

Be a Sponsor: Your Questions Answered

*“The focus of a member, or members,
or the group as a whole on the recovery
of an individual”*

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Introduction: What is sponsorship?

At its simplest it is one-to-one help for a member from another member to help them on the road to recovery.

It is the focus of a member, or members, or the group as a whole, on the recovery of an individual.

The responsibility to sponsor a member, usually a newcomer, is unwritten and informal, but it is the heart of the GA approach to recovery and to leading a normal life through the GA Recovery Programme and Just for Today.

It is a responsibility that stems from a very real need; the need for us to avoid making that first bet. We know from experience, that we become strengthened when we share what we have with others who may need and ask for help. The concept of sponsorship dates back to the earliest days of our fellowship.

In many successful groups, sponsorship has become one of the most important planned activities of the members. Some sponsorship suggestions follow.

This booklet is not a rulebook, only guidance based on the experience of sponsors themselves.

What are the benefits of sponsorship?

Sponsorship is just one part of GA's goal of helping members to avoid the first bet. For some, attendance at meetings is enough, but to others a helping hand is essential. It may be a very small, gentle help, a full-blown daily boost that is needed, or something between the two.

Isn't sponsorship a crutch to prop up the newcomer?

It could be, but this booklet should answer most questions.

Today, more than ever, we need to feel wanted, and to a newcomer, knowing that someone has taken the trouble to help them, someone who until recently was a perfect

stranger, can make a dramatic difference to his or her attitude.

It can be the first step to having an open mind about the benefits of the GA way of recovery.

How does sponsorship differ from Twelfth-Step work?

Twelfth-Step work - talking to, or calling on, a compulsive gambler who has asked for help, and telling them about the GA Recovery Programme - can be considered the beginning of sponsorship.

Obviously, sponsorship and continuing interest in another compulsive gambler can only develop when they are willing to be helped. When they have accepted the fact that

they are a compulsive gambler and have made a decision to seek a way out of their dilemma.

Sponsorship differs from the initial *Twelfth-Step* contact; it involves continuing responsibility and interest in helping the new member adjust to a way of life without gambling.

How does sponsorship help the newcomer?

It gives the assurance that there is at least one person who understands their problem fully, that there is at least one person to whom they can turn without embarrassment when doubts or problems linked to gambling arise.

Does sponsorship help the sponsor?

Yes: most emphatically!

It helps by demonstrating the satisfaction that comes from assuming responsibility for someone other than oneself. Sponsorship satisfies the desire to help another human being get through what they have been through themselves.

Sponsorship strengthens the recovery of the more experienced member. The act of sharing by being a sponsor provides the most dramatic proof that to help another is to help oneself. It helps the once self-centred gambler to improve the quality of his or her own recovery.

It helps to avoid complacency by being continually reminded of the problems created by compulsive gambling.

How does sponsorship help the GA group?

The primary purpose of a GA group is to carry the message of the GA Recovery Programme to compulsive gamblers who want and request help. Group meetings are one way in which the purpose is advanced. Sponsorship is another, often more direct approach, to the same problem.

The concept of sponsorship can be broadened to include working with compulsive gamblers in institutions and through correspondence with isolated members who may not be able to attend regularly (or at all).

Sponsorship helps keep more members involved.

What does a sponsor do?

Within the limits of the sponsor's own experience, these are some of the things a sponsor can do (not in any order of importance).

It is not a failing to be either willing or able to carry out only some of these; sponsors are *not* qualified counsellors; they can only speak from their own experience and should never try to go into problem areas about which they do not have experience.

Help towards an understanding of the Twelve Steps of Recovery.

No one in the early stages of their recovery can strictly “Work the Steps”. Everyone, however, benefits from reading and talking about them and what they mean. Sponsors can guide the newcomer towards Steps Meetings and to reading GA literature that explains the Steps more fully.

Encourage the daily use of Just for Today.

One of the key sets of advice which can be followed simply, one day at a time.

Be a living example of the effect of the GA Recovery Programme.

Sponsors can demonstrate by their own example and story what GA has meant to them, including honest admissions of their failures along the way, and how every fail can be part

of the learning process that is the continuous road to recovery.

Encourage regular attendance and visits to other groups.

Attendance at other meetings assists the newcomer in having broader views and interpretations of the GA Recovery Programme.

Many meetings make it easy, few meetings make it difficult, no meetings make it impossible.

Encourage an open mind.

A frequent reason for newcomers to stop coming is an inability to accept what they occasionally see as bad or immature behaviour by members.

Sponsors can do a great deal to encourage the newcomer to keep an open mind when this happens. They can also assist greatly the newcomer who is, at first, not convinced that he is a compulsive gambler.

Make introductions to other members.

Meeting other members, and making friends, is often a long forgotten skill. (Remember how friendless we were when we were gambling?).

Be available for counsel and guidance.

Probably the most important, and yet the most difficult for the sponsor to interpret.

Just how far should a sponsor go in giving advice? When does counselling and advising on the GA Recovery Programme become marriage or financial guidance?

Some of the questions in this booklet may help, but generally it is best to stick to the shared understanding of the experience of being a compulsive gambler and its effect on the sponsor and his or her family.

Ask for help from other more experienced members of the group and other sponsors faced with the same problems.

Explain anonymity and the GA traditions.

The sponsor stresses the importance of the tradition of personal anonymity and the significance of other GA traditions in the Unity Programme.

Talk to the relatives.

When asked, explain the GA

Recovery Programme and how they can contribute to their loved one's success on the GA Recovery Programme.

Maintain personal awareness of the purpose of sponsorship.

In all the relationships with a newcomer, the sponsor attempts to keep uppermost in his or her mind the fact that it is the GA Recovery Programme and not the sponsor's personal talent or position, that is important.

Keep the group secretary informed.

Except for confidential matters, the group should know about the sponsorship of a member. Keep the group secretary up to date with the newcomer's progress.

Explain Twelfth-Stepping.

Finally, the sponsor encourages the newcomer to work with other compulsive gamblers on themselves, as soon as they are ready and willing to do so.

Are there definite sponsorship techniques?

Members are free to approach sponsorship based on their own experience and personality.

Some sponsors adopt a *take it or leave it* approach with newcomers. Others exhibit extreme patience and personal interest in those they are sponsoring. Still others are somewhat casual, content to let the new member take the initiative in asking questions and seeking help in special situations.

Each approach has been successful.

Each fails occasionally.

Only the sponsor can decide which will be most effective in a particular case. The experienced sponsor knows the importance of flexibility in working with newcomers. They avoid depending on a single approach and may try a number of different ones with the same person.

Can a sponsor be too firm with a new member who may still be gambling?

Some sponsors believe in being firm with a still gambling new member. They describe the GA Recovery Programme, as they understand it. They explain what it has meant to them. They point out that there is no known cure for compulsive gambling, but that it appears to be

a form of illness that *can* be arrested. Having done these things, they leave the next move up to the new member. If the individual does not reach an immediate decision to join GA, this type of sponsor does not usually proceed.

This approach is not totally unsympathetic. Many members respect it and recognise it as an attempt to be completely factual about GA and to avoid emotional overtones. The GA Recovery Programme is based on certain tested principles, which the newcomer disregards at his own risk. More experienced members recognise that sometimes an excess of firmness may disturb a newcomer, so they may temper it with understanding and sympathy.

Can a sponsor be overprotective?

In their anxiety to help a newcomer on the programme, some sponsors may tend to be overprotective. They worry unduly about those

they sponsor, and smother them with attention. In doing so, they run the risk of having a newcomer depend too much on *them* rather than on the GA Recovery Programme.

The most effective sponsors recognise that a newcomer must eventually stand on his or her own two feet and make their own decisions and that there is a difference between helping someone to their feet and insisting on holding them up thereafter.

Overprotectiveness may also annoy the newcomer to the point where they resent the attempts to help them and may turn away from GA.

Can a sponsor be too casual?

Some sponsors prefer to spend time with the newcomer if they ask for it, but to not call them

between meetings. If a newcomer is inclined to be timid or reserved by nature they may conclude that the group and the sponsor are not interested in helping them.

Many present members say they did not make a firm decision to adopt the GA Recovery Programme until months or years after their first contact with GA, simply because they were allowed to drift away from the group.

How does the sponsor explain the GA Recovery Programme?

The sponsor will want to explain GA in the manner that comes most naturally to them. Experience suggests that it is generally more realistic not to expect the newcomer to absorb

very much of the GA Recovery Programme during their first few meetings.

Many sponsors stress the fact that GA has one primary purpose; to help compulsive gamblers arrest their gambling. They remind the newcomer that Step One, the admission that they are a compulsive gambler and their life has become unmanageable, is the key to the programme, and that many GA members base their success largely on acceptance of the first step. They emphasise that GA offers a practical programme that works. They underline the fact that only the new member themselves can decide whether or not GA can help them.

Nearly all members who work with newcomers interpret the GA Recovery Programme in terms of their own experience. They assure the new member that no one is a spokesman for GA, and that each person is

perfectly free to develop their own concept of the programme.

Some sponsors place more stress on the spiritual side of the programme than others. Nearly all direct the attention of the newcomer to the fact that in GA the concept of a *power greater than ourselves* is one which people of any faith - or no faith - can and do accept with complete harmony.

The most satisfactory interpretation of the GA Recovery Programme develops in all that GA has to offer.

How should a sponsor deal with relapses?

It can be discouraging to work with a newcomer, see him or her grasp the

programme for a period of time, and then see them have a relapse and start gambling again. The sponsor may be tempted to consider the member ungrateful, and may even be tempted to give up on them.

The newcomer may be equally discouraged and bewildered, finding it very difficult to face facts honestly, to analyse what led to the slip, and to return to the fellowship for a fresh start.

This is a time for self-searching for both sponsor and sponsored. One of the mysteries of GA is why some grasp the programme immediately and hold it securely, while others stumble before the GA Recovery Programme becomes meaningful to them. More experienced members know from experience that it is unwise to predict which newcomers will have trouble remaining on the programme and which will not. Most individuals and

groups emphasise to a newcomer that they will continue to be welcome in GA.

Successful sponsorship depends to a large degree on the understanding and sympathy that the individual and group offer to the member who slips despite their effort to make the programme work.

How can the sponsor help the newcomer's family?

By explaining the GA Recovery Programme to the partner, parents or relatives. By pointing out that most members have found it easier to make the transition to a life without gambling when their family took an interest in GA. In general, the sponsor can encourage the newcomer's family to give him or her a chance

to make good in GA regardless of the number of times they may have failed previously.

The sponsor will also let the family know of the existence of Gam-Anon and its help for relatives of compulsive gamblers who may or may not be in GA.

Should a sponsor lend money to a newcomer (or directly to the family)?

GA has but one primary purpose: to help compulsive gamblers recover from their gambling problem. GA is not a philanthropic or job finding society. Being a member, and having some feelings of guilt about our own past, does not mean that we should respond to problems that the newcomer or their family are suffering by lending them money.

This does not mean that the newcomer who turns to GA and is in need of money, clothes, or employment is in the wrong place. GA offers the most important thing the newcomer needs; help to recover from the gambling problem, and to return to a normal way of thinking and living.

Dealing with money is such an important part of a gambler's recovery - it is, after all, the fuel on which compulsive gambling feeds - that lending or even giving has never been found to work. It creates many more problems than it solves and is always discouraged in GA.

How can a sponsor help the newcomer who rejects help?

In such cases, there is little a sponsor can do except to assure the new member of their willingness to help when and if needed.

Sometimes it is simply that the sponsor-newcomer relationship is not working. This may be difficult for the sponsor to accept, especially if the sponsor has been successful with others before. However, a change of sponsor, by introducing the newcomer to another member who may share more of the newcomer's background and interests, may be all that is needed to help the newcomer back to the GA way.

Sponsorship is flexible and sponsors themselves are flexible in working with new people. It is however, as much a mistake to force unwanted help on a newcomer as it is to refuse to help him.

Can a newcomer change sponsors?

Of course. In fact, an effort should be made to expose a newcomer to as many more experienced members as possible to give the new member an opportunity to select the sponsor with whom they feel most comfortable and who can be most helpful to them.

One of the tests of the sponsor's own recovery is the way the sponsor handles the apparent rejection when a newcomer changes sponsor sometimes in an immature way.

How long should a member be on the programme before becoming a sponsor?

The most successful sponsors are men and women who have been in GA long enough to acquire a mature understanding of the GA Recovery Programme. The more experienced member is usually, but not always, able to work more effectively with newcomers than the member who has been *on the programme* for only a short time.

Time is a factor, but not the only factor, in successful sponsorship. Of equal importance is an individual's capacity for understanding and patience, a willingness to devote time and effort to the new member and by their own personal example of how GA works.

Can any member be a sponsor?

There is no selection procedure to be a sponsor. Any member can help to advance the basic concept of sponsorship, which is to help the new member make the difficult transition to a life without gambling in any form.

Some groups make the selection of sponsors a group responsibility and this is encouraged as part of the principle of *group self-government* that is part of the Unity Programme.

Can a member sponsor more than one person at a time?

Members differ in their capacity to handle sponsorship work, and must take care not to become overconfident about their personal

talents in this field. As in so many areas of GA activity, common sense is the best guide.

Most present members of Gamblers Anonymous owe their lives today to the fact that someone else took a special interest in them and are willing to share a great gift with them; the GA way of life.

.... and the reward for the many sponsors in GA is the knowledge that they have helped other human beings to recover from one of the most insidious, progressive diseases; compulsive gambling.

Notes, phone numbers and contacts

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things
I cannot change...
Courage to change
the things I can...
and wisdom
to know the difference.*

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