs responsible people to perform these duties. In accepting these responsibilities a member may acquire a title, but titles in Gamblers Anonymous are used only to designate areas of service. Those who accept these responsibilities are directly responsible to those they serve.

Are there more compulsive gamblers in certain groups than in others?

Among Gamblers Anonymous members there seems to be a predominance of outside salesmen which is probably due to the fact that this type of employment has the least amount of personal supervision. Obviously, this allows more freedom to gamble. The job backgrounds of the balance of our membership are extremely varied. It seems safe to say that compulsive gambling has nothing to do with the kind of work the individual does to earn a living. The problem apparently arises from an inner imbalance, not external factors.

What is the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program?

When a compulsive gambler applies the twelve-step recovery program in his or her life, his or her disintegration stops and his or her recovery begins. Since these steps are basically spiritual in their concept, their practice can become a highly rewarding experience. These are the steps which are a program of recovery:

1. We admitted we were powerless over gambling - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power of our own understanding.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed.

7. Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people, wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.

No one claims these steps are in any way original with Gamblers Anonymous. They reflect practical experience and application of spiritual insights as recorded by thoughtful men in many ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work. They enable us and thousands of others to lead happy productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which our society has been built. They were given to us freely, for which we are grateful.

What is the Unity Program?

Unity is the most precious quality our society possesses. Our lives and the lives of all to come depend squarely upon it. Yet unity in Gamblers Anonymous cannot automatically sustain itself. Like personal recovery it demands honesty, open mindedness, and above all, vigilance. In the words of the great patriot Benjamin Franklin, "We must hang together or assuredly we shall all hang separately". So there can be no sacrifice too great if it will strengthen our essential Unity. In maintaining unity we have begun to traditionally practice the following principles:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon group unity.
2. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for Gamblers Anonymous membership is a desire to stop gambling.
4. Each group should be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.

5. Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.
6. Gamblers Anonymous ought never endorse, finance or lend the Gamblers Anonymous name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every Gamblers Anonymous group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Gamblers Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. Gamblers Anonymous, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the Gamblers Anonymous name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and Internet.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the Gamblers Anonymous program, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Why are Gamblers Anonymous members anonymous?

Anonymity has great practical value in maintaining unity within our fellowship. Through its practice at the level of press, radio films and television we have eliminated the possibility of fame and recognition being given to the individual member; hence, we have not been faced with any great internal struggles for power and prestige which would prove highly detrimental to our essential unity.

Anonymity also has great value in attracting new members who initially might feel there is a stigma attached to the problem.

More importantly, we realize that anonymity has tremendous spiritual significance. It represents a powerful reminder that we need always place principles above personalities.

Our survival as individuals demands that we renounce personal gratification . . . so our Gamblers Anonymous movement not only advocates but tries to practice true humility and it is through greater humility that we will be able to live in peace and security for all the years to come.

Is Gamblers Anonymous a religious society?

No. Gamblers Anonymous is composed of people from many religious faiths along with agnostics and atheists. Since membership in Gamblers Anonymous requires no particular religious belief as a condition of membership, it cannot be described as a religious society. The Gamblers Anonymous recovery program is based on acceptance of certain spiritual values but the member is free to interpret these principles as he or she chooses.

As it is used in Gamblers Anonymous, what is the meaning of the word spiritual?

Simply stated, the word can be said to describe that characteristic of the human mind which is marked by the highest and finest qualities such as generosity, honesty, kindness and humility. Inasmuch as the Gamblers Anonymous fellowship advocates acceptance of these principles as a way of life, it can thus be said that Gamblers Anonymous is a spiritual fellowship.



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*God grant me
the serenity
to accept the things
I cannot change –
courage
to change the things
I can –
And the wisdom to
know the difference –*