

G.A. SCOTLAND

Towards Recovery in Prison

*Guidance for the recovering compulsive
gambler while in prison.*

Gamblers Anonymous Scotland

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to help you through your time in prison. 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 as you read.

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 be very different. 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**.

Recovery will require effort from you, but GA is willing to help through visits and has members happy to write to you. All that is needed is an open mind and a desire to stay away from your next bet, one day at a time.

We welcome you to GA and please, if there is anything you don't 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. 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.

WHAT IS COMPULSIVE GAMBLING?

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

UNDERSTAND AND APPLY THE TWELVE STEP RECOVERY PROGRAMME

The Twelve Steps of Recovery are on pages 24-25.

When compulsive gamblers read them for the first time, their reactions may be negative: “It’s an impossible task”; or “I don’t need to do all of these twelve steps”. 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 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 first, because without admitting that gambling has us licked, there is no way we can beat it.

We will be forever fighting and losing.

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 eleven more steps to help us to live a normal, decent 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's freely available to all.

Trying to apply 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 and self-respect.

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 you will 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.

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're the same as the rest of us; no better, no worse.

Allow yourself to be aware of a higher power. We do not mean that we all believe in God; 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; maybe we're cured; this time it will be different; or maybe we're 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've been free from gambling.

Remember, the distance from our last bet may get longer and longer, but the distance to our next always remains the same: we're one bet away from disaster. If we don't have the first gamble, then we won't 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.

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, a lack of progress, or they simply feel sorry for themselves because they are in prison.

Our experience has shown that 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 a 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.

ENJOY IT BUT 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. If we are not aware of them, they can prevent us from 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 make them. But we 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 guilt, kick it out and replace it with responsibility. If you feel resentment, 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 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, 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, husbands, friends, relatives, or 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 can 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. 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 HAVE A PARTNER, TELL EVERYTHING

Another piece of advice we are given early in our GA life is to wipe the slate clean and tell our partner everything. This can seem a horrendous task but, painful though it may be, it is essential to start from a basis of honesty.

But, be warned, it is truly amazing how this illness can control us and warp our judgement. Many members have told us of how they told almost all but held back one or two hidden deeds or debts. Excuses included embarrassment, forgetfulness, shame, or “I thought I could manage it myself”. We believe this is the illness keeping a hold on its victim. As long we have a secret debt or deed, we are keeping a ready-made excuse to gamble.

How can a sensible budget be planned if all outgoings are not declared? How can a hidden debt be paid without holding cash back and lying to cover it up? In the early days, we often need someone to look after our money so come clean from the start and be totally honest.

MAKE FRIENDS WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

Most members, by the time they arrive at GA, have suffered badly from the effects of their gambling. These effects can be many and varied but one of the most common is a terrible feeling of loneliness.

Through years of gambling, we have put barriers around ourselves, cutting ourselves off from family and friends. We have come to believe that nobody could like us, let alone love us, and this feeling drives us deeper and deeper into our dreamworld.

After a short time in the fellowship, if we are following the advice we are given, a bit of order comes back into our lives and our minds begin to clear. We come face to face with ourselves and we don't always like what we see. It is at this time that we need friends within the fellowship. We need people who have faced similar problems and hardships, who know what we are going through. Friends with whom we can feel relaxed

and comfortable, and to whom nothing that we say is likely to shock or cause embarrassment.

When we stop gambling there is usually a great emptiness in our lives. Friends in GA can help fill that emptiness. Try to be friends with your GA visitors and get ready for the day when you come out.

Making friends in GA can help you recover.

It also carries the bonus that you can help another member to recover just by being a friend.

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 – JUST FOR TODAY

Just for today I will try to live through this day only and not tackle my whole life problem 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 to be true what Abraham Lincoln said, that: "most folks are 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 contact another member and share.

Just for today I will not gamble.

TELL YOUR PARTNER ABOUT GAM-ANON – IT MAY HELP THEM

You may well have someone close to you who is suffering as a result of your gambling.

The Fellowship of Gam-Anon exists to help them.

Gam-Anon is quite separate from GA but is closely linked. Members are wives, husbands, partners, parents, children and close friends of compulsive gamblers; indeed, it is open to anyone for whom life has been impacted by someone else's gambling.

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

More information about Gam-Anon can be found at <http://gamanon.org.uk>

THE TWELVE STEPS 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 understood 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.

TWENTY QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

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

1. Do you lose time from work or education due to gambling?
2. Is gambling making your life unhappy?
3. Is gambling affecting your reputation?
4. Have you ever felt remorse after gambling?
5. Do you ever gamble to get money with which to pay debts or to otherwise solve financial difficulties?
6. Does gambling cause a decrease in your ambition or efficiency?
7. After losing, do you feel you must return as soon as possible and win back your losses?
8. After a win do you have a strong urge to return and win more?
9. Do you often gamble until your last pound is gone?
10. Do you ever borrow to finance your gambling?

11. Have you ever sold anything to finance gambling?
12. Are you reluctant to use gambling money for normal expenses?
13. Does gambling make you careless of the welfare of your family?
14. Do you gamble longer than you planned?
15. Do you ever gamble to escape worry or trouble?
16. Have you ever committed or considered committing, an illegal act to finance gambling?
17. Does gambling cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
18. Do arguments, disappointments, or frustrations create an urge within you to gamble?
19. Do you have an urge to celebrate any good fortune by a few hours gambling?
20. Have you ever considered self-destruction as a result of your gambling?

God grant me the Serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And the Wisdom to know the difference.

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