



Gamblers Anonymous

England, Wales & Ulster

Questions and Answers about the Problem of Compulsive Gambling and the GA Recovery Programme

FOREWORD

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

This booklet represents an effort by its members to answer some of the questions that are often asked about the nature of compulsive gambling and the GA Fellowship.

After reading this booklet, you may have further questions. For more information, call the National Information Line or use the website (see the back cover).

MOST COMPULSIVE GAMBLERS ANSWER YES TO AT LEAST SEVEN OF THESE QUESTIONS.

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Do you lose time from work due to gambling? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Is gambling making your domestic life unhappy? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Is gambling affecting your reputation? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Do you feel remorse after gambling? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Do you gamble to get money with which to pay debts or otherwise to solve financial difficulties? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Does gambling cause a decrease in your ambition or efficiency? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. After losing, do you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. After a win do you have a strong urge to return and win more? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Do you often gamble until all your money is gone? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 10. Do you borrow to finance your gambling? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Do you ever sell things to finance your gambling? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Are you reluctant to use “gambling” money for normal expenditures? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Does gambling make you careless of the welfare of your family? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Do you gamble for longer than you planned? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Do you gamble to escape worry or trouble? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Have you committed, or considered committing, an illegal act to finance your gambling? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Does gambling cause you to have difficulty sleeping? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Do arguments, disappointments or frustrations create an urge within you to gamble? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. Do you have an urge to celebrate good fortune with a few hours’ gambling? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. Have you considered self-destruction as a result of your gambling? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

The fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous is the outgrowth of a chance meeting between two men in January 1957. These men had a truly baffling history of trouble and misery due to an obsession to gamble. They began to meet regularly and, as the months passed, neither had returned to gambling.

They concluded from their discussions that, in order to prevent a relapse, it was necessary to bring about certain personality changes within themselves.

In order to accomplish this, they used for a guide certain spiritual principles which had been utilised by thousands of people who were recovering from compulsive addictions.

Also, in order to maintain their own abstinence, they felt that it was vitally important that they carry the message of hope to other compulsive gamblers.

As a result of favourable publicity by a prominent newspaper columnist and TV commentator, the first group meeting of Gamblers Anonymous was held on 13 September 1957 in Los Angeles, California. Since that time, the movement has grown steadily and groups are flourishing in many other areas.

In May 1964, a member of Gamblers Anonymous, on business from the USA in England, attended a meeting addressed by the Secretary of the Churches Council of Gambling. The two men accepted that they must work together to establish the movement in Britain and a group was formed in London on 10 July 1964.

COMPULSIVE GAMBLING AND GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

What is compulsive gambling?

There are many and varying interpretations of compulsive gambling. The explanation that seems most acceptable to GA members is that compulsive gambling is an illness, progressive in its nature, which can never be cured, but can be arrested.

Before coming to GA, many compulsive gamblers thought of themselves as morally weak or just “no good”. The GA concept is that the compulsive gambler is a very sick person who can recover by following a very simple programme, to the best of his or her own ability, that has proved successful for thousands of other men and women with a similar problem.

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

To accept the fact that compulsive gambling is a progressive illness, and to have the desire to get well. Our experience has shown that the GA Programme will always work for anyone who wants to stop gambling. It will seldom work for the man or woman who cannot, or will not, squarely face the facts about this illness.

Only you can make that decision. Most people turn to GA when they become willing to admit that gambling has them licked. Also, in GA a compulsive gambler is described as a person whose gambling has caused growing and continuing problems in many departments of life.

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

Can a compulsive gambler ever gamble normally again?

No. The first small bet to a problem gambler is like the first small drink to an alcoholic.

Sooner or later comes the fall back into the old, destructive pattern.

Once a person has crossed the invisible line into irresponsible gambling, then it seems to be impossible to regain control. After abstaining for a few months, some of our members have tried some small bet experiments, always with disastrous results. The old obsession inevitably returned.

Our GA experience seems to point to these alternatives: to gamble, risking progressive deterioration; or not to gamble, and develop a spiritual way of life.

Does this mean I can't even buy a lottery ticket or play a game for table stakes?

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

Why can't a compulsive gambler simply use his or her willpower to stop gambling?

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

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

Often families and friends of these people have asked us to intercede, but we have never been able to be of any real help. Actually, sometimes we felt we held back a member's eventual recovery by giving this unsolicited attention. It all goes back to the basic principle that a gambler ought to want help before being approached by us.

I only go on gambling binges periodically.

Do I need GA?

Only you can determine whether or not, or how much, you need GA. However, most periodic gamblers who have joined GA tell us that, though their gambling binges were periodic, the intervals between were not periods of constructive thinking. Symptomatic of these periods were nervousness, irritability, frustration, indecision and a continued breakdown in personal relationships. These same people have often found the GA Programme a guide to spiritual progress towards the elimination of character defects.

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

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

If I join GA, won't everyone know I am a compulsive gambler?

Most people made quite a name for themselves as fully-fledged gamblers, and by the time they turned to GA, their gambling was not usually a well-kept secret. It would, then, be unusual if the good news of their abstinence from gambling did not cause comment. However, no disclosure of any affiliation with GA can rightfully be made by anyone but the member themselves. Even then, it should be done in a way that will not harm the GA Fellowship.

How does a person stop gambling through the GA Programme?

This is done by bringing about a progressive personality change from within. This can be accomplished by having faith in, and trying to understand, the basic concepts of the GA Recovery Programme.

There are no shortcuts to gaining this faith and understanding. To recover from one of the most baffling, insidious, compulsive addictions will require diligent effort. Honesty, open-mindedness and willingness are the key words in our recovery.

Can a person recover just by reading literature or medical books on the problem of compulsive gambling?

Sometimes, but not usually. The GA Programme works best for the individual when it is recognised and accepted as a programme involving other people. Working with other compulsive gamblers in a GA group, the individual seems to find the necessary understanding and support. There is an ability to talk of past experiences and present problems in a comfortable environment. Instead of feeling alone and misunderstood, there is a feeling of being needed and accepted.

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

Among GA members, there seems to be a predominance of those who work on their own, or have little personal supervision. Obviously, this allows more freedom to gamble. The occupations of the other members, including those at school or at home, are extremely varied. It seems safe to say that compulsive gambling has nothing to do with the occupation or age of the individual.

It apparently arises from an inner imbalance rather than from external factors.

Does GA look upon compulsive gambling as a moral vice?

No.

Is knowing why we gambled important?

Not as a rule. Of the many GA members who have had extended psychiatric treatment, none have found a knowledge of why they gambled to be of value in stopping gambling.

What, however, are some of the factors that might cause a person to become a compulsive gambler?

GA members, in considering this perplexing question, feel these are some of the possible reasons:

INABILITY AND UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT REALITY. Hence, the escape into the dreamworld of gambling.

EMOTIONAL INSECURITY. Here a compulsive gambler finds emotional comfort only when “in action”. It is not uncommon to hear a GA member say, “The only place I really felt like I belonged was when I was in a gambling environment. There I felt secure and comfortable. No great demands were made upon

me. I knew I was destroying myself yet, at the same time, I had a certain sense of security.”

IMMATURITY. A desire to have all the good things in life without any great effort seems a common characteristic of the problem gambler. Many GA members accept the fact that they were unwilling to grow up.

Subconsciously they felt they could avoid mature responsibility through wagering on the spin of a wheel or the turn of a card, playing a machine or clicking a mouse, and so the struggle to escape responsibility finally became a subconscious obsession.

Also, a compulsive gambler seems to have a strong inner urge to be a “big shot” and needs to have a feeling of being all-powerful. There is a willingness to do anything (often of an antisocial nature) to maintain a personal image for others to see.

Then, too, there is the theory that compulsive gamblers subconsciously want to lose to punish themselves. There is evidence among GA members to support this theory.

What is the dreamworld of the compulsive gambler?

This is a rather common characteristic of us compulsive gamblers when still gambling. We spend a lot of time creating images of the great and wonderful things we are going to do when we make the big win. We often see ourselves as charming and charitable fellows.

We may dream of providing our family and friends with new cars, expensive holidays and other gifts. We picture ourselves leading lives of luxury, made possible by the huge sums of money we will accrue from our “system”. Homes in the country and abroad, celebrity friends and designer clothes are a few of the wonderful things that are just around the corner when we finally make a big killing.

Pathetically, however, there never seems to be a win big enough to make even the smallest dream come true. When we succeed, we gamble to dream still greater dreams. When we fail, we gamble in reckless desperation, and the depths of our misery are fathomless as our dreamworld comes crashing down.

Sadly, we struggle back, dream more dreams and, of course, suffer more misery. No one can convince us that our great schemes will not some day come true.

We believe they will for, without this dreamworld, life for us would not be tolerable.

Isn't compulsive gambling basically a financial problem?

No. Compulsive gambling seems to be an emotional problem. When in the grip of this illness, we create mountains of apparently insoluble problems.

Of course, there are financial problems, but we also have to face family problems, employment problems, or problems involving ourselves with the law.

We lose our friends, and relatives have us on their personal blacklist.

Of the many serious problems we create, the financial problems seem the easiest to solve.

Upon entering GA and stopping gambling, we find income often increases and, as there is no longer the financial drain caused by gambling, there is soon relief from the financial pressures.

The most difficult task to be faced is that of bringing about a personality change from within ourselves. Most of us in GA look upon this as our greatest challenge and believe this to be a lifetime job.

Does GA want to abolish gambling?

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

Who can join GA?

Anyone who has a desire to stop their own gambling. There are no other rules or regulations concerning GA membership.

How much does it cost to join GA?

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

Who runs GA?

GA is a unique spiritual movement having no central government and little formal organisation.

There are no officers or executives who wield authority over the fellowship or the individual.

Even though GA is an informal organisation, certain jobs have to be done.

In the local group, someone has to be responsible for the meeting place, look after the group finances, arrange for refreshments and keep in touch with other groups. This means that a group needs responsible people to perform these duties.

In accepting these responsibilities, a member may acquire a title, but titles in GA are used only to designate areas of service.

Those who accept these responsibilities are directly accountable to those they serve.

What is the GA Recovery Programme?

When compulsive gamblers apply The Twelve Steps of Recovery in their lives, disintegration stops, and unification begins. These steps are basically spiritual in their concept and their practice can be highly rewarding. These are the steps which are suggested as a programme of recovery:

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

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

No one claims these steps are in any way original to GA. They reflect practical experience and application of spiritual insights, as recorded by thoughtful people in many ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work.

They enable us and thousands of others to lead happy, productive lives. They represent the foundation upon which our society has been built.

They were given to us freely, for which we are grateful.

What is the Unity Programme?

Unity is the most precious quality our society possesses. Our lives and the lives of all to come depend squarely upon it. Yet unity in GA cannot sustain itself. Like personal recovery, it demands honesty, open-mindedness and, above all, vigilance. In the words of Benjamin Franklin, “we must hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.” So, there can be no sacrifice too great if it will strengthen our essential unity.

In maintaining unity, we have traditionally practised the following principles:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon GA unity.
2. Our leaders are but trusted servants: they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for GA membership is a desire to stop gambling.
4. Each Group shall be self-governing, except in matters affecting other Groups or GA as a whole.
5. GA has but one primary purpose – to carry the message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

6. GA should never endorse, finance, or lend the GA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every GA Group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. GA should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. GA as such ought never to be organised, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. GA has no opinion on outside issues, hence the GA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we must always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, film and television.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the GA Recovery Programme, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Just for today

Just for today I will live through this day only, and not try to tackle all my problems at once. I can do something for 12 hours that would appal me if I felt that I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

Just for today I will be happy. This assumes that “most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”

Just for today I will adjust myself to what is, and not try to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take each day as it comes, and fit myself to it.

Just for today I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

Just for today I will exercise my soul in three ways: I will do somebody a good turn and not get found out; if anybody knows of it, it will not count; I will do at least two things I don't want to do – just for exercise; I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt – they may be hurt but today I will not show it.

Just for today I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticise not one bit, not find fault with anything, and not try to improve or regulate anybody but myself.

Just for today I will have a programme. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will save myself from two pests – hurry and indecision.

Just for today I will have a quiet half-hour all by myself and relax. During this half-hour, sometime, I will try and get a better perspective of my life.

Just for today I will be unafraid. Especially, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful, and to believe that, as I give to the world, so the world will give to me.

Just for today I will not gamble.

My daily moral inventory

Liabilities

Assets

WATCH FOR:

STRIVE FOR:

Self-pity

Self-forgetfulness

Self-justification

Humility

Self-importance

Modesty

Self-condemnation

Self-evaluation

Dishonesty

Honesty

Impatience

Patience

Hate

Love

Resentment

Forgiveness

False pride

Simplicity

Jealousy

Trust

Envy

Generosity

Laziness

Activity

Procrastination

Promptness

Insincerity

Straightforwardness

Negative thinking

Positive thinking

Vulgarity,
Immorality

High-mindedness,
Spirituality

Trashy thinking

Clean thinking

Criticising

Looking for the good

Definition of a mature person

The following is taken from the “Moral and Spiritual Values in Education” used by the Los Angeles City Schools as part of their educational programme:

As mature people, we have developed attitudes in relation to ourselves and our environment, which have lifted us above childishness in thought and behaviour.

1. We accept criticism gratefully, being honestly glad for an opportunity to improve.
2. We do not indulge in self-pity and have begun to feel the laws of compensation operating in all areas of life.
3. We do not expect special consideration from anyone.
4. We control our temper.
5. We meet emergencies with poise.
6. Our feelings are not easily hurt.
7. We accept responsibility for our own acts.
8. We have outgrown the all-or-nothing stage, recognising that no person or situation is wholly good or bad, and have begun to appreciate the Golden Mean.

9. We are not impatient at unreasonable delays. We have learned that we are not the arbiters of the universe, and that we must often adjust to other people and their convenience.
10. We can endure defeat and disappointment without whining or complaining.
11. We do not worry unduly about things that cannot be helped.
12. We are not given to boasting or showing off in socially unacceptable ways.
13. We are honestly glad when others enjoy success or good fortune. We have outgrown envy and jealousy.
14. We are open-minded enough to listen thoughtfully to the opinions of others, and do not become vigorously argumentative when our views are opposed.
15. We are not chronic fault-finders.
16. We plan things in advance rather than trusting in the inspiration of the moment.

In terms of spiritual maturity:

1. We have faith in a higher power.
2. We feel an organic part of mankind, contributing our part to each group of which we are a member.

3. We obey the essence of the Golden Rule: treat others as you would like others to treat you.

Why are GA members anonymous?

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

Anonymity also has great value in attracting new members who might feel there is a stigma attached to compulsive gambling. Therefore, we guarantee the newcomer as much anonymity as he or she chooses. More importantly, we are beginning to realise that anonymity has tremendous spiritual significance. It represents a powerful reminder that we need always place principles above personalities.

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

Is GA a religious society?

No. GA is composed of people from many religious faiths, along with agnostics and atheists.

Since membership of GA requires no particular religious beliefs, it cannot be described as a religious society. The GA Recovery Programme is based on acceptance of certain spiritual values, but the individual member is free to interpret these principles as he or she chooses.

As it is used in GA, what is the meaning of the word “spiritual”?

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

What is Gam-Anon?

Compulsive gambling is recognised as an emotional illness. Living with this illness proves to be a devastating experience. Family relationships become unbearably strained. The home is filled with bitterness, frustration and resentment.

There seems to be no way to solve our insurmountable difficulties. We are unable to think rationally at times. Families and friends of gamblers, are are also very prone to develop a neurosis. Life seems hardly worthwhile.

“As families and friends of compulsive gamblers, many of us have found a strong bond. We need no longer feel alone. A wonderful new life is ours.

Come join with us in this, the Gam-Anon way of life.”

For information, contact Gam-Anon directly via their website: **www.gamanon.org.uk**.

Some advice to members

- 1. Attend as many meetings as possible per week.**
- 2. Contact other members as often as possible between meetings.**

Use the telephone list or other means of communication.

- 3. Don't tempt or test yourself.**

Don't associate with acquaintances who gamble.

Don't go in or near gambling establishments.

Don't gamble for anything – this includes buying lottery tickets, raffle tickets, premium bonds, flipping a coin, or playing games for table stakes.

- 4. Live the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Programme one day at a time.**

Don't try to tackle all your problems at once.

- 5. Read and practise Just for Today (page 22) and the Serenity Prayer (back cover).**

6. Ask trusted servants at your group about Sponsorship.

This gives you an opportunity to talk about yourself outside of meetings to a member that you feel comfortable with.

7. Read and practise the recovery and unity steps.

Follow the steps in your daily affairs.

These steps are the basis for the entire GA Recovery Programme and practising them is the key to your growth. If you have any questions, ask them of the trusted servants of your group.

8. Be patient! The days and weeks will pass soon enough and as you continue to attend meetings and abstain from gambling, your recovery will really accelerate.

There are meetings in many parts of the country and in major cities on most nights of the week. Ask any members for the addresses and times. Use our website: www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk.

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.



Gamblers Anonymous

England, Wales & Ulster

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

National Information Line: **0330 094 0322**