

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

Suggestions for Coping with Urges to Gamble

Many compulsive gamblers, especially those in early stages of recovery, experience urges to gamble. Repetition of the gambling behavior over a relatively long period of time, combined with thoughts of gambling and associated pleasurable feelings, causes the compulsive gambler to experience cravings. Sometimes these urges to bet are so intense and overpowering that they cause the gambler to relapse.

Following are some suggestions to cope with urges to gamble.

SUGGESTIONS TO PREVENT URGES FROM OCCURRING

- **Attend Gamblers Anonymous meetings as often as needed**, but at least once a week.
- Become more involved in the Gamblers Anonymous Program. **Take a Trusted Servant position.**
- **Telephone other GA members on a regular basis.**
- **Read and re-read the Gamblers Anonymous Combo Book.** Many GA members have said “Everything I need to stay away from a bet is right here in this little yellow book.”
- **Ask another Gamblers Anonymous member to be your sponsor.**
- **Read and LIVE the Gamblers Anonymous Steps of Recovery.** At first, it is OK to have a healthy skepticism about working the Steps. However, thousands of GA members have reported that the more they become involved in the Steps of Recovery, the less likely they are to gamble. It is suggested that you ask another GA member – preferably your sponsor – to help guide you through the Steps.
- **Don’t go in or near establishments where gambling is available**, including web sites on the Internet. Shop in stores or supermarkets that are gambling-free or where gambling is out of sight
- **Don’t look at anything that will remind you of gambling** – for example, the sports or stock market sections of the newspaper, lottery tickets, racing programs, or advertisements for casinos or other forms of gambling.
- **Don’t associate with people who gamble.** (This may mean curtailing relationships with friends or relatives.)
- **Avoid getting caught up in conversations about gambling.**
- **Carry only the bare minimum amount of money that you need for the day.** If possible, have your **paycheck direct-deposited** or put someone you trust in charge of your finances. **Destroy your credit, debit, and ATM cards** – anything that will put a barrier between you and excess cash.
- **Establish an anniversary date** – that is, your first Gamblers Anonymous meeting after your last bet. Many GA members gain a healthy inner confidence from knowing that they have acquired the habit of not wagering over time.
- **Change your attitude.** There is a world of difference in the statements “I have to stop gambling” and “I want to stop gambling.” Think about it. If you *have* to do anything, then you probably won’t *want* to.
- **Change your behavior.** This is one of the most difficult tasks in all of human endeavors, let alone in the Gamblers Anonymous Program. However, it states in the yellow combo book that it is necessary for a compulsive gambler to bring about a character change in order to prevent a relapse. GA members have reported that character defects such as anger, impatience, laziness, self-pity, etc., have led them back to gambling. Replacing negative habits with healthy ones is vital for maintaining abstinence.

- **Consider getting your body into better physical condition.** It has been said, “Bring the body and the mind will follow.” If compulsive gambling is a sickness of the mind, then it makes sense for a compulsive gambler to be in relatively good physical condition. Remember the saying: “Healthy body, healthy mind.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR WHEN YOU HAVE AN URGE TO GAMBLE

- First acknowledge the urge. Become acutely aware of it – how you feel and what is going on in your mind. Then say to yourself, “Oh, OK. I am now having an urge to gamble. Right now I want to gamble. **TOO BAD I DON’T GAMBLE ANYMORE.**”
- OK. So your urge to gamble is very strong. Again, acknowledge the urge and become aware of what is happening and say to yourself, “OK, maybe I’ll gamble in 10 minutes.” **Wait 10 minutes.** If the urge is still there, say to yourself, “OK, maybe I’ll gamble in another 10 minutes.” Then find something else to do for 10 minutes. If the urge persists, **keep putting off gambling for 10-minute stretches.** Keep doing this. The urge to gamble will pass.
- **Make believe your mind is a slide projector** and the thoughts that enter your brain are slides. Go to a quiet place, close your eyes and **CHANGE THE SLIDE!** Refuse to entertain thoughts about gambling. Think about a family member, a loved one, your job, a pleasant activity – anything but gambling. You can do it if you quiet your mind and concentrate.
- **Accept the fact that you cannot gamble safely.** This may seem painfully obvious, but many GA members have reported relapsing after having debated mentally with themselves on this point. Among some of the common inner arguments: “It’ll be different this time,” “I’m not that bad yet,” “I’ll quit once I get even,” and “I’m due.” **Acceptance is one of the key components of the GA program.**
- **Say the Serenity Prayer:** “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.” Repeat the prayer until the urge dissipates. A quieting of the mind will quiet the urge to gamble.
- **Work Recovery Steps Two and Three.** Envision yourself giving the urge to gamble to a Higher Power. Many GA members live by the saying, “Let go and let God.”
- **Go to a Gamblers Anonymous meeting regardless of the way you feel.**
- Go to a quiet place and **meditate.** One simple method might be to close your eyes and stare out into space, visualizing the urge as a concrete object (it doesn’t matter what it is). Concentrate on it for several minutes. As you hold the object in your mind, visualize it breaking up into tiny pieces. Your urge to gamble will disintegrate with it.
- **Telephone someone you trust.** Tell him or her about your urge to gamble.
- Leaving cash, checks, and credit cards behind, go and **meet with someone.**
- Stop dwelling on the urge. Get outside of yourself. **Go and help someone else.**

- **Think the bet all the way through** and weigh the consequences. Most of us don't consider the possibility that if we gamble, we might lose. Consider the possibility that you will lose. Think of all the other times you have lost. **All forms of gambling are losing propositions.** You will probably lose again. Will losing this money – in addition to money already lost and problems you already have – really make you feel better? And if you were to win, what would happen to the money? What has happened to all the money from past winnings? Where is it? What is the cause of your current financial situation? **Isn't it gambling that has put you in this predicament?** Can't you see yourself betting away any winnings – PLUS MORE? Isn't it true that with a win you might pay off a few bills, yet set aside some cash for MORE GAMBLING? Isn't it true that any winnings would be used as ammunition to keep waging the war of gambling?
- **Write about the pros and cons of gambling in your life.** Take a sheet of paper and divide it into two columns. On the left side, list all the good things that gambling has given you. On the right side, list all the bad things that have happened to you as a result of your gambling. Be thorough and honest. (Note: You may want to rate each item from 1 - 10 in terms of importance, with 10 being the most important and 1 being the least. When you're through, total up each column and compare the score.) Once the list is complete, use this tool as a reminder of the effects of gambling on your life.
- Make a decision about **how you will spend your free time** instead of gambling.
- Make a decision that you won't gamble **JUST FOR TODAY!**

Again, these are all merely suggestions. Why not figure out the ones that will work best for you?

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS®
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE OFFICE
 1306 MONTE VISTA AVENUE, SUITE #5
 UPLAND, CA 91786
 PHONE: (909) 931-9056
 FAX: (909) 931-9059
 WEBSITE: www.gamblersanonymous.org
 E-MAIL: isomain@gamblersanonymous.org

FOR MEETING INFORMATION
 IN YOUR AREA CALL
 (855) 2-CALL-GA
 (855) 222-5542

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