



RPG Research In-Person and Online Programs and Role-Playing Game Sessions Code of Conduct

Version: Recreational, Educational, and Community Settings

Revision 20220827k by W.A. Hawkes-Robinson

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Overview

This document provides an outline of RPG Research's Role-Playing Gamer Code of Conduct for general participation in recreational, educational, and community settings. We have other modified versions for specific settings including research, therapeutic, etc. The latest versions of our Code of Conduct documents can be found at <https://rpgresearch.com/coc>

RPG Research is a 100% volunteer-run 501(c)3 non-profit research and human services charitable organization studying the effects and uses of all role-playing game formats for their potential to help improve the bio-psycho-social functioning for all ages and abilities.

At RPG Research's community programs, participants join together to share the distinctive, beneficial, and enjoyable experiences of role-playing gaming. In order to maintain a fair and fun environment, all players are expected to honor the Code of Conduct. Please read the Code of Conduct carefully, paying close attention to each point.

Remember we try to run mostly family-friendly programs. Family-friendly means along the lines of PG or younger appropriate language and content, while still potentially covering complex adult topics in creative ways. This makes our as accessible and inclusive as possible for the widest audience possible.

Occasionally we may run more mature content (such as Call of Cthulhu, World of Darkness, etc.). In such cases, please pay special attention to the Game Content Consent Form we provide to help keep the environment as comfortable as possible.

Informed Consent Regarding Audio & Video Recordings, Streaming, Remote Staff, Remote Participants, Photos, Monitoring, etc.

We record with audio, photos, and video most of our program sessions for general liability, insurance policy, research, program improvement, and training purposes. Frequently our volunteer staff, trainees, interns, our internal researchers, and our other approved staff, often monitor our public and private sessions in-person and/or remotely via our private and secure audio & video technologies, including both the live and recorded sessions. Our facilities also have audio and video security systems inside and outside of the program facilities, including our mobile facilities. These recordings are ultimately stored locally on our private computer systems.

We also often record or live-stream some of our programs for public access, usually for special events, promotional, or other fundraising purposes. These are public streams and/or recordings. If there is a program you wish to participate in that will be public, please keep this in mind as you sign this agreement.

Capture and Use of Likeness Information and Consent Agreement

We also from time to time take photos of our program environments, staff, bystanders, and participants for our records, research, promotional, training, and program quality purposes.

BY PARTICIPATING IN ANY OF OUR PROGRAMS YOU CONSENT TO ALLOW US TO TAKE THESE PHOTOS AND USE THEM IN OUR MATERIALS INTERNALLY AND PUBLICLY. IF YOU WISH TO OPT OUT OF THIS, YOU MUST CONTACT YOUR FACILITATOR TO SEE IF IT IS POSSIBLE TO MAKE ACCOMMODATIONS. IF ACCOMMODATIONS ARE NOT POSSIBLE, THEN IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN OUR PROGRAMS.

BY PARTICIPATING IN OUR PROGRAMS AND AGREEING TO THIS DOCUMENT YOU ARE ALLOWING US TO RECORD AND USE YOUR LIKENESS IN PERPETUITY.

Be Respectful, Keep Our Programs Friendly

The Program Facilitator (PF), Game Master (GM) (aka Dungeon Master® (DM)*), and other staff will treat you with respect by default. It is expected that you will treat everyone else with respect and that other players will treat you with respect as well, so you have no reason to mistreat them. Disrespect in any fashion may be grounds for disciplinary action.

RPG Programs: Story First, Rules Second

Rules are tools. Use them, but do not let them trap you.

If the GM chooses to make changes here or there to encourage the flow of the story, do not let the flow of the game be ruined by frequent rules debate.

If you have a concern, then please write a note about your concerns and pass it to the GM, speak with them during a break, or decide to discuss the topic at the end of the game session to make an official decision for future sessions. Then the GM can opt to adjust a rule/ruling. Sometimes a critical issue will be impacted by a ruling in the moment, so the GM may, on rare occasion, allow interrupting game play briefly to quickly research and resolve the ruling, but these instances should be kept to an absolute minimum as close to zero per session as possible. **Generally if an issue cannot be clearly resolved within 30-60 seconds, the GM must make a ruling by fiat, write it down, and that rule/ruling will have to be applied for rest of the duration of the session.** This ruling/rule may be changed later, when the GM has had time to research the issue after the session is over, or may become part of the GM's "House Rules" list. The House Rules List should be provided, in physical printed form, by the GM before, or at the beginning of, each session.

Take it to the Game Master (GM) – Debate is Welcome, Avoid Arguing.

Respectful and intelligent debate is welcome as long as it doesn't disrupt the flow of the program session. However, be careful that your emotions do not take control of you to a detrimental level, be careful you do not violate the rule about arguing. Please do not kill the immersion, potential flow state experiences, and the "suspension of disbelief" for the players by disrupting the game or bogging it down with frequent interruptions, rules debate, or arguing.

If you can address an issue very briefly during your turn, and ask for a quick ruling by the GM, that is fine. Otherwise, as stated, please make a note to yourself to talk about any issues with the GM at the end of the session, or if it is more urgent pass a note to the GM asking to discuss the topic during a break or at the end of the session, so that the GM may hear you out in full. Please always keep it civil and be considerate of others.

Respect All Participants, Facilitators, Bystanders, Staff and Others, Their Right to Have Fun

Our programs are often cooperative, and role-playing gaming is a collaborative effort. It provides the most enjoyable and beneficial experience if everyone is working together, not just in the game, but outside of it as well. **Contribute to everyone's fun and not just your own.** To help with this, let's tell a good story together, and have a good time doing it!

As part of being contributory, one must keep things like the following in mind:

- If your play style or character is causing resentment in the other players, consult with your GM and/or Facilitator to confirm. If there is an issue, it *might* be time to either make a new character that will clash less with the group, or find an in-game way to alter the character's background story, personality, etc., in some way. We want to make sure *everyone* is having fun.
- While the GM bears the highest burden for preparation and facilitation of the game, please remember that the game session's fun is not entirely dependent upon the GM, the responsibility also rests upon each player! Even an inexperienced GM can still end up running a fun session if the players are working *with* the GM and the other players, rather than simply expecting perfection from everyone else. Do not try to intentionally undermine the GM or players.
- **Out-of-Character (OOC) physical abuse, discrimination, or verbal abuse is not tolerated, and will generally lead to disciplinary action.**
- Everyone is to maintain common sensitivity. Out of consideration to others, public intimacy is discouraged. Please do not "hit on" your fellow players or player characters. Except for folks that have known each other for years, and/or more emotionally mature players, this tends to make everyone uncomfortable, and will usually drive players away.
- For our more mature programs, with completed Participant Consent Forms provided (and

reviewed by the GM and/or Facilitator at the beginning of every session), with pre-approval from the GM/Facilitator, it may be acceptable for your PC to flirt with NPCs (as appropriate to your character, campaign, group expectations, and the adventure), but don't get too carried away. Treat your fellow players as an associate, friend, or friendly family member, not a potential date. Unless discussed and allowed by all participants and the GM/Facilitator in advance of the program starting, detailed descriptions of sexual acts in (or out) of the game are not allowed. If you and another player are already romantically involved, please do not incorporate that into the game, it usually causes other participants to feel very uncomfortable.

- Except for pre-approved more “mature programs” consent, none of our programs should have content exceeding the PG rating. Absolutely no pornography or otherwise rated "X" material is to be displayed anywhere near our facilities. Do not use, post, distribute or link to obscene, pornographic, sexually explicit, graphically or gratuitously violent, derogatory, demeaning, malicious, defamatory, abusive, offensive, hateful or discriminatory language or content. If using any electronic tools, this includes "masking" language by using alternative characters/spelling /spacing to get around profanity filters or claims of profanity filter “testing.”
- Players are prohibited from making final rules calls or chastising others for improper role-playing. Players should instead *politely* call the rule or player actions into question by consulting with the GM appropriately to resolve any issues. Do not provide unsolicited advice to other players on how they should play their characters. If a rule or player's behavior is called into question, said rule is to be reviewed by the GM, Show Host, Facilitator, or other Authorized Staff to determine its legality/compliance. Respect the authority of the Game Master, Facilitators, and/or Show Hosts.
- Please try to keep the language family friendly, for the widest possible audience. The closer to G than PG, the more people will be able to enjoy our programs, shows, etc., including at their workplace, home, etc. where others may overhear.
- Be respectful and considerate of your noise level, especially in shared community spaces. Some of our programs may have a large number of people in a shared community space. These can often get noisy quickly. Please try to moderate the volume of your speech and other noises so that there isn't an escalation of volume across all participants. Not being considerate of this can make a facility unpleasant, and make participation in our programs very difficult. So please moderate your volume, especially in shared spaces.

Be Respectful of All Property

Show respect toward all property and possessions. Damage or theft of a Player's, GM's, or Host's property is not tolerated. This also includes dice, pencil, books, other gaming materials, as well as online reputations, accounts, etc.

Harassment & Hate Speech

If someone says “No” or “Leave me alone” and you don’t listen, that is harassment.

Consider harassment to be a pattern of unwanted contact, attention, or behavior.

Hate speech is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display which may incite violence or prejudicial action against or by a protected individual or group, or because it disparages or intimidates an individual or group.

Do not harass, bully, threaten, harm, anyone. Wherever possible try to avoid knowingly causing discomfort for other persons. If you are made aware of causing such discomfort, please adjust your behavior accordingly. If you are uncertain how to address such issues, please speak with your GM and/or Facilitator about recommended solutions.

We do not have a zero tolerance policy, we have found that such policies harm more than it helps. Instead, while it requires more effort, we attempt to address all issues in context. However, we do have some clear rules and guidelines.

Out-of-character racist, bigoted, or excessively vulgar or distasteful language is strongly discouraged.

Do not:

- Use hate speech or racial, ethnic, sexist, political, homophobic or religious slurs.
- Harass a specific person (trolling, repeated flaming, personal attacks, etc.).
- Make sexual advances toward other players
- Troll or bait the participants in general with inflammatory statements, such as ones designed to elicit a negative response from the participants.
- Cause violence, threats of violence, or any other action or gesture that compromises the safety of participants.
- Use harassment or hate speech of any kind.
- Use religious slurs, content, and/or comments (be considerate of specific religious, atheist, and other players’ sensitivities, including certain names “in vain”), we want to try to keep our programs friendly and accessible to all.
- Be careful with “off color” jokes. “Know your audience” in advance before taking such chances.

Methods of Communicating Potential Triggers or Discomfort

We try to provide Participant Consent Forms in advance of each session for settings that might be more upsetting for some participants. For sessions that may be designed to cover difficult topics, we may provide you with a “No Thank You Evil”, “X card”, various technologies, private post-it notes, or other

means of discretely communicating to the GM that something is bothering you, and that you are requesting for the GM and/or Facilitator to address it ASAP. This might not always be addressable immediately, but the sooner you inform our staff, the sooner it can be looked into and potentially adjust accordingly, depending on the context of the circumstances.

Optional In-Character (IC) Exceptions

In-character racist, bigoted, or excessively vulgar or distasteful language is discouraged, but if approved in advance by all participants and the GM, *may in cautiously moderate amounts*, as per in-advance discussion with the GM and other players, be allowed if appropriate to the campaign and player characters. For example, racially derogatory comments about dragons, or a troll's vulgar threats to the Free People of Middle-earth, might be allowed if appropriate to the circumstances and the predefined characters. It is very important to discuss this in advance to know what is appropriate for this campaign and this particular stream. Also check in your the other participants to know you audience and what will be acceptable and what will cross the line.

In the case of a program that has pre-planned allowing some of these exceptions, it is very important that these terms be provided by the GM and/or Facilitator, included in printedhandout or other means, providing a description with as much advance warning as possible, detailing the list of issues, triggers, or other content that may be of concern for participants. Basically use the PG movie ratings as a guide, if it may push the limits of PG content, then such lists are strongly recommended.

For some of the more mature programs, with consent from all participants and the GM in advance of the program beginning, and with completed consent forms, behavior that is completely disallowed for Out-of-Character (OC) might be allowed for In-Character context.

Historical “Legacy” Language and/or Content Potential Issues

Things get complicated for historically placed games, such as a World War I campaign being played in a relatively historically accurate early 1900s, or 1600s Tokugawa Era Japan, there are many sensibilities, attitudes, behaviors, and terms in other time periods that are no longer considered “appropriate” in this day and age.

It is important to know which terms and behaviors are appropriate for the session and that they are discussed and agreed upon clearly by the GM and all participants, in advance of starting the session.

For example, many Call of Cthulhu games are set in the 1920s. Some Facilitators and players opt for an “alternate reality” of the time period and drop any references to racism, sexism, etc. However, other groups (with prior consent) may opt to run a more “historically accurate” setting which includes behaviors, language, and content of the time period that are not considered appropriate by today's standards. Such groups must handle these topics with extreme care, but are allowed with clearly expressed consent from all participants.

Hygiene, Allergies, Dress Code, Alcohol, Drugs, & Smoking

Please be considerate of all the other participants. Some participants have strong reactions from allergies, asthma, and other sensitivities to strong chemicals, perfumes, or excessive body odor. In some cases these can be life-threatening.

Out of consideration to everyone else, please avoid excessively poor grooming, noticeable body odor, or excessive perfumes. Severe body odor isn't just unpleasant — it can irritate medical conditions like allergies, asthma and migraines, and is highly disruptive to the enjoyment of the game for everyone else.

No participant shall have an odor generally offensive to others when attending a session. An offensive body odor may result from a lack of good hygiene, from an excessive application of a fragrant after-shave or cologne or from other causes.

No alcohol or illegal drugs are to be brought or used at gaming sessions, on, or around, our facilities. Obviously intoxicated or high participants may be asked to leave the game.

Smoking/vaping must comply with local, state, and federal laws. For example, in Washington state a user of such materials must stay a MINIMUM of 25' distance away from entrances and windows).

Since some participants are known to have allergies and asthma, if you do need to smoke, please refrain from smoking/vaping until after the game session is over. Smoking/vaping just before a game, or during a break, tends to bring a strong unpleasant odor into the facilities afterward, and can trigger life-threatening asthma attacks or other issues. Please try to wait until after the game session is over to smoke.

If you do have offensive odor, the GM, Facilitator, and/or Show Host, will attempt to discretely let you know so that you can resolve any such issues.

Props and Costumes

Props may be allowed, with permission of the GM and/or Facilitator, but brandishing of naked steel is generally discouraged, unless the GM allows, and all participants indicate they are comfortable with it. Please consult with the GM and/or Facilitator before bringing any prop-type weapons to the session.

For most of our TRPG sessions, though you may wear costumes and props, when not at a convention setting, most of our groups are not expected to dress in any costumes at all.

All attire must be appropriately modest and considerate of others. Determination of “appropriately modest” is to be decided by the facilities staff, facilitators, management, and/or the GM. Remember we wish to keep our programs and facilities “family friendly” for all ages, so please do not wear attire that would violate these standards.

Be Respectful of the GM

Your character is free to do whatever you want it to do as appropriate to the theme of the campaign. If this is a heroes-only campaign then avoid blatantly “evil” PC actions.

Please take the GM's scenario seriously, but not *too* seriously, and follow the GM's lead, at the very least in spirit. The GM works very hard to learn to perfect or design a scenario to be exciting. All that is asked is that you not make intentional efforts to break that work or intentionally disrupt the game.

Role-playing gaming is in large part about working together: the GM provides you with a scenario and helps you run through it, in return please provide the GM your sincere cooperation.

The Game Master (GM) and/or Program Facilitator (PF) may arbitrate debate about the game rules or other such issues. The GM, PF, or Show Host (SH), take the approach of “beneficent dictator”. They will hear the concerns of those that wish to speak about an issue, but in the end all rulings by the GM, PF, and/or SH are final. Do not argue with the GM, PF, or SH.

Be Considerate, Patient, Take Turns, Pay Attention, Avoid Distractions, and Do Not Be Overbearing

Take turns. Do not speak over each other. It is always important to take turns, especially in a TRPG setting. For individuals or groups that struggle with impulse control, a useful method the GM may opt to use is an object such as a “talking stick” to help with training better turn-taking.

Even if it is not your turn to speak, it is polite, considerate, and helps speed up the flow of the game, if everyone is paying attention to each other throughout the session.

In general avoid talking over each other in all programs. This is even more dramatically important when broadcasting, unless designed to be part of the show, is just plain bad form to talk over each other, and makes it nigh impossible for the audience to understand anyone.

Please mute or turn off your cell phones and place them out of sight or at have least the screen not visible to anyone, including yourself. Generally we do not allow electronic devices to be on at the tabletop RPG sessions. This rule may vary for specifically approved accessibility needs, for other types of RPG formats, or specific approval by the facilities supervisors. Strong and extensive research shows that such technologies, even when used explicitly to aide the game play (such as digital rule book collections, digital player character (PC) sheets, etc.) almost always significantly reduce to varying degrees the focus, engagement, creativity, and overall enjoyment of all participants. There may be some exceptions made for the Game Master (GM), Program Facilitator (PF), Assistant Facilitator(s) (AF), Show Host (SH), or others as authorized by the program or facilities senior supervisors.

Please do not be engaged in out-of-game chat, instant messaging, social networks, or other distractions not directly related to the session, the GM, the players, and the adventure.

Significant research, as shared at www.optimizedrpg.com, shows that removing such distractions will not only improve your experience, reduce the likelihood you are distracted and miss important details and being ready to respond to the GM and other players promptly and in a prepared manner. The research strongly indicates that such technologies also impact the enjoyment, level of immersion, ability to creatively problem solve, visualization, imagination, and flow state opportunities, of you, your fellow players, and the GM.

Disciplinary Actions, The Consequences of Violating a Rule(s)

The following is only an example progression to provide some approximate guidelines of expectation. These are not "hard and fast" written in stone methods, and cannot possibly cover all situations.

We address all issues in context.

Alternate or additional remedial actions may be taken, based on the discretion of the Game Master (GM), Program Facilitator (PF), Assistant Program Facilitator (APF), Staff, Management, or facilities owners, and the severity of any individual case may escalate remedial actions. The remediation is usually at the GM's discretion.

We believe that zero tolerance equals zero thought, so we do not implement a zero tolerance policy.

One size does not fit all. If necessary, disciplinary consequences are only implemented for actual behaviors, not potential behavioral scenarios ("might haves") that never actually happened, and certainly not for thoughts or feelings. Speech, sign-language, drawing, writing, and other such activities are also considered active behaviors that may require disciplinary consequences. You may think or feel anything you want, but once you state your feelings or thoughts it becomes a behavior that is potentially subject to disciplinary action.

Context is critically important, though it requires more effort than a zero tolerance policy, our 45+ years of research and evidence-in-practice, supports our policy that the context-driven approach is the most just and fair approach for everyone. We make all reasonable efforts to understand the contextual appropriateness or inappropriateness of an action in the broad and immediate contextual circumstances of the issue(s) of concern.

If something is determined to be inappropriate, here is a non-exhaustive list of potential consequences:

1st Level Offense: A verbal (or passed note) warning.

2nd Level Offense:

- Verbal reprimand, while trying to not publicly embarrass or shame the person involved, the GM and/or Facilitator will try to speak with the participant discretely away from the others if possible, though this may be difficult in some situations and may require a more public response.
- Potentially a loss of turns or control of character for a given time period may occur.

3rd level Offense:

- Removed from participant in the rest of the day's session (or next session).
- Up to being banned from a number of multiple sessions.

4th Level Offense:

- Banned from all future game participation in this group.
- Depending on the contextual circumstances, may or may not be allowed to work with the organization or at the facility in other capacities.

5th Level Offense:

- Banned from any participation at any programs, activities, or facilities for a set or indefinite period of time. This is extremely rare, reserved for only the most egregious behaviors.

Player Character Campaign Guidelines

Most of our RPG programs have the expectation of the player characters (PC) being “the good guys” in a typically “heroic” campaign. The character must be good, or at least trying to be good, at heart. If you are needing some guidance and specific examples of what is meant by a “good” or “heroic” style, the works of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and other such writings provide excellent examples.

*It is okay for player characters to be flawed, have eccentricities, and struggle with difficult moral decisions and actions (which can lead to some great role-playing and even personal development). A less subtle extreme example of a heroic but flawed character includes Boromir's temptation and loss of self-control caused by giving into the will of The One Ring and accosting Frodo. Boromir is an example of an heroic character that gave into temptation and a moment of evil action, and experienced consequences to the actions. The ends *do not* justify the means. In the long run the PC must be well-intentioned towards finding the right balance between individual good and the greater good, not in a Machiavellian way, but in the more classically idealized concepts of “good”.*

If your character commits too many evil acts, the PC will increasingly lose free will, succumbing to impulse, and/or the will of others. Too much transition into this "shadow", as determined by the game system rules or ultimately the GM, may lead to the PC increasingly losing self-will. At the GM's discretion, if the PC performs too many evil or questionable acts, if the player repeatedly ignores the GM's warning the player may no longer be allowed to control the PC, and relinquishes partial or full control of the PC to the GM.

Additional Legal Disclaimers

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