



Gamblers Anonymous

England, Wales & Ulster

Towards Recovery in Prison

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.

After reading this short booklet, you may have questions that are still unanswered. For more information, use the website:

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

*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"/> |

Introduction

This booklet is designed to help you through your time in prison. In the pages following, you will find practical advice that has been tried and tested down the years by many, many compulsive gamblers.

All we ask is that you keep an open mind when you read the pages of this booklet.

Up to now, your life (if you are like us) has been a shambles, driven by a mad urge to gamble. Being like this can only mean:

Misery, heartbreak, being permanently broke, and now prison.

The GA way of life will obviously be very different to you. You might be sceptical or it may even frighten you, but we promise that the GA way of life means:

Happiness, peace of mind and feeling good about yourself.

To recover will require effort from you, but GA is willing to help through visits, and has members who are happy to write to you.

All that is needed is an open mind and a real desire to stay away from your next bet, one day at a time. We welcome you to GA and please, please, if there is anything you do not understand, ask to have a GA visit. You are no longer alone. Accept the hand of friendship.

Start your recovery now

When prisoners first contact Gamblers Anonymous, they believe that their main problem is that they are in prison and/or they are in hefty financial trouble.

They often believe that they have reached rock bottom or the point of no return, and no matter what they do, no one will give them a second chance.

Many compulsive gamblers have started their recovery in prison and are now out and leading normal lives.

Recovery depends upon trying a new way of living, and facing up to life. It matters just as much *in* prison as outside.

By the time a new member arrives at GA, they have picked up some bad habits and attitudes.

For example, it is just about impossible to gamble compulsively without lying and/or stealing. We run away into a dreamworld. We have found that stopping gambling does not switch off these behaviours.

How do we get rid of these weaknesses?

First, we must know what they are, and this requires:

Honesty – with ourselves and with the visitors we receive and the meetings we attend. This is not an easy task and can be painful, but with the help of GA, it can be achieved in time.

Willingness to accept advice – when we read and listen, even if it is not directly for us.

Open-mindedness – to help us to know if the advice is for us, and willingness to carry out the changes needed.

By learning how other compulsive gamblers have coped with problems on their road to recovery, we can learn to cope with the problems we will surely face on our own road to recovery.

Understand and apply the Twelve Step Recovery Programme

On page 22 of this booklet is The Twelve Steps of Recovery. When compulsive gamblers read them for the first time, their reactions may be very negative: “It’s an impossible task”; or “I don’t need to do all of these 12 Steps”; and some don’t understand what is being asked of them, so they put them to one side.

If this is your reaction, do not panic: there is no time limit on The Twelve Steps. There is plenty of time: in fact you have the rest of your life. Lots of members have said they did not understand The Twelve Steps of Recovery. However, when they started to read and discuss them, they began to understand.

To start you off right now, Step One says: “We admitted we were powerless over gambling, that our lives had become unmanageable.” We believe we must agree with this, firstly, because without admitting that gambling has us licked, there is no way we can beat it. We will be forever fighting and losing. So, accepting Step One is the way to start. This Step alone may just keep us from gambling for a while, but that is not the GA way. There are 11 more Steps to help us to live a normal life.

Think about the questions and ideas in this and other GA booklets. Write down your thoughts and talk about them with other GA members. Keep an open mind. Every single word comes from those who have suffered in the past and have found a better way of living.

There is a tremendous amount of knowledge and wisdom in GA, and it is freely available to all. Trying to apply the The Twelve Steps of Recovery to your life can be a beautiful thing, and the rewards are many. It will enable you to know yourself better. It will set you at peace with yourself and your fellow human beings. It will bring you serenity, and allow you to manage your life with dignity, self-respect, and the love of your fellow man.

We cannot do it alone

We accept that we cannot beat gambling through willpower alone: we need help. Applying the advice in this booklet will require courage, but it will make you feel great inside.

By changing yourself into a better person, by behaving with honesty, tolerance and humility, you may find some power from outside of yourself helping in this task.

Generosity means giving of yourself without expecting anything back in return. Honesty includes being honest with yourself. Tolerance means letting others think and behave differently to you without becoming upset or argumentative. Humility means you stop thinking you are “top dog” and come to realise that you are the same as the rest of us: no better and no worse.

Allow yourself to be aware of a higher power. We do not mean that we all believe in God, or become religious. We are not a religious fellowship. You do not have to know what your higher power is: just keep an open mind.

Stay away from the first bet, one day at a time

Stopping gambling might not be easy but it is quite simple: do not place a bet. Simple yes, but for a compulsive gambler it can be a minefield, with lots of pitfalls to overcome. However, remember that you are not alone; we have had similar experiences to you, and will be able to share your journey.

When suffering gamblers first contact GA, the thought of never, ever gambling again seems like madness. Until now, their hopes and dreams all revolved around gambling and having that big win. Now these hopes and dreams are being taken away.

GA teaches us that we should try to live our lives, one day at a time. Therefore, we only have to stay away from gambling, one day at a time. Do not worry about tomorrow, or next week, or next year.

We can only live in the present, whether we are in prison or outside. Today is all we have.

We cannot do anything about yesterday or tomorrow, but, if we have a good day today, we will be a little stronger tomorrow.

As the days without gambling follow each other, and we try to apply The Twelve Steps of Recovery in our lives, the urge to gamble lessens.

Even so, we must keep a look out so as not to slide back into old habits. Watch out for thoughts that may come into our heads, that gambling wasn't all that bad, that maybe we are cured, or that this time it will be different, or maybe that we were not compulsive gamblers at all, we were just unlucky.

These thoughts are all part of our illness, and can lead us back to the miseries we have tried so hard to put behind us.

These thoughts are not just dangerous to *new* members; they are equally deadly to any member, no matter how long they have been free from gambling.

Remember, the distance from our last bet may get longer and longer, but the distance to our next bet always remains the same: we are all one bet away from disaster.

If we do not have the first gamble, then we will not have a second.

So, in the morning, if we say “I will not gamble today”, and make it a good day, there is every chance we will be able to say it again tomorrow.

If you *do* gamble though, just keep trying.

If two dogs have a fight, usually the bigger, stronger dog will win. If you take those two dogs away for a month, feed one and starve the other, when they fight again, the weaker dog will lose. Our thoughts are like those dogs: if you feed your gambling thoughts, then they will grow strong and win; equally, if you starve the gambling thoughts, then they will lose. When you feed something it grows strong; when you starve something it withers and dies.

Stop living in the past

Many compulsive gamblers struggle in the early days of their recovery because they look back on their lives and feel guilt and remorse. They see the money lost, opportunities missed, relationships damaged, or their lack of progress, or they simply feel sorry for themselves because they are in prison.

Our experience has shown that, if we are to recover, these things must be left in the past and we must move on.

Guilt and remorse – they can cripple us. They are just like being sorry for ourselves. We must strive to replace them by accepting responsibility, and to make amends where we can.

Money lost – we must accept that the money has gone. We have already spent too much time and money trying to get it back, with no success. All we get is more misery and more pain.

Opportunities missed – if we come to accept that life is not all good or all bad, and, if we are free from gambling and living a useful life, we will be able to take advantage of opportunities when they occur.

Fill the void when we are a few days or weeks off gambling

We want to be fit mentally when we come out. We are feeling good, and are pleased with ourselves. Suddenly we might find a huge hole in our lives: what do we do with the time that was once taken up by our gambling obsession? Yes, we know how bad gambling was, but we remember the pleasures and excitements too.

In the early days, most compulsive gamblers have a clear picture of how much time was spent in the bookies, the casino, in front of a machine or computer, but this was only part of their gambling.

There was also the time spent getting hold of money by any means to feed the gambling, the sleepless nights cooking up the lies to explain where we had been or where the money had gone, lies to our employer as to why we were missing, to cover up our thieving, or simply why we were not doing our job.

In fact, gambling takes over our whole life. Now we must fill the gap and get ready for a new, useful life. Each prisoner should try to find a way that suits them best, but it is essential that they do find a way. Some take up activity programmes. Some return to previous

interests or hobbies. Some return to education: this can be done at any age.

Spend time trying to rebuild family life or relationships with friends and relatives who may have suffered due to your gambling. Let them know of your progress in your chosen activity.

These are just a few suggestions. Why not chat about them to someone like a chaplain or education officer? We hope each member will make their own efforts to fill the void, and in so doing, maintain and improve their recovery.

Many compulsive gamblers started out in this way in prison and are now leading normal lives.

Watch out

You are in prison, but do you feel sorry for yourself?

Recovery from compulsive gambling is a wonderful miracle. Every member's recovery is their own.

The surest way to have a good and lasting recovery is to learn to enjoy it, and to start now.

The suggestions you have read may seem like stating the obvious, but there are obstacles, which, if we are not aware of them, can prevent us enjoying our recovery.

Guilt – when our recovery starts, we sometimes let our minds wander to past misdeeds and, if we allow ourselves to think about them for too long, we begin to think that we do not deserve to recover. These thoughts, if not spoken about, can have tragic results.

Resentment – when we first contact GA, it is suggested that we make some very big changes in our behaviour. Often we think that some of these changes are impossible or too difficult. Sometimes we think that some of the suggested changes are not needed, or we just don't want to implement them. But remember that in the first days and weeks, we tried them, they worked, and we quickly gained time free from gambling.

The price of recovery is too important. If we are to keep the recovery going, instead of resenting what we need to do, we should be enjoying what we are getting, however slowly: self-respect, peace of mind, repaired relationships, family life. Make a start on your recovery now. Don't put it off until you come out.

Enjoy your recovery: if you feel guilty, kick it out and replace it with responsibility.

If you feel resentful, think about all the people who have forgiven you, and be thankful that you were picked to be part of the GA Recovery Programme.

Accept the illness for what it is

Compulsive gambling is an emotional illness, which can never be cured, but can be arrested, one day at a time.

The compulsive gambler can't stop gambling by himself or herself, and has this idea that a way can be found, not only to control the gambling, but also to make it pay and enjoy it. While gambling compulsively, we often promise ourselves that we'll never gamble again, but we always find ourselves back in action.

For most of us there are days, weeks or even months when we are certain that we are controlling ourselves, always followed by even longer periods of mad gambling when we ignore everything and everyone, and sink lower and lower as human beings.

The worst effects are on our relationships with our partners, wives and husbands, friends, relatives and employers.

Therefore, we have to understand that this gambling is an illness that steadily gets worse. If we do, we have a chance to recover and return to a normal, useful and enjoyable life.

Try and get regular visits

There is a saying in GA: “Meetings make it.”

You may ask yourself: “make what?” The answer is recovery. Meetings make it easier, stronger and better.

The foundation of the Fellowship is its meetings.

By sharing our experience, strength and hope, we believe you will find the strength needed to stop gambling, one day at a time.

We suggest that while in prison, you get as many visits as possible. Not because you need them more than us, but because the more quickly you come to terms with this illness, the better it will be for you.

Also, you could ask your prison governor or at the Recovery Unit about starting a GA meeting at your prison.

Ask too, if someone can write to you.

On entering GA, you will see around you a way of living very different from yours.

The more you see and begin to understand this new way of living, the greater will be the benefit to you and your family.

If you gamble, admit it

As a fellowship of compulsive gamblers, it's certain that some will go back to gambling. Sometimes they never come back to GA.

Whether they felt ashamed or had a feeling that they had let someone down, or for some other reason, something stopped them returning.

Nobody will look upon you as a failure. Nobody will say you have let them down. We are here to help, not judge.

It is a fact that GA meetings have in them many members, who at some time, have gone back to gambling. The ones who return and practise The Twelve Steps of Recovery are living happy, contented lives, free from gambling and all of the horrors that go with it. The unfortunate ones are still out there, gambling and suffering. So, if you do return to gambling (and we don't apologise for repeating this), don't hesitate to admit it to your visitors and take notice of their advice.

Help yourself, one day at a time

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.

Does this mean I can't even 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, playing cards, guessing the number of bricks in a cell, or playing pool.

How does a person stop gambling through the GA Recovery 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.

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 men in many ages. Their greatest importance lies in the fact that they work.

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

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

What is the Unity 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 Programme, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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

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 before 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.

Tell your partner and family members about Gam-Anon – it could help them

Compulsive gamblers come from many walks of life. They come in both sexes, and all ages and races. You may well have someone close to you who is suffering as a result of your gambling.

Gam-Anon is a fellowship which could help them.

Gam-Anon is separate from GA, but is closely linked. Members are wives, husbands, partners, parents, children, siblings and close friends of compulsive gamblers.

When listening to Gam-Anon members speak, we have found that their mood swings were often caused by the results of the gambler's day of gambling. In many cases their personality gets so suppressed that they became similar to the gambler. Sadly, in cases where there once was love, there remained only hate, bitterness and resentment.

Add to all this, confusion and a feeling of hopelessness, and you can see why they also need help.

Gam-Anon won't stop your gambling, but we have found that by helping our partners, family and friends get better, we recover too. They can attend Gam-Anon whilst the compulsive gambler is still in prison.

“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**.

To helping agencies

How do I contact GA?

Via the website:

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Or by email:

info@gamblersanonymous.org.uk

This booklet was approved for issue
by the National Committee in July 2020.

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**