

G.A. SCOTLAND

Towards The First 90 Days

**Some words of wisdom for the recovering compulsive gambler
during the first weeks in Gamblers Anonymous.**

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Introduction

In coming to GA, genuinely seeking help, you have probably taken the most important step of your life up to this point.

This booklet is designed, to help you through your early days in the fellowship. 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 of you is that you keep an open mind when you read through the pages of this booklet.

Up to this point your life (if you are like us) has been unmanageable, directed by your uncontrollable urge to gamble. The pattern your life has been following can only have the following disastrous outcome:

MISERY, HEARTACHE, FINANCIAL DRAIN
for you and those closest to you.

The GA way of life will obviously be very different to you. It may even frighten you, but we can assure you, the GA way of life has the following encouraging outcome:

HAPPINESS, PEACE OF MIND, and SELF-RESPECT

All that is required is an open mind and a genuine 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 don't understand, ask someone to explain.

You are no longer alone.

Accept the hand of friendship.

Listen and learn.

When we first arrive at Gamblers Anonymous, we believe that our main problem is the financial mess we are in.

We know that it is caused by our gambling and we also know that finance, or lack of it, is causing problems in other departments of our lives.

Because of this thinking, we tend to believe, that by clearing up the financial mess, that is all we need to do.

Alas, this is not the case.

Marvellous though it may be to get our finances in order, this has often proved to be the easiest problem to deal with, provided we are honest with ourselves and our debtors.

Experience has shown that, by the time a new member arrives at GA, he or she has picked up a number of character defects.

For example, it is virtually impossible to gamble compulsively without lying or stealing or avoiding reality and escaping into a dream world. We have found that stopping gambling does not automatically rid us of these defects.

How do we rid ourselves of these defects?

First, we must be aware of them, and this requires:

Honesty

Honesty with ourselves and with the meetings we attend. This is not an easy task and can be painful but, with the help of our meetings and if possible, a sponsor, it can be achieved in time.

Learning to listen

We need to have an open mind when we listen to advice, even if it is not directly to us.

An open mind

Will make us aware if the advice applies to us.

Willingness

To apply and act on the advice and make the changes that will be asked of us.

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

Understand and apply the 12 Step Recovery Programme.

When compulsive gamblers read the 12 steps of recovery for the first time, their reactions may be very negative, "It's an impossible task", "I don't need to do all these things", or some don't understand what is being asked of them so they put it aside.

If this is your reaction, do not panic.

There is no time limit on the 12 steps, there is plenty of time, better still, you have the rest of your life.

We believe that Step 1: *We admitted we were powerless over gambling, that our lives had become unmanageable*, is virtually a precondition for all the rest. Unless we can admit and accept that gambling has us licked, that there is no way we can win.

We will struggle.

The acceptance of Step 1 might just keep us free of gambling on its own but that is not the GA way. Our predecessors added the other 11 steps of recovery, which enable us to live a normal, decent life and play our part in the society.

Most meetings spend some time discussing various parts of the GA Handbook, usually relating to these steps. Try to keep an open mind during these discussions.

There is a tremendous amount of knowledge and wisdom in GA rooms and it is freely available to all.

If there is something you don't understand, or a step you don't know how to apply in your life, ask any member who has been around a while. He or she will be delighted to help you.

Trying to apply the 12 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 fellow human beings.

It will bring you serenity and allow you to manage your life with some dignity, self-respect and the love of your fellow man.

We cannot do it alone.

We allow ourselves to be aware of a Higher Power.

We do not mean that we all believe in God.

We accept that we cannot beat the gambling bug with willpower alone.

Taking the advice in this booklet will require inner strength and will gain you inner peace. By changing yourself into a better person, by behaving with generosity, honesty, tolerance and humility you may find some power outside of yourself to help in this task.

You do not need to identify your Higher Power, just keep an open mind.

Stay away from the first bet - one day at a time.

Stopping gambling is quite simple - *Do not place a bet.*
Simple, yes, but not easy for a compulsive gambler.

When suffering gamblers arrive at GA, the thought of never ever placing another bet is unthinkable to them.

Until now, their hopes and dreams have been dependent on *the 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*. So, it follows that we only require to stay away from the first bet *one day at a time*.

We should not worry unduly about tomorrow or next week or next year.

We can only live in the present.

Today is all we have.

We have to realise that we can do nothing about yesterday, or tomorrow, but, if we have a good today, we will be a little stronger tomorrow.

As the days free from gambling string together and we try to apply the 12 steps of recovery in our lives, the urge to gamble will lessen.

Nevertheless, we should always be on our guard and try to be aware of any backsliding into old habits, any signs of complacency, any

thoughts that may come into our heads, that *gambling wasn't all that bad*, that *maybe we are cured*, or *maybe we were not compulsive at all - just unlucky*.

These thoughts are all symptoms 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 just as deadly to any member, no matter how long they have been gambling-free.

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

If we don't make the first bet, we won't make the second.

So, in the morning, if we say *I will not place a bet 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, through looking back to their past life, burdening themselves with guilt, remorse, money they have lost, opportunities they have missed, or lack of progress at work.

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 very close to self-pity.

We must strive to replace them with the acceptance of responsibility and to make amends where we can.

Money lost

We must accept that the money has gone.

We have already spent some considerable time and money trying to get it back, with no success.

All we have achieved is more misery and more pain.

Opportunities missed

If we come to accept the golden mean, we will have more opportunities and, if we are free from gambling and living a useful life, we will be able to take advantage of them when they occur.

The old ones are gone, look forward to the new ones.

Lack of progress at work

This depends a lot on the age and abilities of the member, however, anyone can become a better employee.

Probably for the first time in years, we are able to concentrate on what our employer asks us to do.

We can channel the energy we previously used for gambling into our daily tasks then leave the rest to our own Higher Power.

To sum up, our experience has shown us that, if we care to embark on a new life, free from gambling and all the problems and misery that gambling generates, then we must close the book on the life we are leaving behind.

Fill the void.

We are a few days or weeks free from gambling.

Life has stopped getting worse.

We are filled with hope and gratitude.

Suddenly we find a huge hole in our lives - what do we do with the time that once was taken up by our gambling obsession.

In the early days, few compulsive gamblers have a clear picture of how much of their time was spent on gambling.

Most can tell stories about the time spent in betting shops, casinos or in front of a one-armed bandit, although this usually represents only a part of their gambling life.

There is also the time spent in pursuit of money to feed the gambling, the sleepless nights trying to concoct lies either to get money or to explain about money that has now gone.

Lies to our employer as to why we were missing or why a job wasn't completed.

Lies to our partners as to our whereabouts.

In fact, gambling dominated almost all of our waking lives.

Now we must fill this void.

Each member should try to find a way that suits them best but it is essential that they do find a way. Some take up long-forgotten hobbies.

Some return to sport they once had an interest in.

Some resume education (this is something that can be done at any age).

We would also suggest that some time is allocated to rebuilding the family life or rebuilding relationships with friends and relatives who may have suffered due to our gambling.

These are just a few suggestions.

We hope each member will make their own efforts to fill the void and, in doing so, will sustain and enhance their recovery.

Enjoy it.

Recovery from compulsive gambling is a wonderful miracle and every member's recovery is a unique and personal experience.

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

This may seem like stating the obvious but there are obstacles which, if we are not aware of them, can prevent us enjoying our miracle.

Guilt.

When life starts to improve for us, we sometimes let our minds wander to past misdeeds and, if we allow ourselves to dwell on these too long, we begin to think that we do not deserve to recover and these thoughts, if not spoken about, can have tragic results.

Resentment.

When we first come to GA, it is suggested that we make some very radical changes in our behaviour.

Some we think are impossible, unnecessary, or we just don't want to do them.

However, in the early days we tried them, and they worked, and we quickly gained time free from gambling.

Euphoria of not gambling fades.

We start to ask questions of ourselves,
e.g. *Why can't I carry money if I want to? - Why can't I buy a raffle ticket? - Why can't I watch a big race on TV?*

Price of recovery is too high.

This thinking can lead to tragedy. If we are to sustain recovery, instead of resenting the disciplines we must impose on ourselves, we should be rejoicing in the many rewards that are ours - self-respect, peace of mind, and happy family life.

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 miracle that is the GA recovery programme.

Go on, enjoy it!

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 is dominated by an irresistible urge to gamble. Coupled with this is the obsessive idea that a way can be found, not only to control the gambling, but to make it pay and enjoy it.

While compulsively gambling, we often express a desire to stop forever but, inevitably, we find ourselves back in action.

For most of us there are days, weeks or even months when we are certain that we have gained control. These intervals invariably are followed by long periods of all-out uncontrolled gambling during which a progressive deterioration in almost every department of our lives becomes evident.

This deterioration is most acute in the relationships with our wives and husbands, friends, relatives and employers.

Therefore, acceptance of the progressive nature of our illness is vital to enable us to recover and return to a normal, productive and enjoyable life.

Attend as many meetings as possible.

There is a saying in GA, *Meetings make it.*

You may ask yourself, "*Make what?*"

And the answer? Recovery.

Meetings make it easier, stronger and better.

The foundation of the fellowship is in its meetings.

By sharing our experience, strength and hope, we believe you will find the inner strength necessary to arrest our gambling on a daily basis.

We suggest that, in your first 90 days, you get as many meetings in as possible. Not because you need them more than us, but because the quicker you come to terms with this illness, the better it will be for you.

On entering GA, you will see evidence of a lifestyle that is obviously very different from the one you have been living. The more you see and begin to understand this new way of living, the greater will be the benefit to you and your family.

After their first 90 days, members usually settle down to a routine. This routine differs from member to member. Some take part in many meetings per week, others only one. The choice is yours, but we have found that most members do more than one meeting.

Each to his own and you will find a level that you are comfortable with.

But remember, *Meetings make it.*

Only carry money that you really need.

You may find this suggestion hard to accept at this moment but, believe us, there is a very good reason for it.

In your first 90 days you are still finding your way, still trying to come to terms with this illness and beginning to realise that money has uses other than gambling, but you are still very vulnerable.

You have been made aware of the financial position you (and your family) are in and yet it is so easy to fall into the old trap of believing once more that gambling will solve your financial problems quickly.

This dream is so much easier to believe if you have excess money in your pockets: When gambling, in our minds £10 often quickly became £100, and £100 became £1000 even quicker. Before we knew where we were, we were back on the old merry-go-round once again.

We have learned through experience not to put ourselves through this temptation and use the basic suggestions of GA and only carry money that we really need for that day.

This suggestion serves another purpose for us.

If our families can see that we are really making an effort and taking the basic advice, it puts their mind at ease and things in the home begin to improve.

Again, through experience we have found that, with the support of our families and of our GA meetings, these early stages in our recovery can be very pleasant and rewarding times.

Work out a budget with the help of GA.

In most cases it is financial pressures that finally lead us to seek help within GA.

Many years of borrowing from banks, finance companies, friends, and relatives, create seemingly insurmountable problems. Initially, upon entering GA, it is necessary to establish a sound financial budget, which allows you to pay off debts at a rate you can afford.

GA members can be invaluable in helping you to work out a budget as many of them have experienced the self-same problems you now find yourself in.

They can advise you on how much you can afford to repay as trying to settle debts too quickly, causing further financial pressures, can lead us back to gambling.

It is surprising how quickly financial problems can be solved, allowing you to concentrate on the more difficult task of changing yourself.

Tell your partner everything.

Another piece of advice we are given early in our GA life is to *wipe the slate clean* i.e. tell our partner everything.

This can seem a horrendous task to the new member but, painful though it may be, it is essential that we take this advice and apply it if we are to recover.

It is, however, truly amazing how this illness can control us and warp our judgment.

Many members have told us of how, when their gambling bubble burst and they were pouring out the terrible things they had done and the debts they had incurred due to gambling, they would hold on to one debt.

The excuses included embarrassment, shame, and forgetfulness or, *I thought I could manage to pay it myself, or I am really just too ashamed of this debt.*

We believe it is the illness keeping a hold on its victim.

As long as a compulsive gambler has a secret debt, he or she is keeping a ready-made excuse to gamble.

Our experience shows this to be true.

How can a realistic budget be planned or managed if all the outgoings are not declared? How can a hidden debt be paid without manipulating the cash available, and more lying to cover this up? Another reason for telling our partner everything is that, in the early days of our recovery, we need someone to handle our finances.

We will probably have a couple of members of our group to help work out a budget which, again, our partner will be expected to manage.

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 round ourselves, isolating us 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 dream world.

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 we need friends within the fellowship.

We need people who have faced similar problems and hardships, who know what you are going through, and with whom we can feel relaxed and comfortable, to whom nothing we say is likely to shock or cause embarrassment.

When we stop gambling there is usually a great void in our lives.

Friends in GA can help us fill that void.

They can help us to rebuild our social life again and, in the early days, it makes it easier if we socialise in non-gambling company.

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, get to a meeting as soon as possible. Use the telephone.

As a fellowship of compulsive gamblers, it is inevitable that some go back to gambling. Unfortunately, there have been occasions when members have found themselves in this position and have never returned to the fellowship.

Whether they felt ashamed or had a feeling that they had let someone down, or for some other reason, it is obvious that something kept them from returning.

Don't let this happen to you. If (and we sincerely hope you don't) you slip and go back to gambling, get to a meeting or phone another member as quickly as possible.

No one will look upon you as a failure. No one will say, you have let them down. We are there to help, not judge.

It is a fact that GA meetings have many members who, at some time, have gone back to gambling. If they returned then they are the fortunate ones.

Most of them are living happy, contented lives, free from gambling and the horrors that go with it. The unfortunate ones are still out there, gambling and suffering.

So, if you return to gambling (and we don't apologise for repeating this), don't hesitate to get to a meeting or use the phone as quickly as possible.

Tell your partner about Gam-Anon. It can help them.

Compulsive gamblers come from any walk of life.

They come in both sexes and they come in all ages.

We have no doubt that you, as a compulsive gambler will have someone close to you who is suffering as a result of your gambling.

With this in mind, we would like to give you a little information on the sister fellowship of Gam-Anon.

Gam-Anon is quite separate from GA but closely linked.

Members are wives, husbands, sweethearts, parents or just close friends of compulsive gamblers.

Their suffering is quite different from that of the gambler.

They have no control over our gambling whatsoever.

When listening to Gam-Anon members speak, we have found that, their mood swings depended often depended on the outcome of the gambler's day and, in many cases their personality became so suppressed that they became similar to the gambler.

Sadly, in cases where there once was love, there remained only hate and bitterness.

Add to all this, confusion and a feeling of hopelessness and you can see why they also need help. Gam-Anon won't stop you gambling but we have found, in our experience, that it has been of help to have our partners recover and share in our recovery.

List of the headings in this booklet:

- Listen and learn.
- Understand and apply the 12 Step Recovery Programme.
- We cannot do it alone.
- Stay away from the first bet - one day at a time.
- Stop living in the past.
- Fill the void.
- Enjoy it.
- Accept the illness for what it is.
- Attend as many meetings as possible.
- Only carry money that you really need.
- Work out a budget with the help of GA.
- Tell your partner everything.
- Make friends within the fellowship.
- If you gamble, get to a meeting as soon as possible. Use the telephone.
- Tell your partner about Gam-Anon. It can help them.

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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