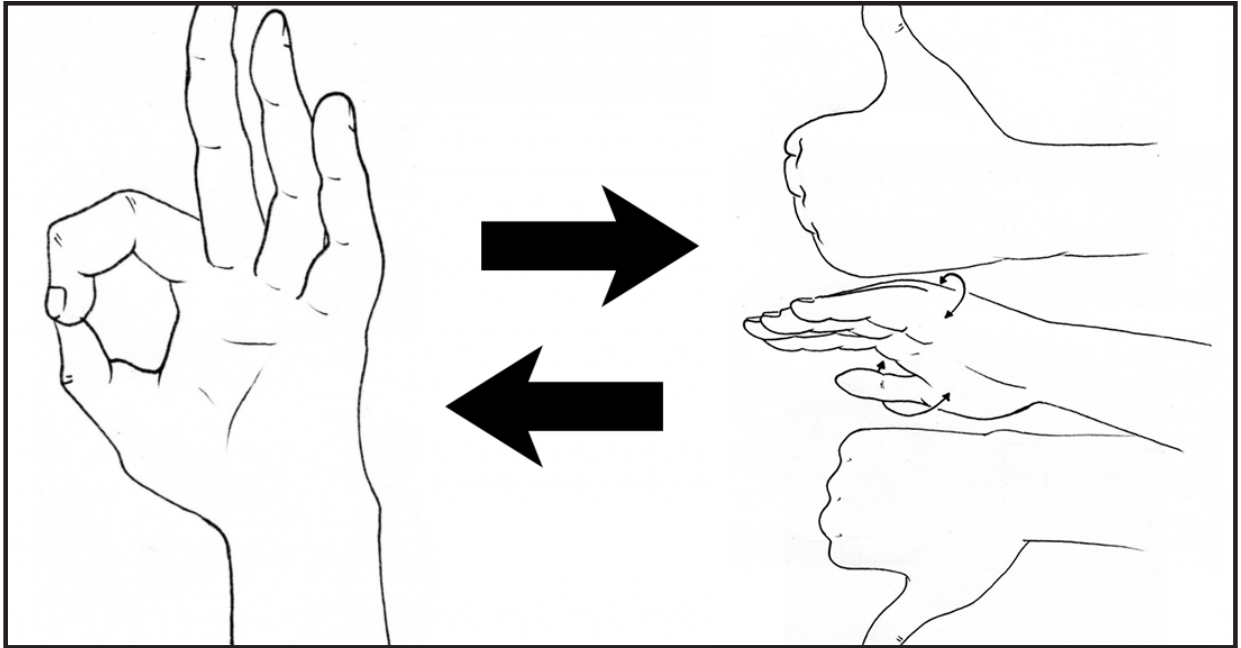




The Jackalope Guide to Playing Hard and Safe



You are going to be stepping into a live action role-playing event that delves into emotional material. Some of it may touch on traumatic events, or deal with uncomfortable subject matter. Some of it might be horrific and disturbing. We have an urge as humans to deal with this kind of fiction, to interact with the dark parts of our world, to come to terms with it. But as we play in a collaborative shared space, we need to be confident we are exploring safely in a way that helps everyone.

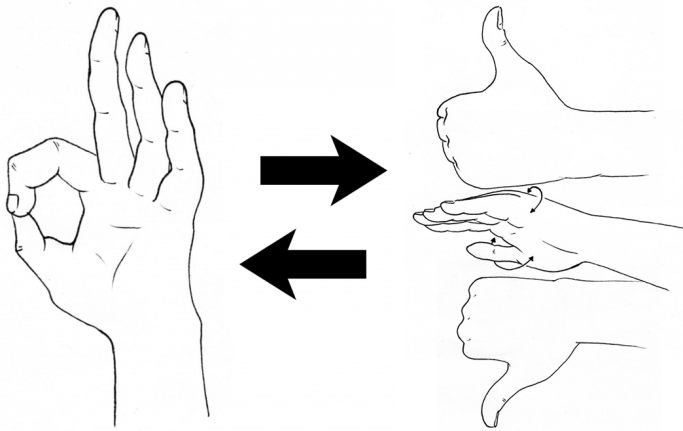
We want the freedom to play hard, to go after the shadows and rabid wild dogs of the human experience. And we gain that freedom by using tools that let everyone communicate where their limits are; to give permission and gain permission to go farther than we might otherwise.

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The OK Check-In



Chris is playing at a LARP, crying and sobbing on the ground as someone holds a knife over them. You find yourself wondering – is Chris just a really good actor, or is Chris actually scared out of their mind? You are a good person, so you want to make sure.

You could break into the scene and say, “Time out, Chris, are you all right?” But breaking the scene would mean interrupting play, which means you now have an obstacle between you and checking in on your fellow participant. So instead, we use the Check-In signal.

How to use the Check-in Signal

1. The concerned participant makes the OK sign to the participant where they can see it. Typically, in the middle of their torso.

2. The participant being checked in on...

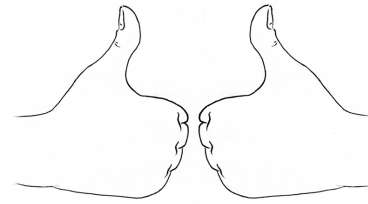
...responds with a thumbs up or double thumbs up. Play proceeds uninterrupted.

...responds with one of the alternate responses. Play stops, out of character discussion occurs. Play may proceed but only after adjusting and negotiating. Read more below.

...does not respond. Play stops and it is treated as a thumbs down.

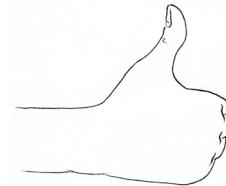
Participants can also give the responses on their own without anyone checking in.

The Responses to a Check-In



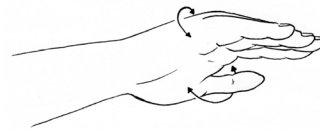
“This is great! Turn it up a notch!”

The double-up means that the participant loves how the scene is playing out and would be fine with going further with the emotional intensity. You aren’t obligated to do so, but it indicates they are willing to go further down this path. You should take it as an invitation to go further, not permission to go as far as you want without checking in any more if you think you should. Always negotiate.



” I am okay.”

A thumbs up means the participant is confidently fine with how the scene is proceeding. Continue without interruption.



“I’m not sure if I’m okay.”

The so-so sign should be treated like a thumbs down until you’ve spoken to the participant. Play pauses, and the participant is asked if they are all right and if there is something that needs to change, including the scene ending. With the participant’s consent, play can resume adjusted as they requested. With anything other than an enthusiastic and clear consent to proceed with specific changes, the scene stops.



” I am not okay.”

A thumbs down means the participant is not okay with how this scene is proceeding. Play should stop immediately. If someone throws a thumbs down to you, you should ask them if they’d like to be taken to an OOC area, how can you help them or if they need anything. The ‘not okay’ player should be the only one who initiates negotiation to continue, and should not even be asked to do so.

Bowing Out



“I have to leave this scene for out of character reasons.”

You are in the middle of a scene where characters are dealing with one of their parents dying. You recently lost a loved one, and you find yourself reacting. You want to leave, but do not want the other participants to think your character is leaving or deal with the consequences. But you have to leave because you cannot handle the content out of character. So you bow out.

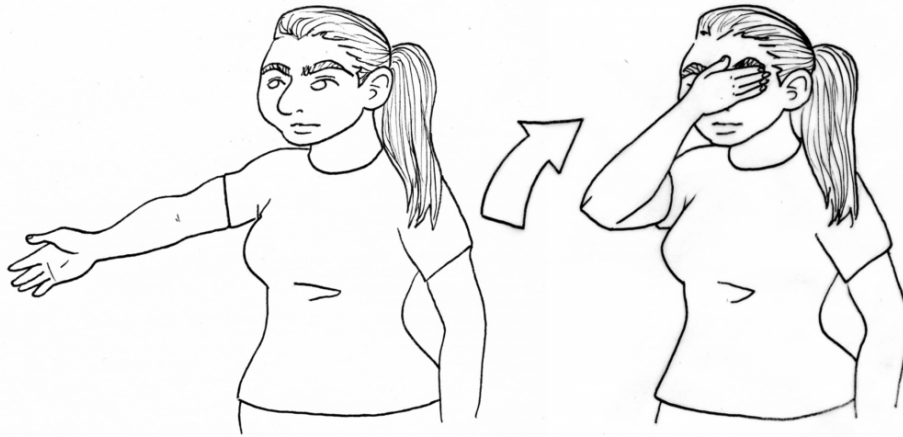
How to Bow Out

1. Put your hand on the back of your head
2. Tilt your head slightly downward
3. Quietly leave the scene

The bow-out is a clear signal that the participant is excusing themselves from the scene, not the character. When you see a participant bow out, you should not comment or act on that information in character. If you are concerned for a participant, bow out yourself and check-in with them. Participants who bowed out of a scene can rejoin it if they wish.

If you are very central to a scene, it is better to use the thumbs down gesture from the Check-In to bring the scene to a halt, or use the “cut”/”break” verbal signal. Either will stop the scene.

Blocking



“Please don’t make me deal with this.”

Jessica is using a switchblade prop weapon in the LARP. Playing a hardened criminal, she is using it to gesture and emphasize points during a conversation. Greg does not like knives and it is disturbing him out of character. He’d like to continue the scene but would like Jessica to stop playing with it during the conversation. He decides to put a block on the knife.

How to Block

1. Requesting participant should gesture with an open hand toward the element you wish to block. If necessary, say one or two words to clarify – e.g. “Knife”, “Fire”, “Cigarette smoke”
2. Requesting participant puts the same hand to block their eyes briefly.
3. Responding participant removes or reasonably minimizes the participant’s contact with the item in question.

The Limits on Blocking

Blocking is there to make minor adjustments to a scene for everyone’s comfort. Sometimes blocking is very straight forward. In the above example, Jessica puts the knife in her pocket and does not take it out for the rest of the scene. Some things are not so simple.

If someone is playing a border guard with a rifle, they cannot be expected to discard it when the rules require they hold it. But they can not point it or brandish it towards the participant who asked for a block. It is beholden on the asking participant not to make it difficult to honor their request.

Sometimes you cannot block broader scene elements and need to bow out from the scene. A club with loud music or a military truck with a large gun on it cannot really be blocked.

Verbal Signals

“Cut!” or “Break!”

A player can say “cut” or “break” any time to signal that they need the scene to end and they are no longer consenting to the content. Proceed as if there was a check-in and it received a thumbs-down. This call is often accompanied by a slicing motion to the neck, but that is not required.

If you are not central to the scene but would like to no longer participate, see the Bow Out gesture.

“Out of character: Stop!” or similar

Any reasonable attempt to signal that you are not speaking in character should be taken as a verbal thumbs-down and stop the scene. Someones calling “out of character, stop” or “out of game, don’t”, etc. is the equivalent of using thumbs-down, break or any other such signals.

It is perfectly possible to forget the right words in the moment, so if there is a possible intent to revoke OOC consent, honor it and check-in immediately.

“Caution!”

You see Jim walking backwards while talking during a scene. He steps out onto the grass, right towards a fire ant mound. While you may or may not like Jim’s character, Jim is a fellow participant and you look out for him. You say, “Caution – fire ants behind you.” Jim hears this and adjusts his path, then the scene resumes.

When you say “Caution” followed by a description of what you are cautioning them about, it should be taken as an OOC signal that is quickly acted upon and play resumes normally. This is a way of quickly letting someone know they could hurt themselves or others.

“HOLD!” & “GAME ON!”

Sam is climbing up a ladder quickly in a scene with a lot of people running. She loses her grip on the ladder and falls down onto the ground where people are running around. A staff member shouts “HOLD!”, and everyone within earshot stops what they are doing, stands still and shouts “HOLD!” as well. The staff member moves over to make sure Sam is all right. It turns out the only thing bruised is her ego. The staff member calls, “GAME ON.” Everyone resumes doing what they were doing.

Whenever anyone shouts “HOLD!”, you stop where you are, break character and repeat the shout. Follow the instructions of staff or if they aren’t there to help immediately with the situation, do what you can to help your fellow participants.

“9-1-1!”

While heating up lunch, Nathaniel knocks the propane burner he was using off the table by accident. It lands in a pile of papers, lighting them on fire. Nathaniel shouts, “9-1-1! Fire! 9-1-1 Fire!” Everyone within ear shot breaks character, repeats the shout and goes to help if they can.

This is the most serious call, and the one most rarely used. Shouting “9-1-1!” indicates there is a real emergency that requires attention. The reason we do not use calls like “Medic!” or “Emergency!” is that these might be interpreted as in-character. The 9-1-1 Call is clear in meaning (to us Americans, it is the emergency services number) while being distinct.

Negotiation

It is always acceptable to break character, warn and negotiate. It is required to negotiate before touching, rough-housing or otherwise engaging in contact with a character. Some powers during some games might also require negotiation.

The signal for going out of character is to hold up two crossed fingers and say, “**Negotiation.**”

How to Negotiate

1. The requesting participant raises two crossed fingers and say, “Negotiation” and then a short reason why you are opening the subject. Options usually include: “Violence”, “Intimacy”

2. The responding participant says, “Negotiation,” echoes the opening reason, with their limits and then asks what the initiator wants to do.

Examples:

- “Negotiation, violence. I am fine with stage-fighting but please no running. What would you like to do?”
- “Negotiation, intimate contact. Touching of shoulders and face only What would you like to do?”

3. The requesting participant explains what they’d like to do, and states their own limits

Examples:

- “I would like to touch your face, but don’t touch back below my neck”
- “I would like to stage-wrestle you to the ground, but please no fake punches.”

4. The responding participant either responds with questions or other ideas.

Examples:

- “How about you touch my face and I nuzzle your fingers?”
“How about you land one stage punch and I fall down to the ground?”

5. Negotiation concludes only when both sides say, “Agreed.” and lower their fingers.



The Pyramid of Action

Whenever performing any negotiated action in the game, consider these three factors in order:

1. **Safety.** Do you feel safe doing what you are doing? Do the other people involved feel safe? Is it safe?
2. **Consent.** Is what you are doing what you are agreed to? Is what you are doing what others have agreed to? Is it within the content limits of the game that everyone agreed to?
3. **Collaboration.** Does what you are doing help the game and move forward everyone’s story? Does it enrich the experience of the game and increase the immersive experience?

Remember, unsafe play is not allowed even if it is consented to. And even if you think a particular action might move the story forward, it must be consented to.