

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS
GROUP HANDBOOK

Section I. Introduction

The Group Handbook is intended to be a tool to guide Gamblers Anonymous groups on how to hold strong, healthy meetings. Topics covered in this handbook include the establishment of new groups, types of groups, officers and trusted servants, types of meetings, meeting formats, room procedures, finances, literature, new member support, room actions, common problems that affect meetings, closing a group, the role of Trustees, and our relationship with Gam-Anon.

Unity Step 4 states that "...each group should be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole...", therefore, the information presented is less about rules that individual groups must follow, and more about "best practices" that have evolved over the years irrespective of geographic area. Although groups have tremendous leeway in running their meetings as they see fit, when a particular practice or procedure is mandated by the Guidance Code, a prior Trustee decision, or other GA-approved literature, that too is noted. We believe that the guidelines presented in this handbook will bring the meeting rooms the assistance and structure that is necessary to effectively carry the message of hope to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. It is in this spirit that we offer the information on the following pages.

Section II. Definition and Establishment of a Group

Our Gamblers Anonymous Unity Step 3 states that "...the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling...". Our Guidance Code Article VII, Section 1, then goes on to say that "...whenever two or more persons with a desire to stop gambling meet together on a regular, weekly scheduled basis to discuss their gambling problem, they will be known as a group, only if they commit themselves to follow the Gamblers Anonymous Guidance Code and limit their use, display, and distribution to only approved and appropriate Gamblers Anonymous literature...and notify the International Service Office (I.S.O.) of their existence...."

As one can see, the backbone of the fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous is the group, also known as a "meeting" or a "room." Any member can establish a group. A group may be as small as two people and as large as 50 or more. By definition, a group meets weekly at the same place and at the same time. Compulsive gamblers in recovery may elect to be a member of one regular group (known as a "home group," "home meeting," or "home room"), or a member of several groups based on their need for more meetings or their need for a variety of different types of meetings.

The most common reason for establishing a group is that individuals with a gambling problem who live in a given area have simply identified the need for one. It could be something as basic as an open meeting or something more specialized like a step-study meeting or a demographic-preferred meeting. Another reason for establishing a group is that an existing group has gotten too large and unwieldy and not everyone who wants to give therapy can do so in the time allotted. In other cases, there may be unresolvable personality conflicts between members of an existing group and the only way to alleviate the problem is to establish another group. And finally, the location of an existing group may suddenly become unavailable, and another group must be formed to replace it.

Member commitment. Once the need for the group has been established, the most important thing to consider is the level of member commitment. It is easy enough for members to say that a new group within a certain geographical area would be a welcome addition; it is quite another to find a core group of members who are sufficiently committed to support that group over the long haul. When a new group is contemplated, the idea should first be discussed among members of existing groups in that geographical area to assess the level of true commitment before going forward.

From there, a point of contact person, commonly known as a meeting "founder," will carry the project to fruition by notifying the International Service Office (ISO) or Regional Service Office (RSO) of the existence of the meeting so it can be put on the official meeting list of the fellowship, and a "starter kit" can be mailed out. At that point, the group can also begin purchasing literature and other meeting materials (see Section VIII) from the local Intergroup or ISO/RSO and set up a written meeting format (see Section VI) that can be approved by the group's members sometime prior to the date of their first meeting.

The local Intergroup, if there is one, is also crucial to the start-up process as is the Trustee(s) of that area. Once the establishment of the group has been completed, the local intergroup should promote it on its website (if they have one) and through mailings to its other groups. In addition, the Trustee and members of the new group should make it a point to promote its existence at other meetings they may attend. It should be noted that according to the Guidance Code, no new group will be qualified to vote on any issues affecting Gamblers Anonymous as a whole until they have conducted regular weekly meetings for a three (3) month period.

The establishment of a Gamblers Anonymous group has been a wonderful experience for many people. Such an undertaking requires no special talent other than a desire to stop gambling and to help other compulsive gamblers to do the same. The mechanics of starting and maintaining a GA group will be covered in subsequent sections.

Section III. Organizing the Group

When organizing a group, several important issues must be considered during the organization process if the group is to succeed:

Choosing the ideal meeting site. There is no single characteristic that makes for an ideal meeting site. It is fair to say that most meetings take place in churches or synagogues, hospitals, community centers, and recreation centers. Sometimes, meeting rooms of other 12-Step programs or conference rooms that are part of non-profit organizations and foundations are utilized. However, there is no reason why a group could not be creative and utilize a portion of an outdoor recreation area such as a park or even an area of a public beach if the group is comfortable doing so. The only site not suitable for a group to meet is a member's place of residence or business. The reason for this is obvious; if something happens to the member (illness, death, loss of abstinence), the group immediately loses its meeting site and has to start all over again.

One major consideration is the availability of that particular site on the days and times that the group believes will meet the needs of the area. Often, a group founder will find that a particular meeting site in a geographically ideal area is only available on a certain day and time and that will be the single most important driver that sets the process in motion.

Whatever site is chosen should be easy to access. If it is an indoor meeting site, groups should receive at least two keys to the site or room where the meetings are to be held so there will always be a backup key holder if the primary key holder is unable to open the meeting on time or at all. With the exception of meetings held in prisons or in locked healthcare facilities, no meeting site should be selected that requires identification documents for a member to enter.

Any site that is chosen should obviously have restroom facilities that are easily accessed without a separate key and ideally, there should be access to a kitchen for events like birthday/anniversary celebrations in which food is served. The site should also be able to provide an ample supply of chairs and preferably, at least one table. If the meeting room is small, it would be helpful if there was a larger event room nearby to accommodate the larger crowds associated with these celebrations. Attention must also be paid to the open hours of operation of the meeting site so that meetings or post-meeting gatherings are not ended prematurely by the person managing the site.

Distance from existing groups. A major consideration when choosing a meeting site for a group is its distance from other existing groups. Ideally, groups should be well distributed within a given geographical area, so members have the ability to select from multiple groups near their home or work. Locating a new group too close to an existing group defeats this purpose and may create unnecessary competition for members if the new group intends to meet on the same day and time as the existing group.

In an area that is some distance from already-existing groups, strategies to grow membership include local advertising through radio, television, and distributing or pinning up meeting flyers. Take the opportunity to talk to people who may have a gambling problem and extend an invitation to your meeting.

Rent. When choosing a meeting site, the fledgling group must always ask itself how much rent it

can afford to pay since this is the first expenditure that will come out of the group's treasury before any monies are allocated for other meeting expenses or sent to the local Intergroup or the International Services Office. The amount of rent a group will have to pay is often the "deal breaker" when selecting a meeting site. That being said, groups should not select a meeting site because it offers meeting rooms free of charge. Unity Step 7 states that "...every Gamblers Anonymous group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions..." We believe that accepting a meeting site free of charge is the equivalent of an outside contribution, therefore groups should count on paying rent, or in the alternative, making a regular donation to the organization that hosts the meeting site even if it is just a token amount.

Insurance requirements. Some facilities are now asking for evidence of general liability insurance before they will rent a room to a 12-Step program. Until such a time as the Board of Regents purchases a general liability policy to be used by all GA groups, the only way this requirement can be met is if a number of groups in a given geographical area, or even the area's Intergroup itself, pool their financial resources and purchase this insurance. There are a number of groups who have availed themselves of this strategy and report that purchasing the insurance this way does not create an undue financial burden as long as the groups meticulously set aside money from their treasuries in order to make timely premium payments.

Section IV. Types of Meetings

Within the fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous, there are four basic meeting types: Open, Closed, Modified Closed, and Combined. The type of meeting a group selects is usually done when the group first forms depending on which one suits their needs best. Each basic type of meeting may be further classified by the characteristics of the meeting and the demographics of the members who attend these meetings.

Obviously, groups are always free to change their meeting type and/or sub-classification through a group conscience at any time, whether it is for all future meetings or for a one-time special event such as a birthday/anniversary meeting, speaker meeting, or a panel discussion meeting. However, if the change is for all future meetings, the International Service Office must be notified of the change as soon as possible so they may change the group's meeting listing on their website. It is further suggested that when feasible, there should be a variety of types and sub-classification of meetings in any given area.

Open Meeting. In an open meeting, spouses, family, and friends of the gambler, or simply anyone who wants to learn more about the fellowship are allowed to attend. However, it is important that only the gambler is allowed to speak and participate at these meetings. Guests can speak only after the meeting is formally closed, and they may not contribute financially to the group. Furthermore, if any members of the group are uncomfortable having a guest in the room while they share, that guest will politely be asked to leave the room while that member is speaking. The thinking, relative to the open meeting, is that the spouses and friends of a problem gambler can have a better chance to understand the real nature of the problem when they are permitted to attend G.A. meetings. Although the work of G.A. is primarily concerned with the compulsive gamblers themselves, our experience has shown that the chances of recovery are enhanced when their family has an opportunity to learn all they can about compulsive gambling. More importantly, family and close friends of the problem gambler may be encouraged to become members of Gam-Anon.

Closed Meeting. In a closed meeting, only those with a gambling problem or who think they have a gambling problem are eligible to attend and participate. Outsiders are not allowed to attend, even as guests of the gambler. There are some areas of the world where the meetings are

predominantly closed. The reason for this type of meeting is simple. Experience has shown us that some problem gamblers are only comfortable speaking about their disease around other problem gamblers and the presence of outsiders, even spouses and other family members, may inhibit the honesty of their shares.

Modified Closed Meeting. In a modified closed meeting, group members may vote to allow certain people to attend the meeting on a one-time basis. This may include health professionals, students training to become health professionals, members of law enforcement, judges, attorneys who may be called upon to represent a compulsive gambler in legal proceedings, or members of other programs who are simply in need of a 12-Step meeting. As with open meetings, if a member is uncomfortable sharing in front of non-gambler attendees, they will politely be asked to leave the room during the share.

Combined Meetings. On occasion, Gamblers Anonymous members and Gam-Anon members from a particular area come together and hold what is commonly known as a “combined meeting” (see Gam-Anon). They may occur on a regular basis (i.e. monthly, bi-monthly, or semi-annually) or as an occasional event that supplements, but does not preempt, regularly scheduled Gamblers Anonymous meetings. The purpose of a combined meeting is the same as any other Gamblers Anonymous or Gam-Anon meeting, but by holding them together, individual Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon members have an opportunity to learn and understand more about their respective fellowships by reading from each other’s literature and sharing individual experiences. If the combined meeting is being held *in lieu* of a regularly scheduled meeting, there should be an announcement at the beginning of the combined meeting that a regular meeting of Gamblers Anonymous will be made available in another part of the building, if feasible, for those members who desire one.

Quite simply, the meeting itself is held under the exact conditions as if they were being held separately. In a combined meeting, there are two chairpersons, one from Gamblers Anonymous, one from Gam-Anon. To begin the meeting, excerpts from Gamblers Anonymous literature are read by GA members alternating with excerpts from Gam-Anon literature that are read by Gam-Anon members. This is then followed by traditional sharing. There are many ways in which this is done. The presiding chair people can alternate speakers, one for Gamblers Anonymous and one for Gam-Anon or two Gamblers Anonymous speakers in a row followed by two Gam-Anon speakers in a row, or if agreed upon in advance, one-half of the meeting for Gamblers Anonymous and the other half of the meeting for Gam-Anon. It is ultimately up to the combined meeting how they wish to handle donations, but it is recommended that all donations be in separate receptacles and accounted for separately.

Sub-Classifications of Meetings

Comment and Cross-Comment Meetings. A comment meeting is simply a meeting in which members may comment on each other’s therapy. When a member is allowed to respond to a comment made about their therapy, that meeting is called a cross-comment meeting. Despite these classifications, if a member does not wish comments, he or she is always free to say so and the room must honor that request. For comment and cross-comment meetings to be effective, input from the other members should always be constructive and not denigrating. We know from experience that these types of meetings are a good fit for some members but a poor fit for others.

Preferred Category Meeting. A preferred category meeting simply refers to a meeting that is welcoming to a particular demographic such as non-English-speaking gamblers, women gamblers, or LGBTQI gamblers. Despite its “preferred” designation, any member not of that demographic who wishes to attend and participate must be allowed to attend as long as they

observe all other rules associated with that meeting. When a group elects to become a preferred category meeting, that information should be given to the International Service Office as soon as possible so it can be listed as such in their online meeting directory.

90-Day Meetings. Another popular meeting is the 90-Day Meeting (also known as a newcomers meeting). This type of meeting typically caters to members with less than 90 days of abstinence. The benefits of such a meeting are obvious. First, someone with less than 90 days of recovery may be uncomfortable in a room full of compulsive gamblers with many years of abstinence but will feel right at home with compulsive gamblers at the same stage of recovery. Second, it may give this type of member more individualized attention as they begin to learn what compulsive gambling is and how the program aids them in their lifelong recovery. Our pamphlet entitled “Gamblers Anonymous-Towards 90 Days” speaks well to the needs of the new member. Although this type of meeting is directed toward newcomers, the secretary of a 90-day meeting should have at least 6 months of abstinence in order to serve as a role model. At 90 days of abstinence or sooner, the new member is expected to transition to a meeting comprised of more experienced members.

Speaker or Panel Meetings. On occasion, a group may invite a member of our fellowship, whether from that group or another, to be the featured speaker in which they share their experience, strength, and hope with the other members. Some groups may designate a certain meeting each month for this purpose; others may hold speaker meetings less regularly. Since the speaker will take up most of the available meeting time, a group conscience should be taken to determine whether there will be sharing in addition to the speaker.

In a panel meeting, several members sit in front of the room and answer questions about their experiences in recovery. Questions may be pre-selected by the group secretary or originate spontaneously from the audience. These meetings are especially valuable for newer members who need to see “recovery” from several different standpoints. Ideally, the panel members will have different abstinence times and will consist of both men and women.

Step-Study Meetings. Some groups prefer to exist as standalone step-study meetings in which there is no individual therapy and members devote their meeting time to studying and discussing the 12 Steps of Recovery in great detail using GA-approved step-study literature. They are often held back-to-back with a regular meeting. Other groups may designate one meeting every month to be a step-study meeting and still others may split their regular meeting into two portions with a break in between, one for studying the steps and the other for individual therapy.

Anniversary/Birthday Meetings. Anniversary/birthday meetings are meetings where a member of the fellowship celebrates an abstinence milestone with their fellow members. According to Article VII, Section 3 of our Guidance Code, “...abstinence from gambling and regular attendance of at least thirty-nine (39) Gamblers Anonymous meetings (exceptions can be made, via group conscience decisions, for medical reasons and military duty) in the prior 12 months, by the member’s own admission...” are required in order to formally celebrate these milestones and have them listed in the Gamblers Anonymous Bulletin. However, nothing precludes a group from “informally” celebrating a member’s anniversary/birthday if he/she does not meet Guidance Code requirements. In some cases, the celebrant chairs their own meeting and in others, the celebrant may designate someone else, often their sponsor, to chair the meeting. On occasion, more than one member of a group will celebrate their anniversary/birthday at the same meeting. When this occurs, there may be two or more people co-chairing the meeting.

These are joyous occasions and often, family members attend. Groups will sometimes even hold a potluck reception prior to the meeting or a dinner afterward at a local restaurant. However,

despite the festive nature of the occasion, it should be emphasized that based on a previous Trustee Decision (Sunnyvale, 1989), only GA members are allowed to speak during birthday meetings. If members of the celebrant's family would like an opportunity to speak, they should be welcomed to do so only after the meeting is formally closed.

Section V. Trusted Servants and Responsibilities

A trusted servant is a member who holds a position of responsibility within a GA group. While each group should be self-governing according to Unity Step 4, our Guidance Code specifically mentions five "trusted servants" who may be relied upon to assume the workload necessary to keep the group together and in operation. These trusted servants are Secretary, Treasurer, Pressure Relief Group Chairman, Group Representative, and Public Relations Representative. The size of the group, as well as the group's relationship with its local Intergroup (if there is one), will determine whether or not all of these positions are necessary for the group to function effectively but at the very least, each group must have a Secretary and a Treasurer. According to the Guidance Code, these two positions may only be held by the same person if it is a new group. When this is the case, the group should transition into separate positions as soon as feasible. Other trusted servants such as an Assistant Secretary, New Member Greeter, Refreshment Chairperson, or Sergeant-at-Arms may be added by the group as needed.

In addition to this list of trusted servants, the Secretary may also designate a member to chair each weekly meeting if they choose not to do so. It is suggested that the chairperson position be rotated among several members (including the Secretary) in order to give these members "ownership" of the meeting. Sometimes, the chairperson is designated immediately prior to the meeting they are being asked to chair, and at other times, the Secretary will designate the chairperson at the end of the previous weekly meeting. Ideally, the chairperson should have at least 90 days in the program, but group conscience may allow a shorter time of abstinence. It is imperative that whoever is designated as a meeting's chairperson have a reasonable amount of success in the fellowship because it is the chairperson whom the person attending their first meeting will identify with. In some groups, a member celebrating a birthday will chair their own meeting and in others, the celebrant will designate someone in that group, or even someone from another group (with the home group's permission), to chair it. It is customary that after the sharing part of any meeting is over, the chairperson thanks the Secretary for the opportunity to chair the meeting and turns the meeting back over to him or her for closing announcements, the treasurer's report, and the Serenity Prayer.

According to the Guidance Code, it is suggested that a group's trusted servants be elected for three (3), four (4) or six (6) month terms to be decided through a group conscience. It is further suggested that no secretary, treasurer, group representative, pressure relief group chairman, or public relations representative be elected that has not abstained from gambling for at least six (6) months unless it is a brand-new group. According to the Guidance Code, a member cannot be Treasurer for more than one group at the same time. Groups should always attempt to follow the "rotation principle" in which no trusted servant, no matter how competent, should serve consecutive terms in the same position unless no one else in the group is interested. Rotation of service responsibilities has proven to be an effective way for keeping emphasis on the principles of the program rather than on the individual members.

Secretary

Each group is headed by a secretary. The Secretary is responsible for overseeing each and every aspect of the group, including, but not limited to:

- Unlocking the building or the room where the meeting will be held
- Arranging the room prior to the meeting and making sure there is coffee available for attendees
- Maintaining the meeting format and all other documents and records pertinent to the group in a central location such as a notebook
- Assigning a qualified member (preferably with at least three months of current abstinence) to chair the meeting if the secretary chooses not to do it themselves
- Purchasing, maintaining, displaying, and providing all GA-approved and – appropriate literature, keychains, telephone lists, and meeting schedules
- Ensuring that new members are provided with a newcomer packet which includes such items as a Combo Book, a Towards 90 Days booklet, a list of meetings, and a telephone list.
- Providing Lifeline pledge cards to members so requesting.
- Providing Pressure Relief Group Meeting (PRGM) materials to members so requesting
- Communicating upcoming birthdays to the local Intergroup or International/Regional Service Office,
- Communicating any changes in meeting location, date and time of meeting, or meeting disbandment to the local Intergroup or International/Regional Service Office.
- Attending, or assigning a Group Representative to attend, local Intergroup meetings.
- Reporting to the group any GA-related announcements such as social events, upcoming elections, and information that comes from the Board of Trustees or Board of Regents.

According to the Guidance Code, the Secretary should have at least six months of current abstinence from gambling. However, if there is no one in the group who has this requirement, or no one who has this requirement is willing to accept the responsibility, it is permissible to elect a member with somewhat less abstinence, although never a new member. The Secretary position is the most important trusted servant position in the group, and it should not be used simply to allow a member “to get their feet wet” learning to be of service. That can be accomplished through other positions within the group. Obviously, if the Secretary admits to gambling, he/she must resign the position immediately and a new Secretary elected by the group.

Treasurer

The group Treasurer is responsible for all financial matters dealing with the group, specifically collecting and disbursing donations made by its members and keeping financial records of such. The Treasurer should have at least six months of current abstinence unless there is no one in the room with that much time or no one with the required abstinence is willing to take the responsibility. As per Article VII, Section 3 of our Guidance Code, a member cannot be the Treasurer of more than one GA group at a time. As with the Secretary position, if the Treasurer admits to gambling, he/she must immediately resign the position and an election held to fill the position.

The Treasurer’s first duty is to collect all donations made during a meeting. The total should be verified by another member and noted in a room financial ledger. After this takes place, the Treasurer must give a financial report to the group. At a minimum, this report should include the previous balance, collections, disbursements, and an ending balance. All monies should be kept with the rest of the room materials, under lock and key if possible. Any room member may ask for an audit of the ledger at any time. Collections for the International Service Office or Regional Service Office, as well as collections for special activities such as Intergroup picnics or Gratitude Week, should be maintained separately and accounted for as such. It’s important that when taking collections, baskets or some other receptacle should be passed around the room; at no time should anyone walk around to each member with the collection container because that defeats the

privacy of the donation and may make members who are unable to donate feel uncomfortable or ashamed.

The Treasurer shall make all disbursements agreed upon by the group. This includes rent, insurance (if required), materials purchased from ISO, and any other expenses deemed acceptable by the group. Receipts should be submitted in order to account for these disbursements. If the amount of money a group typically handles requires it, a checking account may be opened (see section on Group Finances). If this occurs, deposits should be made within 5 business days of the meeting. Receipts and bank statements must be retained.

Pressure Relief Group Chairman

In some geographic areas, Pressure Relief Group Meetings (PRGMs) are conducted by one or more members of the fellowship for attendees of any group within that particular area. When this is the case, it is up to the group Secretary to act as a liaison between the member seeking the PRGM and the individual(s) who will be conducting it.

Conversely, in other areas, PRGMs are conducted at the group level by a single member or a committee. If it is the latter, a committee chair should be elected by the group who will preside over all aspects of the PRGM including...

1. Coordinating the time of the meeting among all participants, making sure that the member seeking the PRGM has been provided with all necessary forms and materials well in advance of the meeting.
2. Chairing the meeting and making sure that the committee stays within its charge of dealing with legal, financial, employment, and personal pressures associated with compulsive gambling.
3. Staying in contact with the member to assess progress with all recommendations made at the PRGM.
4. Coordinating any follow-up meetings with the member.

Group Representative

The Group Representative is the trusted servant who acts as a liaison between that group and the local Intergroup, or if no Intergroup, to the International or Regional Service Offices. The Group Representative's duties include reporting on the activities of the group and making sure the needs of the group are met by the local Intergroup or International or Regional Service Offices. The Group Representative, in turn, passes along information from the Intergroup, International or Regional Service Office, Board of Trustees, and Board of Regents to members of that group. In most instances, the Secretary of the group acts as the Group Representative although that duty can also be performed by the Treasurer, the Assistant Secretary if there is one, or any other member elected by the group or designated through a group conscience.

Public Relations Representative

The Public Relations Representative works within the framework of the Guidance Code and disseminates information about Gamblers Anonymous to the media and to anyone else requesting information through an interview. The Public Relations Representative should also be available to guide any of the members of the group as to how to behave when doing any public relations work. It cannot be emphasized enough that the Public Relations Representative is not representing Gamblers Anonymous *per se*, but rather, is a recovering compulsive gambler who is simply speaking about his or her own experience, strength and hope. Anonymity of the

fellowship, especially when a member is appearing or functioning in the public eye, is inviolate and must be preserved at all costs. As long as Gamblers Anonymous is not mentioned by name, the Gamblers Anonymous logo and its literature are not visible, and the Gamblers Anonymous telephone hotline number is not displayed, there are no restrictions on what the Public Relations Representative might offer in an interview. Ideally, the Public Relations Representative might even want to use a different name for the purposes of the interview. However, if the Public Relations Representative refers to him or her in any way as a member of Gamblers Anonymous, their face cannot be shown, and their full name cannot be used.

Additional Trusted Servants

Assistant Secretary

When a GA group is large, it may be necessary to elect an Assistant Secretary to help the Secretary carry out his or her duties or to act in the Secretary's place when he or she is away from the meeting for extended periods of time.

New Member Greeter

It has been suggested that if a group is large enough, they should also elect or appoint a New Member Greeter. The primary responsibility of this trusted servant is to be the initial point of contact for a member attending his or her first meeting. At the very least, the New Member Greeter will present the new member with a newcomer packet and introduce him or her to the other members in the room immediately prior to the meeting. In some groups, the New Member Greeter will also maintain contact with the new member for a period of time after his or her first meeting to answer any questions and to ensure that the new member continues to feel welcome in the fellowship.

Refreshment Chairperson

In addition to coffee and bottled water, some meetings also offer an array of snacks that are provided by one or more members on a rotating basis. The meetings that do this often find it desirable to coordinate this effort through a Refreshment Chairperson.

Sergeant at Arms

Larger groups may elect or appoint a Sergeant-at-Arms to assist the Secretary in maintaining order and proper decorum throughout the meeting.

Section VI. Compiling a Written Room Format/Meeting Procedures

Unity Step One states that "...our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon group unity." Unity Step Four goes on to state that "...each group should be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole..." Therein lays the beauty of our fellowship. Within the parameters of the Guidance Code and past Trustee decisions, each group gets to make the rules on how their meetings are to be run. To achieve this end, it is essential for each room to have a written format, developed during a format or business meeting that outlines every aspect of how the room is to conduct its business.

Obviously, formats can change as the need arises, but experience has shown us that by adhering to a written format rather than unwritten agreements, no one member or clique can suddenly take over the will of the meeting.

Once the written room format has been established, everything pertinent to the group should be placed in a meeting-specific notebook that is maintained by the room secretary. Those elements of the room format that specifically guide the flow of the meeting are often laminated and placed at the front of the notebook in the form of a “script” or “cheat sheet”. This allows anybody, whether a meeting regular or a member of another group, to come in and seamlessly chair that meeting.

There are three critical elements to a written meeting format. The first element are those items specific to all meetings in the fellowship. This list includes, but is not limited to...

- Who may speak at a meeting.
- Rules for when a non-member may speak.
- Policies for dealing with members whose therapy goes on for too long or is not on the topic of gambling.
- The prohibition of the use of non-approved or non-appropriate literature during meetings.
- The proper way of collecting money at meetings.

The second element are those items that are group or meeting specific. This list includes, but is not limited to...

- Type of meeting – Open, Closed, Step Study, Preferred Demographic, Newcomer, etc.
- Physical setup of room (based on the facility being rented).
 - Classroom – head table with members facing forward.
 - Conference tables – Seating around tables.
 - Circle – Tables arranged in a circle or members sit in chairs all in a circle with no table.
 - Square – Tables arranged in square or rectangle shape.
 - Cafeteria – Long tables with people sitting on both sides.
 - Other – Picnic tables with people sitting or standing on both sides (outdoor meetings).
- Literature or parts of literature that will be read at every meeting.
- Frequency of group elections.
- Officer qualifications.
- Officer responsibilities.
- The rotation principle with regard to officers and meeting chairpersons.
- Acknowledging milestones – 30-day, 60-day, 90-day, 6-month, etc.
- Structure of celebrations – 90-day milestones, annual anniversaries, memorial meetings, etc.
- Meeting policy regarding whether comments or cross-comments are allowed.
- Rules for giving therapy -- time allowed, topics allowed, etc.
- Procedures regarding disruptive members.
- Minimum abstinence in order to chair a meeting.
- How each meeting is ended.
- Maintenance of group phone list.
- The point during the meeting that collections are taken (i.e. before the break, before sharing begins, at the end of the meeting, etc.)
- How collections are allocated – separate receptacles for group, Intergroup, ISO, special collections (i.e. picnics) or a single receptacle divided up into percentages for each recipient based on a group conscience.
- Policy on literature – Sell or give away when indicated.
- How much rent to pay and when.
- Newcomer procedures.

- Special procedures for handling returnees.
- Pressure relief group procedures.
- Room breaks if any.

The third element are those announcements, based on the information noted above and phrased through a group conscience, that should be read before every meeting begins and before every meeting closes. Experience has shown us that reading these announcements at each meeting not only enhances the flow of the meeting, it puts the group on notice what the rules of the meeting will be. These announcements should be incorporated into the “script” discussed above.

Announcements that should be read before every meeting include, but are not limited to...

- Opening welcome to the entire group.
- An admonition to turn cell phones off or set to vibrate.
- An admonition that there will be no audio or visual recordings of any kind while the meeting is going.
- Welcoming all new members with a newcomer packet and, if part of the meeting format, a welcome key chain.
- In the case of open meetings, an introduction of guests and/or observers by name and their purpose in attending, along with an announcement that (a) if any members are uncomfortable with the presence of the guest(s) during their sharing, those guests will be asked to temporarily leave the room, and (b) that guests will not be allowed to share until after the meeting is closed.
- Acknowledgment of milestones such as 30/60/90 days, 6/9 months, anniversaries.
- An announcement whether or not profanity will be allowed during the meeting.
- An announcement that GA meetings are not held for the purpose of learning how to control gambling, but rather how to STOP gambling.
- An announcement that it is vitally important that members maintain each other’s anonymity “...so whom you see, what you hear here when you leave here, let it stay here...”.
- An admonition to not read from, display, or distribute anything other than G.A. approved or G.A. appropriate literature, and further, to ask a trusted servant if the member is uncertain as to whether or not an item meets this standard...
- An admonition not to discuss any crimes for which a member may still be prosecuted for because anonymity is not a legal right and this room offers no protection regarding such matters.
- An announcement regarding the maximum length of a member’s therapy (and how that will be monitored) and in the case where everybody does not get an opportunity to speak due to time constraints, whether they will be given priority to speak at the next meeting of the group.
- An admonition to be courteous during a member’s share by waiting until the member has finished sharing before leaving or entering the room.

Announcements that should be read before the close of every meeting include, but are not limited to...

- An announcement that GA is self-supporting and as such, groups must purchase their own GA materials, pay rent, etc., and therefore, will pass a donation cup around (respectfully decline donations from new members and guests).
- An announcement about the importance of sponsorship (reiterate the thoughts expressed in the Combo Book, page 17, #6).

- An announcement about the importance of regular attendance at meetings.
- An announcement of time and place of meeting(s) to be held the following day.
- An announcement about the importance of 12-Step calls.
- An announcement that if anyone needs a Pressure Relief Group Meeting, they should see the secretary after the meeting.
- Announcements about future group, Intergroup, or regional/national events.
- An announcement about the importance of Lifeliners.
- The treasury report for the group if not given during the meeting itself.

Any announcement that does not specifically pertain to Gamblers Anonymous itself should be done only after the meeting is adjourned.

Section VII. Room Finances

The group Treasurer is responsible for all financial matters dealing with the group, specifically collecting and disbursing donations made by its members and keeping financial records of such. It is recommended that the Treasurer be a GA member with at least six months of current abstinence unless it is a new meeting, there is no one in the room with that much abstinence, or no one with the required abstinence is willing to take on the responsibility. If the Treasurer admits to gambling, he or she must immediately resign the position and an election held to fill the position. According to the Guidance Code Article VII, Section 3, a member cannot be the Treasurer of more than one group at a time.

Meeting donations are collected according to the group format. When taking the collection, a basket or some other receptacle is passed around the room. At no time should anyone walk around to each member with the collection container because donations are private, and members may feel ashamed if they are not able to contribute. The total shall be verified by another room member and noted by the Treasurer in the room's financial ledger. The treasurer is responsible for ensuring that all monies are safely stored under lock and key. Any room member may ask for an audit of the ledger at any time.

Ideally, donations to the ISO or for special activities should be collected and maintained separately from the group donations and reported as such in the group ledger. If a group chooses to use a "one pot" method of collections as its custom and practice, the amounts or percentages that are to be allocated to rent, literature, supplies, the Intergroup, the RSO (if applicable), the ISO, and special activities must be determined through a group conscience in advance of the collection. Those amounts or percentages should be memorialized in the group's written format. In order to prevent an accumulation of funds, it is suggested that each group maintain a reserve of no more than two months of known expenses.

At each meeting after the collection is done, the Treasurer shall give a report to the group. At a minimum, this must include the previous balance, plus collections, minus disbursements, and the ending balance. In the alternative, the Treasure may give this report to the group immediately prior to the following meeting. In no case can a Treasurer collect monies and neglect or refuse to provide a financial report to the group.

The Treasurer shall make disbursements as decided by the group. This includes rent, insurance (if required), materials purchased from ISO, and any other expenses deemed acceptable by the group. Receipts should be maintained for all disbursements. In the rare event that a meeting decides to open a checking account in its name, deposits should be made within five business

days of the meeting. Receipts and bank statements are to be retained for three years.

Section VIII. Literature

Apart from the meetings themselves, one of the cornerstones of the Gamblers Anonymous fellowship is its literature. Individual groups should always allocate a portion of their treasuries to purchase approved literature and other items. Groups and their members can purchase literature directly from the ISO or RSO or more commonly, their Intergroup, if they belong to one. Group representatives can purchase literature through the Intergroup literature chairperson before or after Intergroup meetings.

GA Approved and Appropriate Literature. Gamblers Anonymous literature falls into two categories, “approved” and “appropriate.” Gamblers Anonymous–approved literature is defined in the Guidance Code as any publication or item (i.e. pins, keychains, medallions, videos, multimedia, etc.) that has been *approved by the Board of Trustees* and is sold or distributed by the International Service Office (ISO), Regional Service Offices (RSO), or any Intergroup who has purchased this literature from either the ISO or any RSO. *Foreign language translations* of Gamblers Anonymous–approved literature items are deemed to be approved if the final product has followed all necessary steps outlined by the Board of Trustees. Currently, the ISO maintains well over 75 approved publications and items that are available for purchase.

Gamblers Anonymous appropriate literature consists of such things as local area member telephone lists, meeting and direction lists, flyers regarding events sponsored by the local groups, local Intergroups, surrounding area Intergroups, or conference committees. Other “appropriate” material must be designated as such by the Board of Trustees.

According to the Guidance Code, groups must only use, display, or distribute Gamblers Anonymous approved or appropriate literature at their meetings. Unfortunately, there are occasions where a member may try to incorporate non-approved or non-appropriate literature into their therapy. This is sometimes done inadvertently, although, in rare cases, it may be done as an act of defiance (“I can read what I want to read”). We have found that these breaches of the Guidance Code can often be prevented by making the following announcement at the beginning of each meeting:

“... Our Guidance Code makes it clear that members should not read from, display, or distribute anything other than G.A. approved or G.A. appropriate literature. If you are unsure whether an item meets this standard, please ask a trusted servant.”

If, even after having been given this clear instruction, a member still insists on violating this rule, they should be told in strong but diplomatic terms that they should immediately cease the behavior, and only as a last resort should they be asked to leave the meeting.

Although Gamblers Anonymous groups may not themselves distribute or display non-approved or non-appropriate literature or items at their meetings, it is understood that if a group is renting a meeting room from a church or other outside entity, the group has no control over what they distribute or display as part of their mission. Groups should therefore never make any attempt to remove items not belonging to them in order to make their room compliant with the Guidance Code.

Sales and Distribution to Members. Once literature and other items are purchased from the Intergroup, ISO, or RSO, groups are free to distribute them to members as they please.

However, when a group sells a piece of literature or other item to a member of that group, it should only be done at its acquisition price from the Intergroup, ISO, or RSO; groups must not make a profit from the sale. Conversely, the Secretary of the group, at his or her discretion or through a group conscience, may provide literature or other items free of charge to a member who cannot afford them if the group believes it promotes that member's recovery.

Literature Inventory. The selection and quantity of approved literature that each group should maintain is up to the Secretary of that group, or in some cases is established by a group conscience based on the size of their treasury and prior sales and use. If a member desires a piece of literature or other item that is not in the group's inventory, the member can either order it directly from the ISO or RSO, or request that the Secretary acquire it at the next scheduled Intergroup meeting.

While there is no Gamblers Anonymous-mandated list of publications or items that groups should keep on hand for sale, groups should always make sure to purchase and maintain (a) a sufficient number of up-to-date Combo Books to facilitate their meetings, (b) a supply of keychains that note different levels of abstinence ranging from newcomer to nine months that can be presented to members as they reach these milestones, (c) a sufficient number of newcomer packs (see below), (d) an up-to-date copy of the Group Handbook for reference purposes, and (e) an up-to-date copy of the Guidance Code for reference purposes.

Security of Literature Inventory. Group literature and other items are typically stored in a briefcase or other storage container which is maintained in a secure place such as a locker (if the facility provides one), or in possession of the meeting secretary. For security reasons, if the meeting secretary elects to possess the supplies, it is recommended that they not be stored in his or her automobile, especially if both the supplies and the group's treasury are stored together.

Copying of Literature. All groups are reminded that Gamblers Anonymous absolutely prohibits the photocopying of any approved literature in order to save money. An exception is made for specific literature that is designated to be reproduced at the group level. Such designation will be listed on the item(s), where applicable.

Newcomer Packet. One key piece of literature a group should never be without is what is known as a "newcomer packet." Newcomer packets are not purchased from the ISO or RSO but rather, created at either the Intergroup or individual group level. Although each Intergroup or group can decide for themselves what items a newcomer packet should have, an ideal newcomer packet should contain, at the very least:

- A meeting directory,
- A group phone list,
- The Combo Book,
- A welcome key tag.

But it might also contain such pieces of literature or leaflets entitled:

- "A Newcomer Asks,"
- "Your First Meeting,"
- "Young Gamblers in Recovery,"
- "Suggestions for Coping with Urges to Gamble",
- A "Towards 90 Days" booklet,
- The information sheet on Pressure Relief Group Meetings
- The card entitled "Before You Make That Bet – H.A.L.T."

Section IX. Supporting the New Member

Everyone in Gamblers Anonymous is important, but extra attention should always be paid to the new member walking into the room for the first time. Some even say that the most important person in any GA group is the new member. Given this, you only get one chance to make a first impression so we, as a fellowship, must always put our best foot forward in cultivating that new member. Experience has shown us, time and time again, that if a compulsive gambler in need of help is not comfortable in their first encounter with the fellowship, there is considerably more damage they can and will do before giving the fellowship another try.

New Member Packet. Every new member should receive a newcomer packet when they walk in the door for their first meeting (see Section VIII).

Other Literature. The group secretary should also make it a point to show the new member other pieces of literature they maintain and sell. If money is a problem, the group secretary is free to provide this literature to the new member free of charge as part of “normal room expenditures.”

New Member Greeter. If a group is large enough, they should elect or appoint an official New Member Greeter. Ideally, this person will come to the meeting early in order to be the first contact for any new members who come into the room. Their job is to immediately make the new member(s) feel at home by providing them with a new member packet and introducing them around to other members immediately prior to their first meeting. Other functions include maintaining contact with the new member periodically up until their next meeting and helping the new member choose a temporary sponsor or act as one themselves. For smaller meetings, anybody in the group can act as the greeter.

New Member Participation. Most new members arrive at their first meeting scared and nervous and many are more comfortable just listening rather than participating. This is perfectly fine. No new member should ever be coerced into being an active participant unless they are comfortable becoming one. As far as their participation in the reading of literature, the best way to approach this is to ask the member if they would “like” to read, rather than just assigning them a passage to read. Experience has shown us that some members are either uncomfortable reading aloud to other members or are simply uncomfortable reading literature in a language that is not native to them. This simple courtesy can depressurize their first meeting significantly.

The Twenty Questions. The ritual of asking the Twenty Questions is an integral part of a member’s first meeting and will often elicit profound emotions from the new member. So as not to put the new member immediately on the spot, some meetings often wait until several members have given their therapy before turning their attention to the Twenty Questions. There are many ways that this ritual can be accomplished. One way is to simply ask the new member to turn to pages 15 and 16 of the Combo Book and read each question aloud followed by a yes or no answer. Alternatively, the chairperson can read the questions and the new member can answer yes or no. Yet another way of accomplishing this is to have each member in the room ask and answer one question about themselves and then ask the new member how his or her answers compared with the rest of the group’s. After noting that most compulsive gamblers will answer yes to at least seven of these questions, the new member is again welcomed to the group and invited to share if they are comfortable doing so.

After Meeting Discussions. Some members will often stay after a meeting to further engage the

new member and provide their personal phone numbers. Often, members of a group will even go out for coffee after the meeting is over just to continue the engagement. Many members feel the “after meeting” is often as valuable as the actual meeting, if not more so.

Financial Issues. Many compulsive gamblers attend their first meeting with crippling financial issues that are not expected to abate for a considerable period of time. Although we tell the new member early in their recovery that bankruptcy and borrowing or lending of money is detrimental to their recovery, there are rare occasions where a new member may try to solicit another member for a loan, or another member may take pity on the new member and offer to lend them small amounts of money to tide them over. Although these are rare occurrences, they can potentially create a toxic situation for the group if there is later a falling out over the money. It should be made abundantly clear to the new member that gambling is primarily an emotional issue and those financial issues can only be addressed through Pressure Relief Group Meetings which the newcomer can avail themselves of once certain criteria are met.

Temporary Sponsorship. The concept of sponsorship should be introduced to every new member at their first meeting. Some groups will recommend, or even assign, a “temporary sponsor” until the new member is comfortable enough with the group to ask one of its members to become a “permanent sponsor.”

Contributions. New members should not be asked to contribute money to the group at their first meeting. Often, the treasurer will tell the new member “this one is on us” and refuse the donation.

Guests Who Come in Support of a New Member. Some new members fear their first meeting so much that they bring a friend or family member for support. If the meeting is classified as an “open meeting,” there are no restrictions as far as allowing guests to come in support of the new member. If the meeting is classified as a “closed meeting” (only Gamblers Anonymous members are allowed to attend), the meeting will have to take a group conscious whether to allow the guest to stay. With either type of meeting, three things must be kept in mind. First, if anyone in the room is uncomfortable giving their therapy in front of a guest, the guest should politely be asked to leave the room until the therapy is over. Second, under no circumstances can the guest participate in the meeting, even to offer a few words of encouragement. Third, just as with the new member, the guest should not contribute any funds to the meeting.

Self-Exclusion. Another area of great concern is members with experience in the fellowship encouraging new members to execute “self-exclusion” agreements with gambling establishments as yet another method to prevent the new member from gambling. Groups or their members should not discuss such activities during the newcomer’s first meeting. First, self-exclusion has nothing to do with the Gamblers Anonymous program; it is considered an outside issue according to Unity Step 10. Second, there have been occasions where new members who signed such agreements with the encouragement of older members put themselves in peril when they later elected to violate these agreements by returning to these gambling establishments. These discussions, if they are to take place at all, are private matters that should be taken up outside the meeting.

Outside Referrals to Therapists, Counselors, Professional Service, Treatment Centers. Unity Step Six states that “...Gamblers Anonymous ought never endorse, finance, or lend the Gamblers Anonymous name to any related facility or outside enterprise...” With regard to the new member specifically, this clearly means that members of the group, or the group itself, should refrain from discussing, or endorsing, their experiences with inpatient or residential treatment centers related to gambling and especially, their experiences with compulsive gambling therapists they see outside

of the fellowship. This is not done to stifle free speech or the free exchange of ideas but (a) to protect the fellowship against accusations of improper relationships with outside enterprises, and (b) to make sure the new member understands that ultimately, Gamblers Anonymous should be the centerpiece of their recovery. Such discussions, if they are to take place at all, should be done outside of the meeting.

Section X. Other Group Actions

In addition to the meeting itself, there are other actions, called group conscience decisions, that a group may need to undertake in order to make their group strong and healthy.

A group conscience decision is simply a decision made collectively by the group to handle a particular situation in a particular way if it is not specifically addressed in the Guidance Code, approved GA literature, or a Trustee decision. It could be something as simple as whether profanity will be allowed at a meeting or the criteria for documenting the attendance of a member attending meetings under a court order. Group conscience decisions may be handled as they come up or through stand-alone meetings (often known as “business meetings”) that take place either immediately before or immediately after a regularly scheduled meeting. What is important is that (a) no group conscience decision can EVER be in conflict with either the Guidance Code, a past Trustee Decision, or GA-approved literature and (b) all group conscience decisions should either be memorialized in the group’s records for easy referral or incorporated directly into the meeting format and read aloud before each and every meeting.

Typical group conscience decisions include, but are not limited to:

1. Determining or changing the starting and ending time of a meeting.
2. Changing a meeting site because of facility closure, eviction, inadequate space, or rent increase.
3. Determining what literature will be read at each meeting and in what order.
4. Determining how long a member is allowed to speak when giving therapy.
5. Determining whether comments or cross-comments to therapy will be allowed.
6. Determining how a birthday/anniversary is to be celebrated (i.e. who chairs the meeting, whether the meeting will be opened up to guests of the celebrant if it is a closed meeting, etc.)
7. Determining whether a meeting will allow profanity or not.
8. Determining how to handle members who have been ordered by the criminal court system to attend meetings as part of their sentences. For example, when a compulsive gambler is ordered to attend meetings, their attendance is typically documented on a “court card” which is signed (first name and last initial only) by the meeting Secretary or chairperson. The group should establish, through a group conscience, what constitutes certifiable attendance at the meeting so there is consistency from week to week.
9. Determining appropriate attire for meetings. In general, attire that promotes any type of gambling establishment (i.e. casino or race track) is strongly discouraged or forbidden, although some meetings may go as far as to ban the attire of sports teams whether professional or college based.
10. Determining actions that are considered distracting to other members and will not be allowed during the meeting.
11. Determining whether it is acceptable to bring children or pets (other than support animals) to meetings.
12. How to handle non-members requesting to attend a closed meeting (i.e. someone looking for continuing education credit, a member of another 12-Step program needing a meeting,

- friend or family of a new member attending a meeting for the first time). Attendance always comes with the caveat that only a member of Gamblers Anonymous may speak at a meeting
13. Determining how “scholarships” to mini-conferences or International Conferences are to be allocated (i.e. number of scholarships available and to who and for how much).
 14. Determining whether a meeting that falls on a national holiday will or will not be held, with the caveat that a member must stay at the meeting place for a short period of time before and after the meeting was scheduled to begin in order to direct someone needing a meeting to another meeting that is open or soon to be open.
 15. How to handle members whose therapies are not consistent with Unity Step 10 such as expressing opinions on outside issues unrelated to compulsive gambling or Gamblers Anonymous.

Section XI. Problems Affecting Gamblers Anonymous Groups

Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. We do this best when the basic unit of the program, the individual group, is functioning at a high level and in a manner consistent with the Guidance Code, the Unity Steps, and input from our Board of Trustees.

Unfortunately, there are times when problems arise both during and after meetings that can interfere with member retention and recovery and affect other groups or even Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.

Common problems affecting Gamblers Anonymous groups include, but are not limited to:

Lack of Adherence to the Guidance Code

Gamblers Anonymous is governed by a Guidance Code which has evolved over many years through actions of its Board of Trustees. Unfortunately, there is a perception among some groups and some members that the Guidance Code is really nothing more than a “guide” as to how we should manage our affairs and run our meetings and that groups are really only bound by Unity Step Four which states that “...each group should be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or Gamblers Anonymous as a whole...” While it is true that each group is self-governing, the Guidance Code clearly states that groups must commit to this document in order to be classified as a “group” and be listed on the International Service Office website. Nothing about the Guidance Code is “optional.” Groups should familiarize themselves with the Guidance Code and make sure they are in compliance with it at all times. We strongly recommend maintaining a current copy of it with all the other meeting materials and referring to it on a regular basis as problems arise.

Members or Groups Using Outside, Unapproved Literature or Promoting Outside Remedies to Compulsive Gambling

Unity Step Six states, in part, that “...Gamblers Anonymous ought never endorse, finance, or lend the Gamblers Anonymous name to any related facility or outside enterprise...” Unity Step Ten then goes on to state, in part, that “...Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues...” Taken together, this clearly means that anything that is not a well-defined part of the Gamblers Anonymous program is considered “outside” the fellowship and because of this, the fellowship neither has opinions about, nor alliances with (a) other 12-Step programs, (b) outside gambling cessation entities such as compulsive gambling “councils”, (c) inpatient or residential treatment centers related to gambling, or (d) therapists specializing in compulsive gambling.

At the group level, this means two things. First and foremost, it is against the Guidance Code for groups to use, display, or distribute literature originating from any of these so-called outside enterprises even if their motive to help compulsive gamblers is admirable. By putting in this restriction, our fellowship is better able to control the messages we are putting out to our members and prevent the dissemination of information that may inadvertently contradict, or even undermine, our philosophy with regard to compulsive gambling. Gamblers Anonymous maintains and sells a large array of literature from its International and Regional Service Offices. This literature represents the fellowship's current thoughts on compulsive gambling and the best ways of responding to the needs of the recovering gambler. Each piece of literature was created either by committees or individual members of the fellowship and deemed "approved" based on not one, but two votes of our Board of Trustees. In addition to approved literature, there is a category of literature deemed "appropriate" which consists of such things as local area member telephone lists, meeting and direction lists, flyers regarding events sponsored by the local groups, local Intergroups, surrounding area Intergroups, or conference committees.

Second, it is strongly recommended that members refrain from endorsing, or even discussing, outside enterprises while giving their therapy. While it is not the intent of the program to limit free speech or stifle discussions that may seem benign to most recovering gamblers, those who are early in their recovery or have little experience with our fellowship may infer that we have special relationships with, or endorse, other 12-Step programs, certain inpatient or residential treatment centers, or specific therapists.

Unfortunately, there are times during meetings when these issues become a problem. Reading from unapproved literature is often done inadvertently or innocently to make a particular point, although in very rare cases, it may be done as an act of defiance. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, reading newspaper articles about compulsive gambling, reading literature that a member published, reading literature that is proprietary to another 12-Step Program (i.e. Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book), or even reading from the Bible or other religious books. To a lesser extent, the same holds true for members who endorse outside entities such as treatment centers or therapists as part of their therapy. Doing this tends to subvert the program and may make other members uncomfortable.

We have found that most of these issues can be prevented by simply announcing at the beginning of each meeting that "...our Guidance Code makes it clear that members should not read from, display or distribute anything other than G.A. approved or G.A. appropriate literature and to please ask a trusted servant if you are uncertain as to whether or not an item meets this standard..." A similar admonition can be made for discussions about outside entities such as treatment centers or therapists. Experience has shown us that doing it at the start of the meeting often prevents uncomfortable moments during the meeting itself. However, if a member still insists on violating these rules even after these opening admonitions, the group secretary or meeting chair should diplomatically explain the rules a second time, and only after the member continues to violate the rules should they politely be asked to leave the meeting.

The Issue of Self-Exclusion

Another area of concern is groups encouraging other members, especially those early in their recovery, to execute "self-exclusion" agreements with gambling establishments. Groups should never encourage, or even discuss, such activities during a meeting. First, this has nothing to do with the Gamblers Anonymous program; it is considered an outside issue. Second, there have been occasions where members who signed such agreements with encouragement of other members put themselves in peril when they later elected to violate these agreements by returning

to gambling. These discussions are best left for private conversations which occur outside of the meeting.

Problems with Group Formation or Structure

There is a specific process for groups to come into existence (see Sections II and III). Rarely however, there have been cases in which groups have come into existence simply by splitting off from other groups without the full knowledge of the fellowship. This may be done innocently although in some cases, it is done because the group wishes to follow its own guidelines rather than that of the fellowship but still wants to hold itself out as being part of Gamblers Anonymous. Instead of doing things the proper way and informing the International Service Office of their existence and purchasing their meeting materials directly from them, they neglect to do this and instead, obtain their meeting materials from other groups that already exist. In some cases, separate meetings within a given area may actually maintain common supplies of literature and other paraphernalia in order to save money. To be clear, each group must stand on its own and such rogue meetings are neither recognized by the fellowship nor will they be listed by the International Service Office.

Another issue that sometimes arises is the co-mingling of different groups' treasuries or the "sharing" of a single treasurer between or among groups. Not only does this violate Section 3 of the Guidance Code, it allows one person to control several treasuries at the same time, potentially giving that person ample means to either gamble with it or pay personal debts or expenses. All recognized meetings must maintain separate treasuries and separate treasurers if they are to be recognized by the fellowship.

Lack of Separation of Spirituality and Religiosity

Gamblers Anonymous is unquestionably a spiritual program and our literature is replete with references to God or a higher power. In fact, every meeting is either begun or ended with the Serenity Prayer. Groups, however, must be very careful not to introduce a particular religion or religious philosophy into their meetings as it may offend members who are not of that religious persuasion. Reading from religious materials or enabling group prayers other than the Serenity Prayer is strictly forbidden in meetings. If the group Secretary feels powerless to enforce this, they should seek the assistance of their Trustee(s).

Violations of Anonymity

Unity Step 12 begins with "...Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the Gamblers Anonymous program..." The fact that compulsive gamblers are able to remain anonymous while seeking recovery may be the biggest reason a compulsive gambler would consider joining and remaining a part of our fellowship. The importance of anonymity for both the member and the fellowship must be reinforced at the beginning of every meeting with such sayings as "What you hear here, what you see here, when you leave here, let it stay here". Members must be admonished never to share anything that happens at a particular meeting with anyone outside of the group whether they are members of the fellowship or not. This is especially true for information that is gathered during Pressure Relief Group Meetings. Furthermore, repeating anything that occurs at a meeting with anyone outside of the group not only violates a member's anonymity, it can quickly become a topic of gossip. Such behavior should be immediately addressed with the offender. If the issue is not resolvable, it should be brought to the Secretary's attention privately, and if necessary, the Trustee(s) of that particular area in a private conversation. In addition, anything that violates a

member's anonymity must never be repeated or discussed openly during that area's Intergroup meeting.

Members should also be cautioned to always protect their, as well as the fellowship's anonymity in public venues as well as on social media. Meetings must never be taped, even for other members, and members should be encouraged not to take notes of other members' therapy unless it is destroyed immediately after the meeting. No member should ever feel it necessary to leave a particular group, or even the fellowship, because their anonymity was compromised.

Questions often arise regarding telephone or virtual (internet) meetings. Gamblers Anonymous provides internationally recognized telephone meetings every day of the week. These meetings are moderated by members approved by the fellowship and take great care in protecting callers' anonymity. During extraordinary times (i.e. the 2020-2022 COVID-19 Pandemic), some individual groups set up their own telephone or video meetings as a way of staying connected with one another and they worked extremely well. However, it should be emphasized that even with the most rigorous of measures, anonymity may not always be adequately protected. This is especially true for video meetings where there is a potential for outsiders, or even a member of the fellowship, to not only record the voices but also the faces of everyone attending the meeting. If a group chooses to utilize this type of meetings, all attendees should be reminded not to discuss any crimes for which they may still be prosecuted or anything of such a sensitive nature that it could potentially harm that member, or any other members should that information be surreptitiously recorded and leaked. Members who are especially concerned about their anonymity should be encouraged to turn their cameras off and/or change their screen name.

Lending of Money/Solicitation of Loans

Although compulsive gambling is considered an emotional problem according to our literature, many compulsive gamblers join the fellowship with crippling financial problems that may remain for a significant time during their recovery. Although our program is quite clear that bankruptcy and borrowing or lending of money is detrimental to our recovery, there are occasions where a member will solicit another member for a loan, or a member will take pity on another member and offer to lend them small amounts of money or even take over their debts as a "receiver." Not only does the lending of money go against everything the program teaches, it can create uncomfortable situations within the group itself if those members eventually have a falling out over the debt. When members are made uncomfortable over a solicitation for money or an unaffected member finds out that this practice is going on in their group, the subject should immediately be discussed with the offender. If the issue is not resolvable, it should be brought to the Secretary's attention, and if necessary, the Trustee(s) of that particular area. It should be emphasized that borrowing and lending money is just as likely to occur outside a meeting when members meet socially as during the meeting itself so members should never let their guard down to solicitations. If we are serious about supporting the recovery of other compulsive gamblers, we must set a personal boundary to never lend them money.

Intra-Fellowship Romances

We know that Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from a gambling problem. We also know that our primary purpose is to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. However, an unintended consequence of these things may be intra-fellowship romances (popularly known as the "13th Step") that unexpectedly arise. While there is no specific prohibition against this, members who enter into

such a relationship may put both their recovery and the unity of the group in peril. Because of this, both parties should give considerable thought as to how that may affect group dynamics if they attend the same home meeting. While there have been successes and even long-lasting marriages as the result of intra-fellowship romances, they can also have deleterious effects on both the group and the individuals should those romances subsequently fail and hard feelings develop. This is especially true if one of the participants of the failed romance then enters into the same type of relationship with yet another member of the fellowship.

Compulsive gamblers have even been known to leave the fellowship as a result of these failed romances. It is recommended that if members enter into these relationships, they should make it a point, whenever possible, to attend separate meetings within their geographical area.

Abusive or Harassing Behavior in and Outside Meetings

Behaviors that disrupt the group's ability to carry out our primary purpose or directly endanger those present in the meeting, threaten unity and recovery. It goes without saying that no compulsive gambler should ever be driven from a meeting or the program itself because of abusive or harassing behavior by one GA member toward another. Regretfully, these behaviors often go on outside of normal meeting times where the group has little or no control. However, when members of the group are made aware of these situations, they should not just accept an affected member's potential decision to leave the group but rather, they should attempt to solve the problem the moment they are made aware of it whether it is going on during the meeting or outside of it.

There are no absolute standards that constitute abuse or harassment of another individual. The items listed here are but a partial list of examples of abusive or harassing behaviors:

- Use of profanity if there is a group conscience in place that forbids the use of profanity.
- Being intoxicated or under the influence of drugs while at a meeting.
- Sexual harassment including unwanted romantic advances by one member toward another.
- Stalking members outside the meeting.
- Verbal and physical threats to other members either during or after the meeting.
- Bullying behavior during or after the meeting.
- Expressing racial or ethnic intolerance to another member.
- Expressing religious intolerance to another member.
- Expressing intolerance of a member's sexual orientation or gender identification.
- Expressing intolerance of a member's political views.
- Approaching or pressuring other G.A. members for money or loans.

When the secretary of the group is made aware of the problem, there are a number of options he or she can take. The easiest way of handling it is to speak to the offender privately. The secretary should carefully explain why that particular behavior is inappropriate and threatening to both the object of the harassment and the unity of the room, and should make it very clear that moving forward, the member is expected to change that behavior. This discussion should take place immediately after the problem is identified, especially in cases of alleged sexual harassment. Letting it linger is neither fair to the person making the allegations nor the subject of the allegations.

If this behavior occurs in the middle of a meeting, the secretary is within his or her rights to ask the member to immediately desist or leave the room. If the member does not desist or leave, a group conscience may ultimately result in temporary exclusion from the group until such a time

as the member is willing to change their behavior. The group secretary should also contact the Area Trustee to assist in any further interventions.

In cases of threatened or actual violence, secretaries should immediately call the police and not try to handle it themselves. Threatened violence can be a verbal threat to harm or kill the member, or it can be physically aggressive behavior such that the member feels the accused person will harm them. It cannot simply be rude or offensive behavior.

Section XII. Ending or Relocating a Group

There are times when it becomes necessary to either close a group because of lack of attendance or move the group to a different location because of loss of availability of the meeting space. In order to preserve order and avoid confusion, the following guidelines should be observed:

1. Other than under extraordinary circumstances (i.e. violations of the Guidance Code or other Trustee decisions causing a group to not be recognized by the fellowship), groups can only be disbanded or moved as a result of a group conscience.
2. When the decision has been made to close a group or move it to another location, the group Secretary should...
 - a. Notify the affected meeting facility at least 3 to 4 weeks in advance of the final meeting date.
 - b. Make sure that rent and other group-related expenses have been paid up to the effective date of the closure or move.
 - c. Notify the Intergroup (if there is one), as well as the Area Trustee(s) of the effective date of closure or move.
 - d. Notify the International Service Office so they can update their meetings page on their website.
3. A member designated by the group Secretary should continue to go to the old meeting site at the listed meeting time for at least 2 weeks after the effective date of the closure or move in order to make sure a member or newcomer needing a meeting does not show up only to find an empty meeting space. In this instance, the member or newcomer can be directed to the closest available meeting.
4. If a group is closed, the group Secretary or Treasurer should take any existing funds and literature and turn them over to the area's Intergroup if there is one. If there is no Intergroup, the funds and literature should be sent directly to the International Service Office.

Section XIII. Gam-Anon

Gam-Anon, established in 1958, is a 12-Step self-help fellowship of men and women who are husbands, wives, children, relatives, and close friends of compulsive gamblers. There are currently over 200 Gam-Anon groups throughout the world and membership continues to flourish. The primary purpose of Gam-Anon is to welcome, assist, and comfort those who have been affected by compulsive gamblers as well as to help them understand what compulsive gambling is. This is all accomplished irrespective of whether their compulsive gambler actually joins Gamblers Anonymous. Conversely, Gamblers Anonymous groups often advise new members of the availability of Gam-Anon meetings for members of their immediate families.

Although Gam-Anon has historically maintained a close relationship with the fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous and participates with them in regional and international conferences, it should be emphasized that Gam-Anon is a completely separate organization from Gamblers Anonymous and has its own headquarters, corporate structure, rules and procedures, and literature. When Gam-Anon members attend Gamblers Anonymous meetings that are classified

as “open meetings,” they do so only as “guests” and are neither permitted to participate in any part of the meeting nor donate to that group’s treasury. As with any open meeting that has guests, if a Gamblers Anonymous member is not comfortable with the presence of a Gam-Anon member during their therapy, the Gam-Anon member will politely be asked to temporarily leave the room.

On occasion, Gamblers Anonymous members and Gam-Anon members from a particular area do come together and hold what is commonly known as a “combined meeting” (see Types of Meetings). These may occur on a regular basis (i.e. monthly or bi-monthly) or as an occasional event that supplements regularly-scheduled Gamblers Anonymous meetings. The purpose of a combined meeting is the same as any other Gamblers Anonymous or Gam-Anon meeting, but by holding them together, individual Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon members have an opportunity to learn and understand more about the respective fellowships by alternating the readings from each other’s literature and sharing individual experiences. It is ultimately up to the combined meeting how they wish to handle donations, but it is recommended that all donations be in separate receptacles and accounted for separately. In addition, if the combined meeting is being held *in lieu* of a regularly scheduled meeting, there should be an announcement at the beginning of the combined meeting that a regular meeting of Gamblers Anonymous will be made available in another part of the building, if feasible, for those members who desire one.

Section XIV. The Board of Trustees

The fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous is guided by a Board of Trustees consisting of members of Gamblers Anonymous, elected by peers in their respective geographic areas, who have completely abstained from gambling for a period of two years and have had regular attendance at Gamblers Anonymous meetings.

According to the Guidance Code, the Board of Trustees’ primary function is to ensure the most effective exchange of thoughts and ideas between all Gamblers Anonymous groups and to act in an official and executive capacity on all matters affecting Gamblers Anonymous as a whole except matters coming under the jurisdiction of the Board of Regents or International Executive Secretary. They are also guardians of the most important precepts of the fellowship, the twelve steps of recovery and the twelve steps of unity and must be guided by these in all their decisions.

In addition to their responsibilities to Gamblers Anonymous as a whole, the Trustees have the following duties to groups in the area they represent:

- Attend as many of the various group meetings within their area as possible but at least 39 meetings per year. Where physical attendance is not possible, keep in regular communication through the mail and/or telephone.
- Be available to all members and groups in their Trustee area for advice and guidance and work with their trusted servants to correct issues that do not conform to the Guidance Code or decisions of the Board of Trustees.
- Attend and support local Gamblers Anonymous functions such as mini- conferences, dinner dances, picnics, etc.
- Offer assistance to any group that has identified a problem.
- Make groups in their Trustee area aware of and encourage the use of the tools of Gamblers Anonymous such as Pressure Relief Group pamphlets, the Group Handbook, sponsorship pamphlets, the Gamblers Anonymous Blue Book, public relations materials, and all other Gamblers Anonymous approved literature.
- Attend Intergroup meetings in their Trustee area on a regular basis.

- Encourage groups in their Trustee area to submit agenda items for the semi-annual Board of Trustee meetings as well as to bring all upcoming agenda items to the attention of groups in their Trustee area for input.
- Offer assistance to any members desiring to start a new Gamblers Anonymous group.

Groups are also encouraged to access the Trustee Web Site (www.trusteewebsite.com) for such things as Trustee meeting agendas, Trustee committee reports, reference materials, information on the Board of Regents, and the Trustee Line (a communications tools available to past and present Trustees for the purpose of airing opinions about issues that affect the Trustees and Gamblers Anonymous as a whole).

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS®
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE OFFICE
1306 MONTE VISTA AVENUE #5
UPLAND, CALIFORNIA 91786
PHONE: (909) 931-9056
FAX: (909) 931-9059
WEBSITE: www.gamblersanonymous.org
E-MAIL: isomain@gamblersanonymous.org
FOR MEETING INFORMATION
IN YOUR AREA CALL
(855) 2-CALL-GA
(855) 222-5542