GAMBLING EXCLUSION / SELF-EXCLUSION PROGRAMS

As we will discuss in this fact sheet, exclusion programs are an option for some people who are trying to limit or abstain from gambling. In addition to discussing the potential benefits of exclusion programs, we will discuss the potential limitations of such programs.

TYPES/DESCRIPTIONS OF EXCLUSION PROGRAMS

- **Self-exclusion programs:** A player-initiated, voluntary form of exclusion that provides gamblers with the opportunity to ban themselves from gambling venues. These programs are designed to limit an individual’s access to gambling opportunities and, in turn, help the individual to abstain from gambling. By signing a self-exclusion agreement, individuals typically agree to certain obligations and forgo some rights under an agreement with an operator that is offered voluntarily or enforced by law. These include:
  - for nominated venues, they agree not to enter gaming areas, not to play gaming machines or not to enter the venue at all
  - authorizing staff to stop them from entering or remaining in a gaming area or venue that they are excluded from
  - authorizing for photographs and personal details to be taken and disseminated to relevant venues and for venues to display the photographs
  - waiving the right to sue nominated venues, their staff or the program administrator on the grounds of assault, defamation or failing in a duty of care to exclude
  - accept their personal responsibility to stay away
  - acknowledge that nominated venues or their staff have no legal duty implied by the self-exclusion deed.

- Several states and countries have implemented self-exclusion programs. In these state-wide and country-wide programs, an individual is excluded from all state-sanctioned gambling venues, including tribal casinos.
  - **State-wide and country-wide self-exclusion programs** (not exhaustive): Connecticut, Missouri, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Arizona, Oklahoma, California, Kansas, Canada (except Quebec), Australia (most states), Netherlands, France, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and South Africa.
  - Specific tribal casinos in the state of Washington allow individuals to self-exclude from those specific establishments.
  - There are also specific gambling providers that offer self-exclusion programs.
  - **Gambling providers with self-exclusion programs:** All American Gaming Association member venues and some multinational casino companies.

- **Involuntary exclusion programs:** A type of exclusion issued to an individual by a gambling provider (usually a casino). Gambling providers reserve the right to exclude individuals from their premises for any reason (such as dishonest gambling practices or disorderly conduct). In some instances, a state gaming board will exclude (or ban) an individual from gambling at any state-sanctioned gambling venues (usually casinos).
  - **Involuntary exclusion programs in other parts of the world:** In some eastern countries (e.g., China), there are regulations that also allow for others (i.e., family) to exclude an individual from casinos. In addition, some eastern countries have regulations that state that individuals who are bankrupt and/or receiving financial aid from the government are automatically excluded from entering the casinos.

LENGTH OF EXCLUSION ORDERS

- Exclusion bans may be for a limited time (such as 6 months, 1 year, or 5 years) or a lifetime.
THERE ARE A NUMBER OF TERMS USED TO DEFINE GAMBLING AND GAMBLING DISORDERS:

- **Gambling**: 1a) to play a game for money or property, 1b) to bet on an uncertain outcome, 2) to stake something on a contingency: take a chance

- **Gambling Disorder**: or gambling addiction (formerly known as pathological gambling), is a persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behavior that causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

SIGNS OF A GAMBLING DISORDER:
A. Persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behavior leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as indicated by the individual exhibiting four (or more) of the following in a 12 month period:

1. Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement.
2. Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling.
3. Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling.
4. Is often preoccupied with gambling (e.g. having persistent thoughts of reliving past gambling experiences, handicapping or planning the next venture, thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble).
5. Often gambles when feeling distress (e.g., helpless, guilty, anxious, depressed).
6. After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even ('chasing’ one’s losses).
7. Lies to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling.
8. Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational career opportunity because of gambling.
9. Relies on others to provide money to relieve desperate financial situations caused by gambling.

B. The gambling behavior is not better explained by a manic episode.

Severity of the gambling disorder is measured as follows:

- **Mild**: 4-5 criteria met
- **Moderate**: 6-7 criteria met
- **Severe**: 8-9 criteria met.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATING AN EXCLUSION ORDER

- Although the consequences of violating self-exclusion orders differ, they typically involve the following:
  - Being escorted off the premises
  - Forfeiture of winnings
  - Potential criminal (i.e., trespassing) charges

BURDEN OF ENFORCEMENT

- In exclusion programs, the gambling provider (usually a casino) is responsible for identifying and keeping out excluders.

LIMITATIONS OF SELF-EXCLUSION PROGRAMS

- Self-exclusion agreements are not necessarily legally enforceable.
- Research indicates that self-exclusion programs result in a percentage (22-55%) of self-excluders entering casinos undetected, thereby breaching their contracts.

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Majority of problem gamblers do not enter into these agreements
  - Some barriers include embarrassment in instigating the process, which can be heightened in smaller rural communities where privacy is difficult to maintain.¹,¹¹

Self-exclusion programs are limited in the extent to which they fail to cover gambling available at venues not included in the agreement. Self-excluded individuals engage in gambling at venues they have not excluded from and in other forms of gambling to which bans do not apply.¹

EFFICACY OF SELF-EXCLUSION PROGRAMS

- Despite these limitations, self-exclusion programs have shown some efficacy.
  - Two longitudinal studies that provide evidence for efficacy. These studies found that after being in a self-exclusion program, self-excluders reported significant improvements in the following areas:
    - Gambling frequency and intensity
    - The rate of gambling disorder (declined from 79% at enrollment to 15% at follow-up)   
    - Number of gambling problems
    - Intensity of negative consequences of gambling
    - Sense of control and urge to gamble
  - A literature review of various self-exclusion programs worldwide found that the majority of participants benefit from such schemes. These benefits include participants reporting:
    - Decreases in gambling expenditure and improved financial circumstances
    - Decreases in gambling frequency and time spent gambling
    - Reduction in problem gambling severity and negative consequences of gambling
    - Reduction in related psychological difficulties including depression and anxiety
    - More control of their circumstances

- Even without enforcement, self-exclusions may be somewhat effective because they allow problem gamblers to make a public commitment to stop gambling.¹ Some problem gamblers will wish to avoid the potential embarrassment of being caught in a break of a self-exclusion agreement.¹

CAUSAL LINK BETWEEN POSITIVE EFFECTS AND SELF-EXCLUSION PROGRAM

- Although there is some evidence of positive effects associated with self-exclusion programs, there is little to indicate the magnitude of the causal link.¹
- A gambler’s willingness to address their adverse gambling behaviors precedes self-exclusion in most cases.¹ It is likely that this willingness, as well as the self-exclusion and potential referrals, results in better outcomes for the potential gambler.¹

HELP FOR THOSE WITH GAMBLING PROBLEMS:
Help for people experiencing problems with gambling, their family members, and the greater community is available:

- The Massachusetts Council on Compulsive Gambling operates a free, confidential Helpline (800-426-1234) and website: [www.masscompulsivegambling.org](http://www.masscompulsivegambling.org). In addition, the Mass. Council trains clinicians and maintains a list of professionals who have earned their Massachusetts Problem Gambling Specialist Certificate (MAPGS).
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health funds treatment centers throughout the state. Many clinicians have earned the Massachusetts Problem Gambling Specialist Certificate and understand both the differences and similarities among problem gambling and alcohol and other substance use disorders ([http://www.mass.gov/dph/bsas](http://www.mass.gov/dph/bsas)).
- Many people experiencing problems with gambling can attend meetings through Gamblers Anonymous (GA; [http://www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)) or Bettors Anonymous (BA; [http://www.bettorsanonymous.org/](http://www.bettorsanonymous.org/)).
- Spouses, significant others, and family members of people experiencing problems with gambling can attend Gam-Anon ([http://www.gam-anon.org/](http://www.gam-anon.org/)), a fellowship that meets to share experiences about living with a disordered gambler.
For more information or to have a packet of materials sent to you, please visit [www.masscompulsivegambling.org](http://www.masscompulsivegambling.org), call the Mass. Council Helpline (800-426-1234), e-mail the Council at gambling@aol.com, or visit 190 High Street, Suite 5, Boston, MA 02110-3031.

**REFERENCES**

4. gamble | to play a game in which you can win or lose money or possessions: to bet money or other valuable things. at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gamble>

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