



GAM-ANON SPEAKS TO OUR TEENS

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I. FOR THE PARENTS OF OUR TEENS

Gam-Anon offers this resource with the knowledge that problem gambling affects our family members, including our children, in many ways.

Our children's growing years are not always easy ones! Adults try, with love and understanding, to help guide their children. Sometimes, it's hard for us to live up to the standards we envision for ourselves. Despite obstacles or challenges, we strive to do our best.

Seeing our children affected by the gambling problem in our family is a genuine and familiar cause for concern. Affected by someone else's gambling, we reach out to Gam-Anon for the support we need to help ourselves. We gain the courage to face the effects of the gambling problem as we work to achieve serenity and stability in our family. We learn acceptance and how to live one day at a time.

Our children notice the struggles, tension, and turmoil. They may even believe they are responsible for the unhappiness in their home. It is important that we discuss and explain the problem in an age-appropriate way. Children usually find the truth less threatening than the fear of the unknown.

Once we recognize our family's need for help and we enter Gam-Anon (and/or Gamblers Anonymous), this too should be explained to our children. Our children should understand that attendance at meetings is vital to the well-being of their family. As children grow older, they may wish to participate in their own self-help groups, Gam-A-Teen or to participate in Gam-Anon when it is age appropriate.

Again, this resource is for you and your teen children, so they will know they are not alone. It offers them strength, knowledge, and understanding.

Please consider sharing the following pages with your teen . . .

- to read together;
- to serve as a springboard for conversation with you;
- to provide insight into how other teens may feel;
- to use as a resource for answering questions, honestly and openly;
- to provide inspiration for their well-being and to further the recovery of all who are affected by the gambling of another.

Please consider sharing material downloaded from the Gam-Anon website, gam-anon.org and selected readings in our literature. There are experiences, poems, and inspirational thoughts that can be appropriate to share.

II. FOR OUR TEENS

In this section, you can read about the experiences, feelings, and concerns of other teens and how they have been affected by someone else's gambling problem.

Living with a parent, grandparent, sibling, or any adult who has a gambling problem can be difficult. It can affect your whole family, and particularly how you think, feel, and act. What it's like living with this gambling problem is different for each person. Do any of the feelings or experiences that follow from other young people describe what it's been like for you?

Recently, I found a box of my old school mementos that my mom had been saving. As I looked through her box of treasures, memories came back to me. First I found a book from nursery school with my classmates' original drawings of their families. My page showed a family watching TV, with the caption: my daddy is excited to watch football because he can make bets on his team. Next I found another book from about a year later, created for Valentine's Day. My page had a hand-drawn picture of me and my dad. He was holding a book. This time the caption said: I love when my dad reads stories to me.

Between those two books, my parents had started going to Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon. What a difference that made in my life.

It was so hard growing up in my home. When I was very young, I didn't know why my mom was always so sad. I would try to make her laugh, doing silly things, but finally I gave up. In time I found out my dad had a gambling problem. I still didn't know what that meant, but how I wished I could just make him stop doing whatever it was that made my mom so sad.

I knew there was a problem in my family, and I knew it had something to do with gambling and money, and so I became very careful about asking for my allowance or new clothes, or anything else. I was so jealous of friends who seemed to have no cares, and always had new things. I started to avoid being with my friends, and that made me even more unhappy. I didn't know how to answer their questions about my moodiness or not wanting to be with them. How lucky they were to be living their perfect lives without the problems that I had.

After my brother's first semester away at college, he was different when he came home for his winter break. I knew he didn't do well in his classes, and my parents were not happy. What they didn't know was that he asked me for money. He said he owed it to people at school because he was gambling and lost a lot of money. He knew I had money in a bank account, and he made me swear not to tell my parents. I was so confused. I didn't want to tattle on my brother, and I didn't want him to get into more trouble gambling. I still haven't told my parents.

I hear the word 'addiction' very often, but it's always about abusing drugs. I hear about the grief and sorrow drug addiction has on families from other kids in school and on the news. I think they say that drug addiction is an illness. I've overheard my dad on the phone talking to another Gamblers Anonymous member and he referred to himself as having an addiction. Is his problem with gambling actually an addiction too?

My parents were not like the other kids' parents, or at least that's how it seemed to me. My father was often in a bad mood, and at night I could hear them fighting about gambling and paying bills. I avoided bringing friends to my house because I never knew what to expect, and I didn't want to be embarrassed.

There were times that I cancelled plans to go out with my friends, because I thought if I stayed home, I could keep an eye on my mom and prevent her from going out to gamble. But this did not work.

My parents fight about dad's gambling every night. Mom cries that she can't pay the bills, and that makes him yell louder. They think I'm asleep. I wonder if I did anything wrong to make them so angry with each other.

Sometimes my parents would ask me for money, and at other times they would help themselves to my money in my wallet or in my hiding places without permission. I knew my dad needed money because he gambles. And my mom needed money for food. When money was missing from my hiding spots, I just held in my anger and pretended it didn't happen. I think a lot about where to hide my money and how much my parents need my money.

My mom is just not around the way she used to be. I think she goes to a casino. Sometimes she is asleep in the morning when I get up to go to school. She used to make breakfast for me all the time. Now I have to make my own breakfast and pack lunch for me and my younger sister too. What's happening?

My good friend desperately wants me to lend him money for some kind of gambling he's doing online. He's cutting classes too and wants me to join in the group he plays cards with. I'm not interested in that and I want to remain friends, but I don't know what to do.

My mom insisted on making me a Sweet Sixteen party, like all of my friends were having, but I felt guilty about having money spent on me. When I started applying to colleges, I got so nervous when I saw the tuition expenses, but my mom told me that was not my concern. But I am always so concerned about money and if we will have enough.

My class was going on a trip, and each kid had to bring in a signed consent slip and \$10 for the bus. I didn't return mine and was embarrassed each time the teacher called my name, reminding me of the deadline. What she didn't know was that each night when I asked my mom to sign the paper and give me the \$10, she'd tell me go ask my dad, adding that he was probably at the casino throwing away our family's money. I hated when she talked about him in this way. It scared me. I could never explain all this to my teacher.

One time when my parents took us to the casino for the weekend (we got these fancy hotel rooms for free), I had a school assignment that was due on Monday. I really didn't want to go away because I needed all of my books and materials that were at home to complete the assignment. But I went and didn't get my assignment done and told my dad Sunday night. He told me to either not go to school on Monday or tell my teacher I was with my family at the casino for the weekend. He convinced me she would be understanding. Well, she wasn't. I guess gambling was more important to my dad than my success in school. I was so ashamed that my teacher thought I was irresponsible.

When I was in elementary school, my brother and I had a babysitter every Monday night because my parents had to go somewhere. Sometimes, when I was in my room doing homework, I could hear my mom on the phone with people whose names I began to recognize and words that became familiar to me. Sometimes she cried as she spoke with these people. I put two and two together. One Monday night I asked my parents if they were going to Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon. I was about 10 years old then. They were surprised that I knew, and they briefly explained my dad's gambling problem and why they went to meetings, and never mentioned it again after that night. But after that I worried about what would happen if my dad gambled again. I wish they would have taken the time to explain more about their programs, and make it OK for me to ask more questions.

III. WORDS OF HOPE

As situations change, there are new messages that express hope. Read on . . .

When my parents started going to Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon, I saw changes and I realized they were trying to become better. It was not realistic to expect everything to become perfect, or that everything was going to change immediately. But at least I knew there was hope.

My father still gambles, and my mom goes to Gam-Anon. We talk more now. I have feelings — I am not numb. At times I feel sad and at other times I am angry. It is no fun feeling angry or sad. When I share these feelings with someone, especially my mom, I feel better.

The single most difficult thing about growing up with my mother who gambled was picking out Mother's Day cards. All of the cards I used to read portrayed this fantastic person who would comfort you when you skin your knee, or when you are ill, or had a bad day at school. Sadly, I don't have any memories of that kind of mom when I was younger.

But something happened to my mom in the past five years since she started attending Gamblers Anonymous. Now I look forward to buying those Mother's Day cards. She has become the mom I always wanted. I love her.

I can't believe how much my life has changed since my parents started attending Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon. Something inside my dad changed. He used to ask me how my day was and when I would begin to tell him, he'd uh-huh me, not showing any interest in what I was saying, instead paying attention to other things, like sports. Now he asks how my day is and actually engages in a conversation with me.

I'm proud to be his daughter. I'm proud that he straightened out his act. I'm proud that he loves us and shows us that.

I say thank you to my mom for being patient and having the courage to hold our family together, and for having faith that my dad would become the person he is today. And thank you to my parents for helping my brother and me understand what was going on by answering our questions. Sometimes that was very hard for them to do.

I remember how hard it was for me to describe my grandfather. Other kids would talk about fun times with their grandpa. The only description that was in my head was that my grandpa gambles a lot. It was not fun when he was around. Then my grandpa started going to Gamblers Anonymous and he became part of our family again, interested in what we were doing, easier to talk to, and someone I could depend on. Now when I think about my grandpa, I think of him as a person who happens to have a gambling problem. In my eyes, he's actually a great person who is loving, kind, caring, fun. Yes, I'll always be aware he has an addiction that he has arrested for which he will keep going to meetings. But he's a man that I've come to love and respect.

IV. UNDERSTANDING YOUR OWN SITUATION

If you're living with a family member who has a gambling problem, you might be having a tough time. You may wonder if you caused your parent or family member to gamble.

But no one — not even the children — can cause a parent's or anyone else's gambling problem. Gam-Anon has a very important saying: "I didn't cause it, I can't control it, I can't cure it."

So like other teens with a gambling family member, you may sometimes feel . . . angry, sad, embarrassed . . . or overwhelmed, afraid, confused . . . or you may worry, lie, keep secrets . . . or struggle with school, family or friends . . . or have questions about recovery . . .

then maybe you would find it helpful or reassuring to:

- have a conversation with a parent or teacher or guidance counselor or older sibling or another trusted adult for understanding, help, and support.
- realize there are others going through the same issues.
- recognize changes in the person with the gambling problem after joining Gamblers Anonymous (G.A.) and ask questions about G.A.
- recognize changes in family members attending Gam-Anon and ask for more information about Gam-Anon.
- keep your focus on school and how to keep success in school a priority.
- ask for more information. And ask for help in finding reliable sources of that information.
- appreciate how important it is to have 'courage,' and start thinking about things that require courage to do.

V. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Gam-Anon?

Gam-Anon is a 12-Step self-help fellowship of men and women who have been affected by the gambling problem of a friend or loved one. ... With the help of Gam-Anon, we find our way back to a normal way of thinking and living, whether or not our loved ones continue to gamble.

What are the Purposes of Gam-Anon?

1. To welcome and give assistance and comfort to those affected by someone else's gambling problem.
2. To communicate Gam-Anon's understanding of compulsive gambling and its impact on our lives.
3. To share our experience, strength, and hope in coping with the gambling problem.
4. To use the Steps and Tools of the Gam-Anon program which nurture our spiritual and emotional growth and recovery.

How can I live with the gambling problem in my family?

To live with this problem takes patience. Realizing that this is an addiction helps. When we realize that our loved one is not deliberately trying to hurt us, our burden is a little easier to bear. We cannot change circumstances but we can change our point of view towards them. Be hopeful that your family member will recover with the help of Gamblers Anonymous.

Will I ever be able to trust my family member who gambles?

There is a myth that says a person is completely trustworthy or completely untrustworthy. No one is always all good or all bad, always heroic or always evil. Love and trust can be separated. It is possible to love someone and not trust them and it is possible to trust someone that you do not love.

Is Gam-Anon part of Gamblers Anonymous?

No. Gam-Anon and Gamblers Anonymous each have its own legally recognized organization and its own program. However, we are cooperating organizations and encourage attendance in each other's programs. Gam-Anon has learned that we can support our gamblers in recovery by following our own program, and understanding and respecting the Gamblers Anonymous program.

About Compulsive Gambling . . .

When compulsive gamblers reach the point where they are willing to admit loss of control over gambling and the complete unmanageability of their lives, they may finally be ready to accept help. This help can be found in Gamblers Anonymous.

VI. MESSAGES FROM GAM-ANON

It might be beneficial to review our Gam-Anon literature with a Gam-Anon family member. Our literature offers inspirational messages, strategies used to meet challenges, members' experiences, and how Gam-Anon offers support and hope.

Over time those affected by someone else's gambling may hear slogans that can be helpful in inspiring hope, courage, growth, and change. Find one or more that "speak" to you.

Don't bear the shame - you're not to blame

Don't be alone - use the phone

Cultivate good habits - weed out the bad

Don't despair - we care

Gam-Anon means hope

To get it, you must want it

Worry is useless - be useful

Patience pays

With hope - you can cope

Remember someone helped you

Bury resentments before they bury you

Listen and learn

Think it out before you let it out

Serenity comes from within

Everything in moderation

(reprinted from The Gam-Anon Way of Life)

What is courage?

"To live to my full potential by taking my focus off others and, instead, using my energy to making my own life better. Today I will remember not to postpone becoming all that I can be. I will seize the courage to change the things I can – myself and my life."

(reprinted from 52 Meditations)

Where can I find courage?

"Courage does not arrive with fire in the belly or sword in hand; but rather it tiptoes into our being, encouraging us to take just one step at a time past our fear and doubt. Willingness to accept the discomfort of the challenges we face while pursuing courage brings confidence and unimagined rewards."

(reprinted from 52 Meditations)

YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

There are two days in every week about which we should not worry; two days which should be kept free from **fear** and **apprehension**.

One of these days is **yesterday** with its mistakes and cares, its faults and blunders, its aches and pains. All the money in the world cannot bring back **yesterday**. **Yesterday** has passed forever beyond our control. We cannot undo a single act we performed. We cannot erase a single word we said. **Yesterday** is gone.

The other day we should not worry about is **tomorrow** with its possible adversities, its burdens, its large promise or poor performance. **Tomorrow** is also beyond our immediate control.

Tomorrow's sun will rise, either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds . . . but it will rise. Until it does, we have no stake in **tomorrow**, for it is yet unborn.

This leaves only one day . . . **TODAY**. We can fight the battles of just one day. It is only when you and I add the burdens of these two awful eternities — **yesterday and tomorrow** — that we break down.

It is not the experience of **today** that drives people mad. It is the remorse or bitterness of something which happened **yesterday** and the dread of what **tomorrow** may bring.

Let us, therefore, LIVE BUT ONE DAY AT A TIME.

(reprinted from The Gam-Anon Way of Life)

SERENITY PRAYER

God, Grant me the
Serenity to accept the things
I cannot change,
Courage to change the things
I can, and
Wisdom to know the
difference.

(reprinted from The Gam-Anon Way of Life)

TODAY I WILL...say the Serenity Prayer in both times of need and gratitude. I will strive to understand more fully the meaning and practical use of the words in my everyday life.

(reprinted from 52 Meditations)