

GAM-ANON

The self-help organization of Gam-Anon is a life saving instrument of the spouse, family or close friends of the compulsive gambler. We come into the group feeling frightened, helpless, desperate, and ashamed. We hesitated to share our problems and failures, fearing none could understand. The Gam-Anon group is warmly accepting and it offers the new member identification. The message we receive is "Come join with us, we too were alone, afraid and unable to cope with the problem, we will share with you a new and fulfilling way of life." Gam-Anon's purposes are threefold: to learn acceptance and understanding of the gambling illness; to use the program and its problem solving suggestions as an aide in rebuilding our lives and to give appropriate aid to the gambler; and, upon our own recovery, then to give assistance to those who suffer.

In Gam-Anon the member will experience relief from anxiety by accepting the fact of powerlessness over the problem in the family. The heavy load of responsibility for the gambling problem is lifted and the agonizing guilt in regard to failures is gradually alleviated. The energy wasted in attempts to stop loved ones from gambling can be channeled into more useful methods of problem solving.

The program suggests that we refuse to be responsible for the gambler's behavior, assuming responsibility only for that which is ours. The prevailing idea is, "the gambler will play as long as someone else will pay."

In Gam-Anon we learn the appropriate way of relating to the gambler as an equal rather than as a "mother." This involves the process known as "letting go" or giving up the control. To be an adult is to give warmth and love in an equal role with the gambler.

It is important to recovery that the member see compulsive gambling in its true light, as an emotional illness. At this point, we will understand that obsessive compulsive behavior, acting out and game playing are symptoms of a serious illness. Although we may have been a pawn in game playing, our hurt was a side effect of this illness, not deliberately intended. After years of accumulated hurtful experiences it will be difficult for us to give up anger and resentment. The recovery program of Gam-Anon offers help in working through and in resolving these feelings.

If the gambler and member seek help jointly, the recovery process will be less complicated. But even then, there is much for us to learn. We will need to be aware that the gambler's recovery cannot be hurried. It is important that we encourage the gambler, but we must refrain from pushing. Our expectations of the gambler should be limited to their ability to respond. Although it proves to be their Waterloo, gambling is their "first love," to give it up will be a tremendous undertaking. They may, at times, be irritable, unreasonable, and difficult to understand. It will be necessary that the gambler expend time and effort in the struggle to stop gambling. This may include many nights away from families as the gambler attends group meetings according to his needs. Our understanding is required and it should be explained to the children because they too, will need to understand.

The members who come to Gam-Anon, and remain to find help for themselves regardless of the gambler's refusal to respond, are greatly to be admired. Their role is one of extreme difficulty. The gambler may resent Gam-Anon attendance and may see it as an attempt to interfere with his/her life. Hopefully the gambler will be motivated to seek help, but recovery should not depend upon the gambler.

APPROVED BOD MEETING 1979.

