



# NCPG

National Council on Problem Gambling

## **INTERNET RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING STANDARDS**

**Revised September 27, 2019**

Gambling may have benefits but also has well documented negative consequences. Internet gambling is no exception. It is clear that some who gamble online will develop problems and that these problems are serious. The most ethical and cost-effective response to gambling addiction issues is a comprehensive public health strategy that includes prevention, education, treatment, enforcement, responsible gambling, research and recovery services. Responsible gambling standards are an important aspect of this approach. The National Council on Problem Gambling has developed these standards to help guide discussions among all stakeholders on internet gambling, including operators, regulators, advocates and the public.

In 2012 NCPG reviewed internet responsible gaming codes and regulations from around the world to guide the development of this standard. The Standards were revised in 2019. The final recommendations in this document come from our experience in problem gambling issues, empirical evidence, existing international codes and feedback from experts in the field including operators, vendors, regulators, researchers, clinicians and advocates. The NCPG standards are continually evolving, as internet gambling-related legislation, regulation and technology are rapidly being introduced. It is intended to apply across all platforms (including web, desktop, mobile, app and any other device that can be used for internet gambling).

It is strongly recommended that operators, vendors and regulators consult with experts in the problem and responsible gambling field during the development and implementation of internet gambling. Problem gambling, like other diseases of addiction, will likely never be eliminated, but we must make better efforts to mitigate the damage. A portion of all gambling revenue should be dedicated to reducing the social costs of gambling addiction. Organizations like NCPG provide services to prevent, treat and research gambling problems, as well as responsible gambling programs and policies such as IRGS.

**Definitions:** Problem gambling is a disorder characterized by preoccupation with wagering, chasing losses and losing control over the amount of time and money spent gambling. Responsible gambling is policies and programs designed to prevent and reduce potential harms associated with gambling; they often incorporate a diverse range of initiatives designed to promote consumer protection, improve community and consumer awareness and education, and provide referrals to treatment and recovery resources.

**About NCPG:** The National Council on Problem Gambling is the national advocate for programs and services to assist problem gamblers and their families. NCPG was founded in 1972 and is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that is neutral on legalized gambling.

730 11th Street, NW, Suite 601, Washington, DC 20001

Tel: 202.547.9204

Confidential Helpline: 800.522.4700

[www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)

## **POLICY**

**Policy Commitment:** Corporate policy makes a clear commitment to responsible gambling and identifies expectations for corporate leadership. The policy should seek to ensure that the prevention of gambling-related harm is included in all strategic decisions.

**Strategy:** The operator has a responsible gambling strategy with defined goals and a clear plan of action.

**Evaluation and Reporting:** The strategy should be evaluated annually for progress and a report made publicly available.

**Support:** A portion of the organization's internet gambling revenue should be dedicated to reducing the social costs of gambling addiction.

## **STAFF TRAINING**

**Corporate Policy:** A senior staff member is responsible for implementation of responsible gambling policies and procedures, and that person is listed on the website. There are regular reminders to all Directors, managers and staff about the organization's responsible gambling policies, and general updates on industry best practice.

**Training:** All staff should be trained every year on responsible gambling, including but not limited to, definitions of key terms, myths and facts and where to get help, with content updated as necessary. Customer-facing staff should have enhanced annual training in player protection and responsible gambling interventions. These staff members are taught skills and procedures specific to their position to respond to situations where a player is in distress. Staff knowledge of responsible gambling should be tested as part of the training. Training should be developed or evaluated by an unaffiliated third party with experience in gambling addiction and responsible gambling.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMED DECISION MAKING BY PLAYERS**

**Safer Gambling Information:** Players are provided with highly visible and readily accessible tools and information to help them make more informed decisions about their gambling. The information should be presented in a way that can be clearly understood by a player with a sixth grade reading level. The responsible gambling information includes, but is not limited to, player-focused information on:

1. Practical tips on how to keep gambling within safe limits
2. Common myths associated with the applicable games
3. How the site's individual games work, including randomness, house edge, odds of winning and payout ratios where applicable
4. Preventing access to a player's accounts by underage, unregistered, unauthorized or excluded players
5. How to use the site's responsible gambling tools and features
6. Risks associated with gambling
7. Signs of a potential gambling problem for themselves or their loved ones
8. How to access personal data on responsible gambling
9. Direct links to at least one organization dedicated to helping people with potential gambling problems. Regular testing for functionality occurs for all links to help services.

**Personal responsible gambling data:** Players have readily available access to their gambling history including amounts wagered, won and lost; time and money spent; games played; net wins/losses as well as session information. Players have access to their account details including all deposits, withdrawals, movement of funds between products, bonus information, restrictions such as exclusion events and limits, and net outcomes including total won or lost over a defined period. This information should be readily available across all platforms (including web, desktop, app).

Players can receive live updates during play about time and money spent and account balances in cash, not credits.

**Limit setting:** The site must allow players to set a variety of limits and should encourage and even incentivize the player to do so. These limits must be clearly signposted when a player joins the site.

- Players have the option of setting daily, weekly or monthly limits on the size of deposits.
- Players have the option of setting a system-wide or a product-based limit on the amount of time or money spent.
- Players should have the ability to block themselves from particular games or game types.
- Players should be able to lower limits immediately. Players may request increases in or removal of their limits. After the period ends and a request for increase or removal is made, there will be an additional delay of at least 24 hours and the player must reconfirm their request for the limit to be changed.

Play is stopped when the limit is reached. Players may view the status of their limits on the account details page at any time either via web browser or mobile app.

**Time Out:** Players have the option of setting time limits (time-outs). Time-outs are defined as instant stops in play that are at least 12 hours but less than six months. Longer stops in play are available under the self-exclusion procedure. Players may still receive marketing materials during a timeout, unless they wish to exclude.

## ASSISTING PLAYERS

**Policies:** Clear policies are in place for assessing and handling situations where a player indicates they are in distress or experiencing problems. Operators should have policies in place to monitor player activity for signs or triggers of problem gambling. There is a procedure in place to address third party (e.g., spouse, relative) concerns about players gambling behavior.

**Responding to Player Information Requests:** Customer service agents are knowledgeable about the helpline, self-exclusion/timeout, responsible gambling, online gambling blocking software and local help resources and able to provide that information on request. All information should be in clear and simple language, ideally in multiple languages where necessary.

## SELF-EXCLUSION

**Self-Exclusion:** Self exclusion is a player-initiated restriction on their ability to play on the site. The self-exclusion functionality should be no more than three clicks from any game.

**Self-Exclusion Policy:** Players have the choice of registering online through their player account or with a customer service agent. Players have the option to register through a third-party provider recognized by NCPG or the regulatory agency.

**Exclusion Length:** The ban length is variable but is a minimum of six months and includes a lifetime option. Players have options to select the length. All bans, no matter what length, are irrevocable until the expiration of the exclusion term. Bans stay in effect indefinitely and accounts are not automatically reopened until players go through the reinstatement process.

**Communication with Players:** Excluded players do not receive any promotional materials until a player goes through the reinstatement process.

**Access to Help:** Players who exclude also receive information about available help and prevention services (e.g., helpline number, blocking software, counseling, Gamblers Anonymous).

**Conditions of Exclusion:** Players receive clearly worded information that outlines the conditions of the ban. Players receive an outline of the conditions of the ban during registration and by email following registration, which should not contain promotional materials but includes:

- Length of exclusion
- The closure process for any accounts opened by the same person during the exclusion
- Requirements for reinstatement and renewal upon expiration of the exclusion
- How reward points, scheduled payments and remaining balances are handled

**Enforcement:** The player's account is closed or suspended so that no deposits or bets can be placed. Any new accounts detected following entry into a self-exclusion/timeout will be closed so that no deposits or bets can be placed.

**Reinstatement:** There is a process in place for players to resume play if their exclusion is less than lifetime duration. If a player requests reinstatement, this information is provided to the player along with help resources (e.g. tips on how to keep gambling within safe limits and encouragement to use the site's responsible gambling features).

**Renewal:** Players may renew their exclusion if their exclusion is less than lifetime duration. Players who renew their ban receive information concerning problem gambling and help resources.

## ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

**Advertising Policy Statement:** The operator has a clearly articulated commitment to advertising that does not mislead or target people with gambling problems or vulnerable populations such as minors. Advertising and promotions are not on any online pages that are geared towards responsible gambling. Advertising is not misleading about outcomes of gambling and does not misrepresent the odds of winning/losing.

**Complaints:** The complaints and disputes process should be easy to find on the website or app.

## GAME AND SITE FEATURES

**Display Cash:** Games always display bets, wins, losses and account balances as cash, not credits or points.

**Game Features:** The site does not allow players to play games automatically using an auto play feature. The site avoids reinforcing myths (e.g., stop buttons are not available to avoid giving players the illusion of control or reinforcing the near miss).

**New Features:** All new games and site technology are reviewed in advance for possible impacts on gambling-related harms utilizing a risk assessment protocol.

**Registration:** Players receive responsible gambling information during registration, agree to the terms before starting to play and receive this information by email following registration. Terms are provided to players upon registration, including information about bonuses, deposits, withdrawal and the disposition of player funds. Terms and conditions should be in clear and simple language, and available in other languages on request. Self-exclusion lists are checked during the registration process and excluded players are denied access.

**Multiple Accounts:** Players are not allowed to have multiple accounts on the same site. Where an operator has multiple sites, they should state clearly how a customer who excludes from one site may be managed on the operator's other sites.

**Free Games:** Free or demonstration games should not be available to play without first signing into an account. Free or demonstration games have the same payout percentages, odds and age restrictions as paying games.

**Encouragement to Continue:** Players are not induced to continue gambling when play is in session, when the player attempts to end a session, or wins or loses a bet. Communications with players do not intentionally encourage players to: (a) increase the amount they play with, (b) gamble continuously, (c) re-gamble winnings, and/or (d) chase losses.

**Underage Gambling:** Sites have an affirmative obligation to put in place technical and operational measures to prevent access by those who are underage. The age verification process should be required as a part of registration and prior to deposit of any funds. Such measures include requiring the site to use a reputable independent third party that is commonly in the business of verifying an individual's personal identity information. When an underage player is identified their play should be immediately stopped and their account closed. The site policy should clearly describe any other consequences including how any winnings or funds in the account are handled.

**Minimum Age:** We strongly recommend a minimum age of 21 to access any play on the site, whether free or paid.

## RESEARCH

**Transparency:** Play data from regulated internet gambling sites should be publicly available through the regulatory agency to qualified researchers. Data must be anonymized to remove personally identifying information, consistent with Federal and state privacy, intellectual property and freedom of information laws. A customer should be able to request and receive all of their account information.

**Evaluation:** A research program should be in place which monitors and reviews the effectiveness of the operator's responsible gambling policies, including tracking player usage and uptake of responsible gambling tools.

## PAYMENTS

**Exclusion:** Any electronic/digital/cashless payments method the site accepts should allow players to exclude.

**Limits:** Players should also be able to set limits on their gambling-related financial transactions, including amount and frequency of deposits.

**Data:** Data on payments made by players should be publicly available through the regulatory agency to qualified researchers. Data must be anonymized to remove personally identifying information, consistent with Federal and state privacy, intellectual property and freedom of information laws. A customer should be able to request and receive all of their account information.

**Know Your Customer:** Players should undergo a thorough age and identification verification process in setting up their payment methods.

**Credit:** Players cannot obtain a line of credit from the site.