

# *Responsible Gambling* | *A Series by Jan Zacharias*

This is a series of articles that focus on responsible gambling. These articles are intended to educate people, who chose gambling as an entertainment option, to gamble responsibly. These articles also describe what programs or policies the provincial government, the industry, or the British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC) already have in place to promote responsible play.

## About the Author

Jan graduated from the University of Missouri in 1971 with an Honours Degree in Psychology. She then completed the Professional Development Program at Simon Fraser University in 1994 to obtain her Teacher Certification. She went on to complete her Masters Degree in Educational Counselling at the University of Northern British Columbia in 2002. She also holds a Certificate in Adventure Based Learning from the Justice Institute of B.C.

Jan currently provides services as both a Clinical Counsellor and a Prevention Specialist with the Problem Gambling Program of British Columbia. She has been with the program since November of 2002, and works primarily in the north eastern part of the province from her home base of Dawson Creek. Jan has also written a 13 part series on problem gambling, which appeared in the Peace River Block News and a variety of community newspapers throughout the province.

*Know your limit*

*Play within it*



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# 1. Gambling Dominates our Daily Lives

Take a chance. What are the odds of that happening? Life's a crapshoot. I'll bet you. You've hit the jackpot. He's a high roller. These expressions are a part of our everyday language and culture. Gambling has become a part of our lives. Everywhere you go there are opportunities to gamble, there are sports pools at work, raffle tickets to support charities, every corner store sells lottery tickets, gambling is available on the internet (both legally and illegally), you can play Keno at the mall, play Bingo at Safeway, or go to bingo halls and casinos. Now some of our northern communities have, or are about to get, a Community Gaming Centre, with anywhere from 25 to 100 slot machines. And governments, both provincial and local, are turning to gaming more and more as a source of revenue.

Let's explore for a moment, where the revenue from gaming goes. In 2005/2006 the province of British Columbia will distribute \$900 million from gaming revenue back into communities throughout B.C. Core government programs such as health care, education, and social services will receive \$700 million of this. Local governments where casinos are located get \$63 million, and another \$137 million will go to charitable and community organizations such as fire departments, sports clubs, music societies, search and rescue and senior's groups, to mention but a few. The gaming industry employs 8,500 people in this province and has a payroll of \$357 million. Host local governments, which include municipalities and First Nations, receive 10% of net gaming revenues from community casinos and 1/6 of net revenues from destination casinos. At this time, more than 6,300 community and charitable organizations benefit from gaming grants each year, with an additional \$39.2 million distributed to various charitable organizations through licensed gaming activities. From this perspective, it is not hard to see how municipal and provincial

governments have come to increasingly value the revenue from gaming as a source of income.

As a society, our views around gambling have gone through a significant shift over the last century, not unlike our views on alcohol. There was a time when gambling was viewed as a sin and morally wrong, not to mention illegal. During the 1950's we entered what might be seen as the 'Las Vegas' era of gambling. Here gambling was associated with the rich and powerful, and those with loose morals who were associated in some way with organized crime. During this era, gambling changed from sin to vice. However, in recent times, gambling has changed yet again and is now generally accepted as an entertainment option open to adults who can make informed decisions about how to spend both their time and their money.

Just as we have shifted our attitudes around drinking alcohol from a time of prohibition to drinking socially and drinking responsibly, our views and acceptance levels around gambling for entertainment have evolved. The conversation has shifted from gambling as a manifestation of the devil and something you should never under any circumstances engage in, to an entertainment option for the evening or even an extended holiday. So what can someone who chooses gambling as an entertainment option do to gamble responsibly? What programs or policies do the provincial government and the gaming industry, or the British Columbia Lottery Corporation (BCLC), already have in place that promote responsible play? And what services are available to the small percentage of the population that is experiencing a problem with gambling?

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## 2. Have a Plan, and a Budget, when you gamble

Each of us has a set amount of money we can spend on a monthly basis for entertainment. That amount varies from person to person and is based on their income, their debt load, their cost of living, and their own personal choice.

Gambling is a form of entertainment that costs money, just as going to the movie theatre costs money. Therefore, the first question you must ask yourself is: "How much money can I afford to spend on gambling for entertainment?" Keep in mind that gambling should not be seen as a way to supplement your income and while you can hope to win, you should expect to lose.

Therefore, only use your discretionary income or money left over after you have paid the rent, the utilities and groceries or provided for any other necessities.

Once you have determined what your entertainment budget is, take only that amount of money with you to gamble. Leave your bankcards and debit cards at home so you won't be tempted to spend more than you have budgeted for. Never borrow money from your friends, your family, or the bank to gamble.

Put your winnings in a separate pocket and only gamble with the money you originally set aside for that purpose. Remind yourself that the house always has the advantage and you are really just paying to play. Loss is a part of the game. Avoid 'chasing your losses' or trying to win back the money you have lost and instead view the money you have spent as payment for your entertainment. You might also want to consider playing games with lower stakes to stretch out your entertainment dollar.

The other thing you should consider is setting a limit on the amount of time you spend gambling. Gambling should be only one of many entertainment and leisure options that you participate in. Set a time limit ahead of time and stick to it. Wear a watch and if you need to, set an alarm to remind yourself when you need to leave. Some forms of gaming, particularly slot machines, have a 'trance-like' quality to them, so it is easy to lose track of time. Take frequent breaks while gambling and get something to eat or drink or perhaps watch others play. Don't gamble alone, go with a friend and decide ahead of time when you will leave and help each other keep that commitment.

## 3. No Shortcuts: Gambling is strictly Random Luck

In B.C. the average payout rate of a slot machine is around 93 per cent. For an individual slot machine, the payout rate will vary from game to game and may depend on how many coins you wager. The theoretical payout percentage is calculated over the life of the machine and is not meant to suggest what the actual payout percentage should be for a single playing session.

The outcome for each game is random at all times, no matter how many wins or losses have occurred in the past. This varies somewhat from game to game and whether the maximum numbers of coins are played.

If you are interested in further information on this subject, you could speak with a BCLC

representative at the gaming site or contact consumer services at:

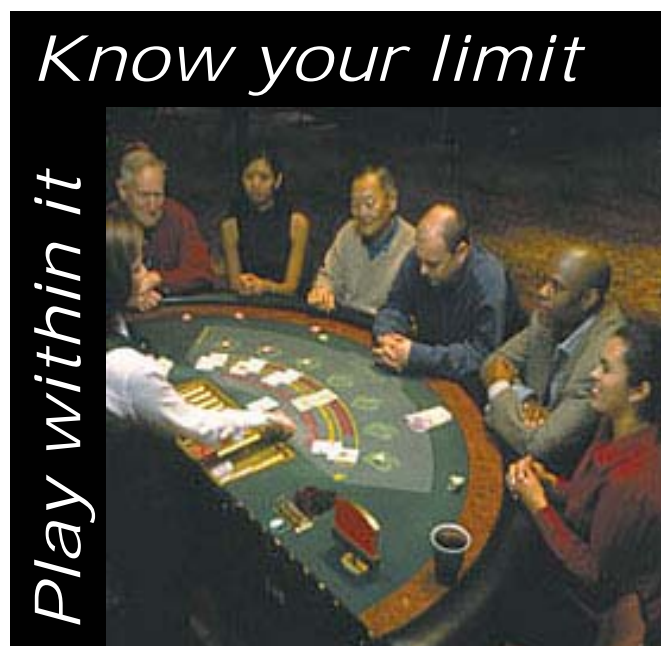
[www.bclc.com/cm/aboutbclc/contactus.htm](http://www.bclc.com/cm/aboutbclc/contactus.htm)

As well, you are always welcome to place a question or comment in the comment card at the site.

Back to the concept of randomness and independent spin: slot machines are controlled by random number generators. Each spin is independent from each other and the machine acts randomly every time you press the button. This means that what has happened in a past event has no bearing on future results. All outcomes are completely unpredictable and

unrelated to past outcomes. Therefore, the result of each game is entirely random and there is nothing the player can do to alter the outcome of the play.

For most games, a machine that has not paid out for some time has no greater chance of paying out in the future. The machine does not know when it last paid out or how close past outcomes were to a win. Each time you play a slot machine, it stops on a random number combination and displays the results. It repeats the process the next time you play. For most games, small wins are programmed to come up far more often than large wins.



There is absolutely nothing a player can do to alter the outcome of the spin. There are no systems you can use to outsmart a machine and you can never predict the outcome of your play.

The following is a list of things that have absolutely no influence on the outcome of the game:

- The last time a machine paid out
- The machine you choose to play
- When and how you press the button
- Any lucky charms you might bring with you
- Anything you or anyone else does to the machine
- How much you need to win
- How long you have been playing
- The time of day
- The clothing you wear
- How close your machine is to the entrance.

If you would like more information about odds and randomness, go to:

[www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca/problem/odds.html](http://www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca/problem/odds.html)

You can read about odds for games such as Lotto 6/49 and BC49, Super 7, scratch and win tickets, slot machines, roulette, bingo, blackjack, and horseracing. Did you know the odds of winning all seven numbers in Super 7 is around one in 62 million, whereas your odds of being struck by lightning are much better at one in 240,000?

## 4. Check Rules, and remember it should be for Fun

Slot machines have changed substantially from the days when you put in your coin, pulled a lever and hoped to get a match of three fruits on a line. Some machines now offer a variety of games within one machine. So if you're a novice, how will you know which games to play and the corresponding rules for each game?

At all venues with slot machines you'll find a slot attendant. These people can provide invaluable information about how the games are played and bonus games. As well, each

slot machine is equipped with a help button and a variety of subsequent menu options on a convenient touch screen that explains how games and bonus games are played. Use either of these two resources before you play the machines.

Information on how to play a variety of table games at a casino can be accessed on site through the dealer. He or she can assist you with information on how a variety of games are played, or refer you to someone on site who can. As well, every casino has a

Casino Gaming Guide, which gives you information on a variety of table games from Blackjack to Pai Gow Poker. The guide gives brief background information on each game, including the objective of the game, how to play it and information on payout rates. This information can also be found on line, at:

[www.bcl.com/cm/casino/tablegames/home.htm](http://www.bcl.com/cm/casino/tablegames/home.htm)

Bingo halls promote a variety of games that are unique to their location. Before you play, read the rules for each game. They will be posted in a prominent location at each site. Callers will announce the type of game before play begins. If you are a novice, or if like to socialize while you play bingo, you might want to consider electronic bingo. In electronic bingo, the screen alerts you to touch the screen if a number on your card has been called. This way you can learn the game or socialize without worrying that if your attention wanders you could miss out on the play.

Whether you are playing bingo, slot machines or table games at casinos, most players choose to bet low until they get the hang of the game and fully understand the rules. In this way, they can maximize their entertainment dollar and keep the fun in gambling.

Now let's see how you do in answering the following true and false questions. It is important that you don't buy into a variety of common myths and misconceptions that could promote unhealthy decision-making and perhaps lead to problem gambling.

1. When you play games against the house, (like blackjack) that require skill, instead of games that don't, such as slot machines or bingo, you have the advantage.
2. People can generally win back their money after losing.
3. Casinos always place the slot machines that pay out the most right at the front.

4. The odds of winning Lotto 6/49 are the same when your numbers are 1, 2, and 3,4,5,6 as they are with any other six-number combination.
5. If you spend \$100 on slot machines that have a payout rate of 93 per cent, you should go home at the end of the night with \$93.

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Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False.

The items on this quiz were designed to highlight a set of beliefs or myths that can contribute to people thinking they can avoid the actual odds of the game. Clinging to these myths can take the fun out of the game and can lead to problem gambling. Let's explore each statement.

Keep in mind that whenever you gamble, no matter what game you chose, you never have the advantage.

1. This is commonly called 'chasing your losses'. Instead, try to think of the money you spent as the amount you paid for entertainment. You are paying to play.
2. It is not true that casinos have slot machines by the door to encourage the belief that it is easy to win. Pay out rates are posted on all games.
3. The winning numbers in Lotto 6/49 are chosen at random by a random number generator.
4. Payout rates are based on the life of the machine, not one playing session.

## 5. The Province has Help for Problem Gamblers

The government plays a role in promoting responsible gambling. They make policy decisions around gaming, provide problem gambling prevention contracts, and sponsor awareness and education campaigns. They also conduct evidence-based research to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention strategies and determine the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in this province. The province also funds the Problem Gambling Help line and Problem Gambling Program.

For most people in our province going to a casino, racetrack or bingo hall, or buying a lottery ticket is a form of entertainment. However, for about 4.6% of the population gambling can become a serious problem. Problem gambling is often referred to as the 'silent addiction' and problem gamblers can go to great lengths to cover up their problem. Listed below are a few warning signs that indicate you or someone you care about might have a problem with gambling.

- Gambling for longer periods of time
- Gambling to win back 'lost' money
- Gambling more than you intend to
- Neglecting family or personal needs to gamble
- Growing debt from gambling
- Unexplained absences for work, school or other important social activities
- Gambling to escape daily pressures or obligations
- Becoming involved in illegal activities to finance gambling
- Lying about the extent of gambling involvement

Problem gambling is treatable. In BC, there are 40 qualified counsellors who deliver clinical, prevention and co-ordination services. Our counsellors speak a variety of languages including French, Mandarin, Cantonese and some Aboriginal languages. Counselling sessions are available to those who are concerned about their own gambling or the

gambling of others. We work with children, spouses or even employers of problem gamblers, to assist them in dealing with the gambling of others. These counsellors are able to meet with people in their own community at a time and location that is suitable for them. There is no wait list in this province for service. Counselling sessions are free of charge and there is no limit to the number of sessions available. If you would like to meet with someone based on your preferences for gender, age or cultural background, this will be facilitated whenever possible.

At every gaming venue in this province you will find a sticker that provides a toll free number for help. This help line is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, by people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Services are offered in over 10 languages, including French, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Cantonese. Everyone who works at the help line has had basic problem gambling training, and can assist you in clarifying your concerns, linking you to the services of a problem gambling counsellor in your area, or helping you with other problems that might arise as a result of gambling. These could include lack of housing, abuse, family violence or financial difficulties.

Problem gambling counsellors will work with you to design a strategy that works for you. There are many stops along the continuum—from gambling that is out of control to total abstinence from gambling. Why not work with someone to design a personalized strategy that works for you? Problem gambling counsellors are trained to help people develop responsible gambling strategies that fit for them. For some, taking a complete break from gambling may seem like the best option.

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## 6. Self-exclusion – an Option for Problem Gamblers

'Time Out' is a program designed for people who feel it is in their best interest not to participate in casino or bingo gambling for a specified period of time. This program also provides people with a link to the services of the Problem Gambling program.

The Self-Exclusion program is a voluntary program. It was first introduced into our province in 1998 and has since gone through many changes to try to make it more effective. This program, which is administered and run by BCLC, offers a person an opportunity to exclude themselves from either a commercial bingo facility or a gaming facility with slot machines, including casinos, community gaming centers and the gaming floor of racetracks.



Self-exclusion applies to all venues with slot machines or commercial bingo halls in the province. Self-exclusion is time-limited, for six months, one year, two years, or three years. At the end of that time, a person may extend their self exclusion by sending a letter to BCLC indicating their wish to do so.

Self-exclusions are handled in a discreet, respectful and courteous manner. The

required paperwork can be done at a gaming venue by the Security Manager, or in a location requested by the player. The information pertaining to self-exclusion is available only to security and management personnel and is treated confidentially.

The process involves filling out a self-exclusion application form and providing any government-issued picture ID that includes your signature. Your photograph will be taken on site. You will also be asked if you would like to see a counsellor from the problem gambling program.

Self-exclusion begins as soon as you sign up. It is your responsibility to honour your commitment to the program. You will not be allowed back in a gaming facility before your exclusionary period is up. If you violate your self-exclusion contract, according to the B.C. Gaming Control Act, charges can be laid and you may be fined \$5,000.

Self-exclusion is a difficult decision. However, for those who wish to make a significant change in their lives and need help getting started, it's an excellent choice. This program provides a kind of external control mechanism that can help you make a start, and gives you time to develop internal controls.

This is why the link to counselling is so very important. Counsellors in the problem gambling program can help you develop strategies that reduce cravings, acknowledge and avoid triggers to gamble, and replace what has become an unhealthy habit with a healthy one. If you begin to gamble as a way to socialize with others, then gambling becomes a problem so you self-exclude, how will you fill your original need to socialize? These are some of the topics that typically come up in conversations with a problem gambling counsellor.

One final note: enlisting in the self-exclusion program must be done by the person seeking exclusion. People cannot sign up their spouse or other family members. However, those affected by the gambling of others are eligible for the services of the

problem gambling program, and are encouraged to seek this help.

Responsible gambling is a shared pursuit. There are many strategies that a player can employ to keep the fun in gambling. The gaming industry is doing many things to promote a healthy customer base, including a variety responsible gambling messages in venues, limiting admission to gaming sites to those 19 and over, advertising the problem gambling help line at its venues, and making

on site assistance available to those who request it.

The final partner is the government. It makes the policy decisions. For instance, in this province, they have developed advertising and marketing standards, in addition to the creation of a Responsible Gambling Strategy and operational plan. The government funds problem gambling prevention and counselling contracts and maintains the toll free help line, as well as sponsoring a variety of awareness and education initiatives.

## 7. Contact Information

If you would like to speak with a trained Problem Gambling Counsellor, sponsored and funded by the Problem Gambling Program, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, call the Problem Gambling Help line at 1-888-795-6111.

Personalized PowerPoint presentations are available to schools, businesses, health providers, organizations or service clubs. You can also check the provincial website at:

[www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca](http://www.bcreponsiblegambling.ca)

This site has more information on responsible and problem gambling.

