

*Information
for the
Newcomer*



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WELCOME !

We hope you enjoyed your first Gam-Anon meeting. Since it is all new to you, there may be a few things you are wondering about. The following are the most usual, but if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Do try to attend at least six consecutive meetings so you will get to know what Gam-Anon has for you. Perhaps some of the things that you hear at Gam-Anon meetings or read in our books and leaflets may not apply to your particular problem. As you continue to attend, you are sure to hear about situations and feelings much like your own and gain helpful information and suggestions. As your knowledge of Gam-Anon increases, you will appreciate the widely divergent ideas presented. You will realize that in Gam-Anon, as in everything else, circumstances alter cases. We are all individuals striving to become all that we are capable of becoming – each in our own way and time. There is something for everyone in Gam-Anon to help each of us become that better person.

WHAT IS GAM-ANON?

Gam-Anon is a fellowship of men and women who have been affected by the gambling problem. If you are seeking a solution for living with this problem we would like you to feel that we understand as perhaps few can. We, too, are familiar with worry and sleepless nights and promises made only to be broken. Our thinking has become confused and unreasonable. Gam-Anon can offer you a new way of life.

EMPHASIS ON ANONYMITY

We urge members to respect the confidences and anonymity of both the Gam-Anon and Gamblers Anonymous members. What is said in the Gam-Anon room must remain in the Gam-Anon room.

GAM-ANON IS A SPIRITUAL PROGRAM

This means that we accept the idea that we are all dependent on a Higher Power for help in solving our problems and achieving peace of mind. A member's individual religious beliefs are a personal matter and we make a point to avoid discussion in terms of any specific faiths.

CONTRIBUTION

It is a Gam-Anon tradition that contributions are voluntary. The money contributed is used for Gam-Anon literature, for expenses of the meeting place, and for regular contributions to the Gam-Anon International Service Office in New York City. Gam-Anon is a non-profit fellowship.

TELEPHONE

The telephone is a very important tool in our program. We urge you to feel free to call members prior to your next Gam-Anon meeting.

WE CARE AND WANT TO HELP YOU

1. It is very important that you feel welcome and comfortable. We are happy to have you with us. We are not here to judge or criticize you, but to give you that understanding and encouragement that each of us has found in Gam-Anon. **YOU ARE NO LONGER ALONE WITH YOUR PROBLEMS – WE CARE ABOUT YOU!!**

2. We hope we can successfully inform you about this disease and its many symptoms. Although the medical profession has begun to do much needed research, our knowledge has been through experience by living with the disease in our families. The prevailing idea is “the gambler will play as long as someone will pay.” We will make suggestions to you, not give advice. You must decide what is best for you to do.

3. We can try to help you with the areas in your relationship that have been damaged, such as trust, respect, responsibilities, communication, etc.

4. We will try to help you get in touch with your feelings and regain control of your life.

5. Much can be accomplished for you in Gam-Anon, whether or not the gambler goes to Gamblers Anonymous.

6. Your attendance in Gam-Anon in no way guarantees that the compulsive gambler will stop gambling and life will become easier. On the contrary, you may find that life becomes more complicated as you are daily facing the realities of your life and the pain that you are experiencing due to the illness. As you attend Gam-Anon consistently this pain lessens, and you are better able to face life’s problems.

The key to keep in mind is that compulsive gambling is an illness, it cannot be cured, it can, however, be arrested with conscious work on the part of the compulsive gambler.

GAM-ANON SUGGESTED POINTS

1. Accept and learn to live with the fact that compulsive gambling is an illness that cannot be cured, only arrested.
2. Please do not repeat anything you hear in this room to anyone. What you hear here, who you see here, let it stay here.
3. During the Gam-Anon meeting suggestions should be given and received with an open mind.
4. Attend meetings regularly and make use of the telephone and e-mail during the week.
5. To interrogate the gambler will serve no purpose. If the gambler wishes to hide the truth, interrogation will prove pointless.
6. To nag the gambler about past losses or to talk of what might have been will prove detrimental to both the gambler's and your recovery.
7. It is not recommended that the Gam-Anon member go to work specifically to cover the gambling debts. Restitution is the responsibility of the gambler.
8. The gambler, not the Gam-Anon member, should be responsible for calling the gambler's creditors to make restitution. Don't take this responsibility from the gambler.
9. It is strongly suggested that NO ONE finance, sign for or consolidate the gambler's debts. Experience has taught us that it is not helpful to borrow money to cover the gambling debts whether or not the gambler is in G.A. Discourage friends and family from lending the gambler money.
10. The gambler's gambling debts were not incurred over a short period of time, therefore, don't be discouraged if the gambler finds it necessary to pay back small amounts of monies over an extended period. Normal family expenses must come first.

11. Prudence tells us that compulsive gamblers are seldom able to handle finances. Perhaps this condition will be altered as the gambler progresses towards recovery.
12. Gamblers Anonymous is a program for the compulsive gambler. Do not interfere. Work your own program.
13. It may be beneficial to encourage the gambler to go to the first few meetings, however, after this the G.A. activities must be left to the gambler.
14. Recovery is a very slow process for the gambler. Give the gambler encouragement and have confidence in the G.A. and Gam-Anon programs.
15. The past is gone. Peace of mind can be found when the past is accepted without resentment.
16. Come to Gam-Anon even if your gambler continues to gamble. We understand your problem and we can help you through our program.
17. You may wish to obtain a personal credit report.
18. You may want to obtain information as to your liability on existing credit cards and credit lines.
19. You may want to contact your internet company to find out how to limit access to gambling and sports websites as appropriate to your needs.
20. You may want to seek appropriate legal advice for answers if: there is a question of liability for taxes (past, present, future); you want to change title to real property; you have questions about pension, ownership of insurance policies and any other matters you feel require legal advice.

LOVE, BUT LET GO!!

COMPULSIVE GAMBLING

Compulsive gambling is the obvious symptom of an emotional disorder. The emotional factors involved are: inability or unwillingness to accept reality, emotional insecurity, basic immaturity, and lack of self-esteem. Gamblers seem to be most comfortable when they are gambling. To us they seem like they are on a course of self-destruction.

Compulsive gambling brings despair and humiliation into the lives of countless thousands of men, women, and children. The compulsive gambler is a person who is dominated by an irresistible urge to gamble. Coupled with this is the obsessive idea that a way will be found not only to control the gambling, but to “make it pay” and enjoy it besides. This disease causes deterioration in almost all areas of the person’s life.

The compulsive gamblers attempt to create images of themselves as philanthropists and as all around “good fellows”. Much of the time they live in dream worlds which satisfy their emotional needs. The gamblers dream of lives filled with friends, new cars, furs, and other riches beyond their means. Pathetically, there seems never to be big enough winnings to make even the smallest dream come true; probably because whatever monies won are, to them, sacred. They must always return to win more. No amount is sufficient. Ultimately, they gamble in reckless desperation and the dream world brings them no relief. They destroy themselves and everyone they touch.

When the compulsive gamblers reach the point where they are willing to admit the problem and have a desire to stop gambling, they will find help through Gamblers Anonymous.

GAM-ANON

The self-help organization of Gam-Anon is a life saving instrument for anyone who has been affected by the gambling problem. We come into the group feeling alone, frightened, helpless, desperate, and ashamed. We hesitated to share problems and failures, fearing none could understand. The Gam-Anon group is warmly accepting and it offers the new member identification. The message we receive is: "Come join with us. We, too, were alone, afraid, and unable to cope with the problem. We will share with you a new and fulfilling way of life."

Gam-Anon's purposes are threefold: To learn acceptance and understanding of the gambling illness; to use the program and its problem solving suggestions as aids in rebuilding our lives and to give appropriate aid to the gambler; and, upon our own recovery, to then give assistance to others who suffer.

In Gam-Anon the member will experience relief from anxiety by accepting the fact of powerlessness over the problem in the family. The heavy load of responsibility for the gambling problem is lifted and the agonizing guilt in regard to failures is gradually alleviated. The energy wasted in attempts to stop loved ones from gambling can be channeled into more useful methods of problem solving.

The program suggests that we refuse to be responsible for the gambler's behavior, assuming responsibility only for that which is ours. The prevailing idea is, "the gambler will play as long as someone else will pay".

In Gam-Anon we learn the appropriate way of relating to the gambler as an equal rather than as a "parent". This involves the

process known as “letting go” or giving up control. To be an adult is to give warmth and love in an equal role with the gambler.

It is important to recovery that the member sees compulsive gambling in its true light, as an emotional illness. At that point, we will understand that obsessive-compulsive behavior, acting out, and game playing are symptoms of a serious illness. Although we may have been a pawn in the game playing, our hurt was a side effect of this illness, not deliberately intended. After years of accumulated hurtful experiences it will be difficult for us to give up anger and resentment. The recovery program of Gam-Anon offers help in working through and in resolving these feelings.

If the gambler and member seek help jointly, the recovery process will be less complicated. But even then, there is much for us to learn. We will need to be aware that the gambler’s recovery cannot be hurried. It is important that we encourage the gambler, but we must refrain from pushing. Our expectations of the gambler should be limited to his or her ability to respond. Although it proves to be the gambler’s Waterloo, gambling is the gambler’s first love and to give it up will be a tremendous undertaking. The gambler may at times be irritable, unreasonable, and difficult to understand.

It will be necessary that the gambler expend time and effort in the struggle to stop gambling. This may include nights away from family as the gambler attends group meetings according to his or her own needs. Our understanding is required and it should be explained to the gambler’s children, because they, too, will need to understand.

The members who come to Gam-Anon and remain to find help for themselves regardless of the gambler’s refusal to respond, are greatly to be admired. Their role is one of extreme difficulty. The gambler may resent Gam-Anon attendance and may see it as an attempt to interfere with his or her life. Hopefully the gambler will be motivated to seek help, but the Gam-Anon member’s recovery should not depend upon the gambler.

PURPOSE:

We are here to assist you in resolving the problems you are facing in your life due to the gambling problem.

INFORMATION:

We have various sources of literature available to you which can be helpful in your quest for information about the compulsive gambling illness and how to cope with the various crises that come up due to the gambling syndrome.

INTENTION:

Gam-Anon is dedicated to the creation and preservation of serenity in our lives.

What this means to you is that the Gam-Anon room is designed to be a safe place to bring your current situation. You can put it on the table – look at it, cry about it, laugh about it, be angry at it, or do whatever you want to do with it.

Hopefully, by the end of the meeting you have been able to unburden yourself of the problem for a short while and be able to go home and face your situation with a new perspective.

None of our members are here to give you specific advice which you should take as gospel. And we cannot dilute our principles to a point where we perform as marriage counselors, psychologists, members of the clergy, vocational guidance specialists, or as representatives of the legal profession. We are here as we have a common denominator in our lives – we are in relationships with compulsive gamblers.

Because of this common denominator, we are more readily able to understand your problems than your family, friends, counselor, or advisor. We can listen to your problems with an empathetic, not a

sympathetic or critical ear. You can rest assured that no one in our meeting will tell you what you are doing is bad. We will only offer our experience in similar matters, giving you a new approach to consider in your situation.

Our goal in the Gam-Anon room is to provide new insight into what can be a devastating problem in many people's lives. With the guidelines of the Gam-Anon program we can provide a wealth of information about practical safeguards you can choose to take when first coming into program.

Above all, remember that all people change. The problems you are facing today will be different tomorrow, next month, next year. Try to put matters in perspective for today. *Don't feel compelled to make decisions that are forever, rather, make choices for today.* Choices are always open for review and change.

In all things, remember that Gam-Anon is your support system. No one can make it work for you but you. We can only be there to support you when you reach out for us.

You have been provided with some free pieces of literature and a telephone list. Please use these as often as you like. Never feel that you are being intrusive when you need to talk to another member. We all have been in crisis situations and needed to talk it out. Please use the tools of our room freely. Please know that they are openly available to you as well.

Sound confusing? Well, for the first few weeks or months your life is going to be confusing and little of the things you hear in Gam-Anon will mean much to you. However, if you persevere and stay in there, you will find that things will make more and more sense and life somehow becomes easier to face each day.

QUESTIONS, NOTES, PHONE NUMBERS

Serenity Prayer

*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.*