

# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT COMPULSIVE GAMBLING AND GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

## **What is compulsive gambling?**

The explanation that seems most acceptable to Gamblers Anonymous members is that compulsive gambling is an illness, progressive in its nature, which can never be cured, but can be arrested. Before coming to Gamblers Anonymous, many compulsive gamblers thought of themselves as morally weak, or at times just plain 'no good'. The Gamblers Anonymous concept is that compulsive gamblers are really very sick people who can recover if they will follow to the best of their ability a simple program that has proved successful for thousands of other men and women with a gambling or compulsive gambling problem.

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

The compulsive gambler needs to be willing to accept the fact that he or she is in the grip of a progressive illness and has a desire to get well. Our experience has shown that the Gamblers Anonymous program will always work for any person who has a desire to stop gambling. However, it will never work for the person who will not face squarely the facts about this illness.

## **How can you tell whether you are a compulsive gambler?**

Only you can make that decision. Most people turn to Gamblers Anonymous when they become willing to admit that gambling has them licked. Also in Gamblers Anonymous, a compulsive gambler is described as a person whose gambling has caused growing and continuing problems in any department of his or her life. Many Gamblers Anonymous 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 bet to a problem gambler is like the first small drink to an alcoholic. Sooner or later he or she falls back into the same old destructive pattern. Once a person has crossed the invisible line into irresponsible uncontrolled gambling he or she never seems to regain control. After abstaining a few months some of our members have tried some small bet experimentation, always with disastrous results. The old obsession inevitably returned. Our Gamblers Anonymous experience seems to point to these alternatives: to gamble, risking progressive deterioration or not to gamble, and develop a better way of life.

### **Why can't a compulsive gambler simply use will power to stop gambling?**

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

### **Do Gamblers Anonymous members go into gambling places to help former members who are still gambling?**

No. 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 retarded a member's eventual recovery by giving them this unsolicited attention. It all goes back to the basic principle that a gambler ought to want help before he

or she is approached by us.

### **I only go on gambling binges periodically. Do I need Gamblers Anonymous?**

Yes. Compulsive gamblers who have joined Gamblers Anonymous 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 Gamblers Anonymous program the answer to the elimination of character defects and a guide to moral progress in their lives. GAMBLING , for the compulsive gambler is defined as follows : Any betting or wagering, for self or others, whether for money or not, no matter how slight or insignificant, where the outcome is uncertain or depends upon chance or 'skill' constitutes gambling.

### **If I join Gamblers Anonymous won't everyone know I am a compulsive gambler?**

Most people made quite a name for themselves as full-fledged gamblers by the time they turned to Gamblers Anonymous. 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 Gamblers Anonymous can rightfully be made by anyone but the member themselves. Even then, it should be done in such a way that will work no hardship on the Gamblers Anonymous fellowship.

### **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 around the track. 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 from gambling.

### **How does someone stop gambling through the Gamblers Anonymous program?**

One does this through bringing about a progressive character change within oneself. This can be accomplished by having faith in -- and following -- the basic concepts of the Gamblers Anonymous Recovery Program. There are no short cuts in gaining this faith and understanding. To recover from one of the most baffling, insidious, compulsive addictions will require diligent effort. HONESTY, OPENMINDEDNESS, AND WILLINGNESS are the key words in our recovery.

### **Can a person recover by himself/herself by reading Gamblers Anonymous literature or medical books on the problem of compulsive gambling?**

Sometimes, but not usually. The Gamblers Anonymous program works best for the individual when it is recognized and accepted as a program involving other people. Working with other compulsive gamblers in a Gamblers Anonymous group the individual seems to find the necessary understanding and support. They are able to talk of their past experiences and present problems in an area where they are comfortable and accepted. Instead of feeling alone and misunderstood, they feel needed and accepted.

### **Does Gamblers Anonymous look upon compulsive gambling as a vice?**

No.

### **Is knowing why we gambled important?**

Perhaps, however insofar as stopping gambling, many Gamblers Anonymous members have abstained from gambling without the knowledge of why they gambled.

### **What are some characteristics of a person who is a compulsive gambler?**

\* INABILITY AND UNWILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT REALITY. Hence the escape into the dream world of gambling. \* EMOTIONAL INSECURITY. A compulsive gambler finds he or she is emotionally comfortable only when "in action". It is not uncommon to hear a Gamblers Anonymous member say: "The only place I really felt like I belonged was sitting at the poker table. 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 on their part seems to be the common character pattern of problem gamblers. Many Gamblers Anonymous members accept the fact that they were unwilling to grow up. Subconsciously they felt they could avoid mature responsibility by wagering on the spin of a wheel or the turn of a card, 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. The compulsive gambler is willing to do anything (often of an antisocial nature) to maintain the image he or she wants others to see. Then too, there is a theory that compulsive gamblers subconsciously want to lose to punish themselves. There is much evidence to support this theory.

### **What is the dream world of the compulsive gambler?**

This is another common characteristic of compulsive gamblers. A lot of time is spent creating images of the great and wonderful things they are going to do as soon as they make the big win. They often see themselves as quite philanthropic and charming people. They may dream of providing families and friends with new cars, mink coats, and other luxuries. Compulsive gamblers picture themselves leading a pleasant gracious life, made possible by the huge sums of money they will accrue from their 'system'. Servants, penthouses, nice clothes, charming friends, yachts, and world tours are a few of the wonderful things that are just around the corner after a big win is finally made. Pathetically, however, there never seems to be a big enough winning to make even the smallest dream come true. When compulsive gamblers succeed, they gamble to dream still greater dreams. When failing, they

gamble in reckless desperation and the depths of their misery are fathomless as their dream world comes crashing down. Sadly, they will struggle back, dream more dreams, and of course suffer more misery. No one can convince them that their great schemes will not someday come true. They believe they will, for without this dream world, life for them would not be tolerable.

## **Isn't compulsive gambling basically a financial problem?**

No, compulsive gambling is an emotional problem. A person in the grip of this illness creates mountains of apparently insolvable problems. Of course, financial problems are created, but they also find themselves facing marital, employment, or legal problems. Compulsive gamblers find friends have been lost and relatives have rejected them. Of the many serious difficulties created, the financial problems seem the easiest to solve. When a compulsive gambler enters Gamblers Anonymous and quits gambling, income is usually increased and there is no longer the financial drain that was caused by gambling, and very shortly, the financial pressures begin to be relieved. Gamblers Anonymous members have found that the best road to financial recovery is through hard work and repayment of our debts. Bankruptcy, borrowing and/or lending of money (bailouts) in Gamblers Anonymous is detrimental to our recovery and should not take place. The most difficult and time consuming problem with which they will be faced is that of bringing about a character change within themselves. Most Gamblers Anonymous members look upon this as their greatest challenge, which should be worked on immediately and continued throughout their lives.

## **Who can join Gamblers Anonymous?**

Anyone who has a desire to stop gambling. There are no other rules or regulations concerning Gamblers Anonymous membership.

## **How much does it cost to join Gamblers Anonymous?**

There are no assessments in connection with Gamblers Anonymous membership. The newcomer signs nothing and pledges nothing. However, we do have expenses relative to our

group meeting and our Gamblers Anonymous service facilities. Since Gamblers Anonymous has traditionally been fully self supporting and declines outside contribution, 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.

### **Why are Gamblers Anonymous members anonymous?**

Anonymity has great practical value in maintaining unity within our fellowship. Through its practice at the level of press, radio, films 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 and prestige which would prove highly detrimental to our essential unity. Anonymity also has great value in attracting new members who initially might feel there is a stigma attached to the problem. Therefore, we guarantee the newcomer as much anonymity as they choose. More importantly, we are beginning to realize 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 gratification . . . so our Gamblers Anonymous movement not only advocates but tries to practice 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 Gamblers Anonymous a religious society?**

No. Gamblers Anonymous is composed of people from many religious faiths along with agnostics and atheists. Since membership in Gamblers Anonymous requires no particular religious belief as a condition of membership, it cannot be described as a religious society. The Gamblers Anonymous recovery program is based on acceptance of certain spiritual values but the member is free to interpret these principles as he chooses.



**Gamblers Anonymous®**