

WELCOME TO GAM-ANON
(SUGGESTED PACKET for NEWCOMERS)

THE PAGES IN THIS PACKET CAN BE USED AS SINGLE SHEETS

OR

AS ONE PACKET.

ALL CONTENTS MAY BE COPIED.



Gam-Anon has much to offer you. . . .
please visit www.gam-anon.org
for information, meetings, literature, etc.



GAM-ANON® INTERNATIONAL SERVICE OFFICE, INC.
P.O. BOX 307 MASSAPEQUA PARK, NY 11762
718-352-1671
www.gam-anon.org gamanonoffice@gam-anon.org

Ten Good Things About Gam-Anon

1. You will never feel alone. Gam-Anon offers daily peer support from people who share your concerns, with ongoing communication via meetings, telephone, text, email, etc.
2. We encourage a one-day-at-a-time process, making life more manageable and goals achievable.
3. We are all equal in Gam-Anon, always listening and learning from each other. No one is judgmental.
4. Gam-Anon's mission is to share experience, strength and hope with those who are experiencing difficulties due to someone else's gambling.
5. The help you receive does not depend on whether or not your loved one attends Gamblers Anonymous.
6. Gam-Anon members experience positive changes in their lives beyond the problem of someone else's gambling. Learning how to use our well established Twelve Step Program improves relationships with family, community, career, and most importantly with self.
7. With the help of Gam-Anon, our members regain confidence to make rational, sensible decisions, and they experience serenity.
8. Gam-Anon offers practical financial suggestions.
9. Anonymity is a guiding principle. What is said in a Gam-Anon room, who you see in a Gam-Anon room, stays in the room.
10. There are no fees, no insurance forms to fill out, no appointments necessary. Just show up at a meeting.



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GAM-ANON MEETINGS

We hope you benefitted from your first Gam-Anon meeting. Since this is new to you, there may be a few things you are wondering about. The following explanations may help you, but if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Perhaps some of the things you hear at Gam-Anon meetings or read in our literature may not seem to apply to your particular problem. Make a commitment to attend at least six consecutive meetings, so that you will get to know what Gam-Anon can offer you. If you will continue to attend, you will hear about situations much like your own. Take from the meetings what you need and put the rest aside. 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, individual circumstances alter cases. We are all individuals striving to become the best people we can be – each in our own way. That way is not the same for everyone, but there is help for everyone here.

Emphasis on Anonymity: In any discussion of Gam-Anon, particularly outside the four walls of our meeting place, we urge members to respect the confidences of each other and especially to guard the anonymity of Gamblers Anonymous members. In other words, whom we see, or what we hear in the Gam-Anon room, remains in the room. This includes persons attending Gamblers Anonymous.

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 religious beliefs are a personal matter and we make it a point to avoid discussion in terms of any specific faith.

Group Participation: Anyone may express an opinion or answer a question upon being recognized by the chairperson. Those who would rather just listen are free to do so.

Contributions are Voluntary: This is a Gam-Anon tradition. The money contributed is used to buy Gam-Anon literature, meet the expenses of the meeting place, and support the Gam-Anon International Service Office. Gam-Anon is a nonprofit fellowship.



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HOW SOMEONE ELSE'S COMPULSIVE GAMBLING AFFECTS US

Gam-Anon members are familiar with how someone else's gambling problem can affect their lives. Do you identify with any of these situations?

1. We set aside money to pay bills . . . and we discover the money is missing; we find ourselves hiding money for safekeeping.
2. We feel that our loved one cannot be trusted with money.
3. We find ourselves wanting to search our loved one's clothing, wallets, closets, electronic devices, bank statements, financial statements, etc., for evidence to confirm our suspicions; or we find scratch-off tickets, lottery tickets, loan books, etc. hidden away in the house or even the family car.
4. Our significant other may be inexplicably unavailable and unreachable, neglecting and jeopardizing employment and family responsibilities.
5. We notice a personality change in our loved one as their gambling progresses; perhaps their behavior becomes unpredictable with angry outbursts or moodiness or depression.
6. When confronted, the gambler will either deny that gambling is a problem or will promise to curtail or stop it; however the gambling continues, often in secret.
7. Our gambler justifies that gambling will solve financial problems.
8. We resort to making threats in an effort to control the gambler; we are promised the gambling will stop; we submit to pleas for another chance, but, then the gambling continues again and again. We doubt ourselves and wonder what is wrong with us that we cannot stop our loved one from gambling.
9. Our gambler may not be able to hold on to a job due to gambling and irresponsible behavior; our family's security and financial well-being are jeopardized due to gambling.
10. Our gambler may consider or commit illegal and fraudulent acts to finance the gambling.
11. We are lied to or manipulated by our gambler; things do not make sense; the gambler can make us feel guilty, shifting blame onto us, suggesting we are the cause for the gambling. We lose trust in ourselves as well as the gambler; we wonder if our behavior could possibly trigger the gambling.
12. We worry about how easy it is to gamble on electronic devices and become frustrated at our inability to manage this ease of access for our gambler.
13. We feel hopeless, isolated and alone, too embarrassed or ashamed to confide in close family members and friends.

If you think you are living with or affected by someone with a gambling problem, we invite you to come to a Gam-Anon meeting whether or not the gambler acknowledges the problem.



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GROWING UP WITH A COMPULSIVE GAMBLER

Perhaps you grew up with a parent, sibling, or other family member who had a gambling problem. Maybe you think about your own children growing up in a gambling environment. Here are some of the recollections shared by Gam-Anon members who grew up with a compulsive gambler.

- 1) I sometimes found money missing, and I felt like I had to hide my money.
- 2) Sometimes Mom or Dad would ask me for money. I knew I would never get it back.
- 3) My parents led me to believe there was money put away for college, but if there had ever been such savings, there was nothing left.
- 4) I was so looking forward to my “sweet sixteen,” but when the time came, there was no money for me to have a party.
- 5) My family’s activities revolved around playing cards, watching sports on TV, sports betting, and other gambling activities. Scratch offs and lottery tickets were handed out as gifts on birthdays and holidays.
- 6) Family vacations were usually to places or resorts with casinos. At first it seemed like fun, but now, as an adult, I ask, “Who takes a 12 year old to a casino?”
- 7) My father rarely showed up for my games or school events. He didn’t even come when I won an award. We never knew where he was!
- 8) My parents were always fighting about money and their arguments frightened me. Sometimes they used me as a sounding board. I felt responsible, even though I was just a kid. Sometimes I felt more like the parent than the child. I felt my presence was necessary to keep things under control.
- 9) Dreading another violent argument over gambling, I grew to fear what might happen between my parents while I was away. I used to call home frequently to see if things were ok.
- 10) I remember handing Mommy tissues when she cried; I told Mommy she could hide in my room when Daddy got home.
- 11) I felt so helpless not being able to make things better for my mom and my younger brother.
- 12) I avoided bringing friends to my house. Life seemed so much calmer at their homes. When I was at their homes I was always worried about what was happening in my home. Sometimes I would rather just stay home alone than be with people.

13) Despite growing up in a gambling home with all its problems and promising myself to never let that happen to me, I wound up marrying a gambler.

14) I've been lied to so much, I have trouble trusting people. I don't think I can trust anyone totally.

15) Money has always been an issue for me. No amount makes me feel secure.

16) My mother wasn't home at night and sometimes not even by the morning to make breakfast and see me off to school. Why did she go to the casino instead of staying home with me?

17) I was the 'good' child. My brother gambled, dumping his problems on our parents. They repeatedly bailed him out of trouble. He got all the attention in the family. I did not know how to act or help. How could my brother do this to us? I am so angry.

18) I have a recurrent dream — a nightmare — about my father's gambling when I was a child. I thought that was all behind me.

19) I was just a child when my father, the gambler, left us, telling me that I was now responsible for the care of the family.

If you grew up affected by someone with a gambling problem, we invite you to come to a Gam-Anon meeting whether or not the gambler acknowledges the problem.



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COULD YOUR CHILD BE A COMPULSIVE GAMBLER?

Parents (and educators) will list drugs, alcohol, bullying, sex, and grades among their concerns for their children. The list is incomplete if it does not include gambling. Could your child have a gambling problem or the beginnings of one? We know that many children are introduced to gambling at a young age, often innocently, since the adults in their lives have no knowledge of the potential consequences.

Gambling may be part of their parents' social lives or vacations, or perhaps members of the family gamble on sports, play poker, buy lottery tickets or "scratch offs," go to racetracks or casinos, or gamble on the internet. Children receive the message that gambling is great fun and if you are lucky or good at it, you can make lots of money gambling.

Even if there are none of these activities in the home, our children receive this message through a variety of media. Even seemingly harmless internet games introduce children to the "fun", "challenging", and "winning" experiences of gambling. Gambling is easily accessible on computers, tablets, and mobile phones in formats that many adults are not even familiar with.

Some children may be unaffected by all of this. It is very difficult to know in advance which ones may be affected. When the invisible line is crossed from social gambling to problem or addictive (compulsive) gambling, it is a life altering change for the gambler and loved ones. Compulsive gambling is not just about the money won or lost, but also about the drastic changes in behavior and the growing unmanageability of everyday life.

Our experience with our own compulsive gamblers has taught us that compulsive gambling can begin at any age. Many of our gamblers, men and women, began gambling in childhood. Based on our experience and the numbers of parents of teens and young adults joining our meetings, we believe that gambling has a place among the list of parents' concerns.

What are the signs that your child may have a problem with gambling?

1. Are you concerned about the amount of time your child spends on the computer, on mobile devices, watching sports, playing cards, etc., or how often these activities distract from family activities, sleep?
2. Are you uncomfortable with your child's friends or their activities together?
3. Are you aware of bets your child is making with friends or classmates?
4. Has your child lost interest in activities he or she once enjoyed?
5. Have your child's grades slipped or does your child miss school or classes?
6. Does your child work but never seem to have money?
7. Does your child have more money or unexplained money, or does your child spend money beyond his/her apparent means?
8. Have you experienced money or items missing from your home? Do you suspect your child might be stealing?
9. Has your child asked to borrow large amounts of money?
10. Do you find yourself rescuing your child from financial crises resulting from gambling?
11. Does your child have an intense reaction during sporting events when one team is either losing or winning?
12. Does your child promise to never gamble again – and then gamble?
13. Have you noticed changes in your child's personality, including mood swings?
14. Has your child become secretive?
15. Does your child lie about money or about gambling activities?

If you think your child may have a gambling problem, you are welcome to come to a Gam-Anon meeting. The Gam-Anon members, including parents, will share their experience with you. Gam-Anon is a fellowship of those affected by someone else's gambling problem whether or not the gambler acknowledges the problem.



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GAM-ANON

Gam-Anon is a 12-Step self-help fellowship of men and women who have been affected by the gambling problem of a friend or loved one. We understand as perhaps few can.

We may have become fearful and uncertain as to how to cope with the deterioration in our lives and our relationships, the financial problems, and the debts caused by the gambling. We know that living with the effects of another's gambling can often be too devastating to bear without help. We in Gam-Anon strive:

1. To welcome and give assistance and comfort to those affected by someone else's gambling problem.
2. To communicate Gam-Anon's understanding of compulsive gambling and its impact on our lives.
3. To share our experience, strength, and hope in coping with the gambling problem.
4. To use the Steps and Tools of the Gam-Anon program which nurture our spiritual and emotional growth and recovery.

With the help of Gam-Anon, we find our way back to a normal way of thinking and living, whether or not our loved ones continue to gamble. We believe that a change in our attitudes is of boundless help to us as well as to our gamblers.

Gam-Anon is not a religious organization or a counseling agency. It is not a treatment center nor is it allied with any other organization offering such services. No dues or fees are required. Membership is voluntary, requiring only that one's own life has been affected by someone else's gambling problem.

WHAT IS COMPULSIVE GAMBLING?

Compulsive gambling is an addiction that causes an individual to experience irresistible urges to gamble. Compulsive gamblers often build a fantasy life filled with dreams of what they will buy or possess when there are enough winnings. Pathetically, there never seems to be enough of these winnings to make even the smallest dream come true and gambling compounds the frustrations rather than minimizes them. In the gamblers' world monies won are sacred and to be used only to gamble more in the hopes of winning even more.

In spite of the financial losses and escalating emotional turmoil, compulsive gamblers continue to believe that they can control or moderate their gambling activities at will, at any time. However, our experience confirms that compulsive gamblers cannot do either of these things.

When compulsive gamblers reach the point where they are willing to admit loss of control over gambling and the complete unmanageability of their lives, they may finally be ready to accept help. This help can be found in Gamblers Anonymous.



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A Brief Synopsis of the Tools of Gam-Anon

When we first come to a Gam-Anon meeting we hear of The Twelve Steps and the Tools of Gam-Anon. We wonder how these will help us. Our Tools help us better understand and work the Gam-Anon program. The tools of Gam-Anon are meetings, telephone and email, literature, writing, sponsorship, service, pressure relief, and anonymity.

Meetings: The only requirement for attending meetings is that you are a person who has been affected by someone with a gambling problem. In addition to the spouse or parents, the widow or widower, the companion, the divorced spouse, the child, the friend, the employer or employee, etc., can attend. . . We share our fears, burdens, and worries with the group, as well as our experience, strength, and hope.

Telephone and Email: Using the telephone or email between meetings is a helpful way to stay in touch with the program and receive the experience, strength, and hope daily. . . . No longer do we have to do it alone. We simply pick up the phone or send an email. . . . The more seasoned member can reach out to the newcomer to offer words of encouragement between meetings.

Literature: At meetings all over the world we read from the same Gam-Anon literature. Gam-Anon has a rich variety of books, pamphlets, and information sheets about the Twelve Steps of Recovery, personal growth, and reflections on our lives, offering us strength, hope, and the Gam-Anon experience. . . . How calming it can be to carry one of our small pamphlets to read during a stressful day! . . . Reading from our Gam-Anon literature at meetings and using selections to guide our sharing provides an inspirational focus.

Writing: Writing gives us insight into ourselves. It is helpful in strengthening our thoughts and resolutions. . . . We can use writings as another dimension in communicating with others. . . . Taking the time to get our thoughts together and not talking in a hasty manner eases the turmoil and helps us when we are confused.

Sponsorship: Sponsors are members in our program who are willing and able to share their experience, strength, and hope with a newcomer on a one-to-one basis. They keep regular contact with the newcomer between meetings. A sponsor does not have all of the answers . . . but a sponsor listens and is objective. This offers the newcomer a sense of belonging and trust, and the experienced member a renewed sense of sharing and worth.

Service: Service is the principle of the Twelfth Step of Recovery. It is a way of giving back to the program what has been so generously given to us.

Pressure Relief Group Meeting: Most of us come into Gam-Anon with issues of debt and financial pressures. Sometimes the debts are overwhelming and in the name of the gambler; other times the debts are held jointly or are in the name of the Gam-Anon member. Regardless . . . the Pressure Relief Group Meeting is an invaluable tool in getting the finances in order. The goal . . . is to relieve the financial pressures by suggesting a budget that prioritizes the normal needs of the family, which addresses all debt, and is livable.

Anonymity: An important principle for group survival is **ANONYMITY**. This means that each person in the Gam-Anon Program has the right to be as anonymous as he or she chooses. Maintaining anonymity is vital if Gam-Anon is to give support to its members and attract newcomers to the fellowship. . . . Anonymity means that we are all equal in Gam-Anon . . . We are each affected by a compulsive gambler.

(excerpts of TOOLS from *The Gam-Anon Way of Life*, pp. 22 - 27)