Gamblers Anonymous England, Wales & Ulster

Public Relations Policy

This policy has been reviewed by the National Committee on the 28th of April 2024.

As recovering compulsive gamblers in GA, we must share our recovery with others to stay off gambling. That is the essence of step 12 of the Recovery Programme. The same applies to Groups; without newcomers, the most important people in our meetings would be absent. GA maintains its vitality by fulfilling its primary purpose: carrying the message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. GA cannot help compulsive gamblers if they have never heard of it, or if its reputation is such that they are advised to stay away from it.

GA will always reach some compulsive gamblers directly, good public relations or not (members will invite friends, family members and co-workers who seek recovery to attend meetings), but the vast majority of suffering compulsive gamblers must be reached indirectly, through others. Most compulsive gamblers will only hear of GA through the media or through being referred by a professional or other member of the public. Otherwise, they will not hear of it at all. To fulfill our primary purpose, we must co-operate with the public. We cannot do it on our own.

Attraction rather than promotion

Step 11 of the Unity Programme says: “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion”. When we share our message in public, we should state it simply and directly, rather than making overblown claims about individuals or GA as a whole. We have had what our members feel to be significant success, but we do not claim to have a programme that will work for all compulsive gamblers under all circumstances, or therapeutic views that should be adopted universally. All we should say is that, if someone has a gambling problem, GA may be able to help them. We have helped many compulsive gamblers stop gambling, lose the desire to gamble, and find a healthy, productive place in society. We need claim nothing more than that required to attract the suffering compulsive gambler to our meetings, and to gain the goodwill of those who might refer compulsive gamblers to us.

We do not have all the answers for every troubled person; we do not even have all the answers for every compulsive gambler. In GA, one compulsive gambler shares their experience, strength and hope with another. Some of the problems relating to compulsive gambling cannot be addressed adequately in this way but require external help.

GA is one tool for addressing compulsive gambling, but not the only one. A variety of organisations offer help to compulsive gamblers seeking recovery. Some of them are highly effective. For whatever reason, some compulsive gamblers might find recovery more readily through those programmes than through GA. If others can help where we cannot, then so much the better.

It should be emphasised, however, that “attraction rather than promotion” does not mean we do nothing to make ourselves known. It is not only alright, but encouraged, to spread the word of GA's existence and usefulness. We do not go about making wild, extravagant claims about ourselves, or belittling the work of others, but we are not a secret society either. GA is based on personal anonymity, but the Fellowship itself should not be anonymous.

Anonymity

Step 11 of the Unity Programme spells out only one public relations restriction in detail: “we must always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, film and television.” We discourage the use of pictures of GA members in the media, and stories which identify them by name. We do this for a number of reasons, including the following:

* We must be able to assure newcomers that their identities as GA members will remain confidential;
* We want to keep the focus on GA's credibility, not on the credibility of the people carrying the message;
* Anonymity keeps us mindful of the need for humility, and of the need to put the Fellowship before ourselves.

The need to maintain personal anonymity in the media does not prohibit the use of spokespeople. However, those spokespeople should appear not as GA members, but as special workers whose job is to speak for the organisation.

Step 11 of the Unity Programme focusses on the need for personal anonymity only in public media. At other levels, personal anonymity is a matter of personal choice. When we know someone with a gambling problem, we may disclose to them our identity as recovering compulsive gamblers and GA members if we think it might be helpful to do so. Likewise, members who give talks at events, may share their personal experience as well as general information about the GA Programme.

Carrying the message

Step 5 of the Unity Programme reads: “GA has but one primary purpose - to carry the message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers.” We must judge the usefulness of our public relations work by considering the extent to which it will help us fulfill our primary purpose.

But what is “the message”? It is important that members are clear on this matter, so that they do not convey inaccurate impressions of the Fellowship to the public. The message is that any compulsive gambler can stop gambling, and develop a new, healthy, spiritual way of life.

Relationships with others

Our friends have helped us start meetings in many places, and have helped GA grow. GA could not fulfill its primary purpose without the co-operation of others. We have a number of principles underpinning our relations with other organisations, among them steps 6, 7 and 10 of the Unity Programme:

* GA should never endorse, finance or lend the GA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
* Every GA Group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
* GA has no opinion on outside issues, hence the GA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

We seek to provide helpful information about GA to the public. We seek to co-operate with others as much as we can, as members of society. At the same time, we maintain a clear distinction between GA and other organisations. We neither endorse nor oppose the work of others. We do not provide funds for the work of others, and do not accept external funding for our own activities. GA has a place in society, and it is our responsibility to maintain that place.

Our public relations efforts must be supported entirely by our members. Local businesses, government agencies and civic organisations may approve so heartily of what we do that they offer funds to help us carry our message. We must decline that kind of support, well-intentioned though it may be. GA must pay its own way. However, it should be noted that not all scenarios are black or white. Members need to exercise their own judgement in such cases.

There is one final matter to keep in mind when considering our relationships with other organisations. In order to maintain its focus, GA has established a tradition of neutrality on public issues. As an organisation we do not take positions on anything outside our own specific sphere of activity. GA does not express opinions, positive or negative, on civil, social, medical, legal or religious matters. We do not even take stances on gambling-related issues, such as regulation and law enforcement. We believe our sole competence is in providing a place where suffering compulsive gamblers can identify with others like themselves who have experienced substantial recovery from compulsive gambling. To remain free from the distraction of controversy, we focus our energy on what we do best, and only on that.