

TTRPG Safety Toolkit

A Quick Reference Guide

Playing tabletop roleplaying games can be fun and fulfilling experiences. However, making sure that the GM, players, and potential audience feels safe is important. This is a quick reference guide on how to incorporate safety tools into your TTRPG games to make sure that everyone is having fun.

Safety Tools

What are safety tools?

Sometimes games have content or situations where a player or GM may feel stressed out, unsafe, or otherwise not having fun. Safety tools are a way for players and GMs to communicate and check-in before, during, and after a game in order to make sure everyone is still having fun, and to provide the right support when needed.

Communication, trust, and care

The key to safety tools is communication and trust. There needs to be an open and respectful line of communication alongside an environment of trust for these to work.

As a GM, player, or organizer, you can create this environment by making it clear that the care and well-being of everyone at the table comes before the game or story. This can be done by actively listening to everyone, offering accommodations and safety tools, implementing actions when asked while not prying (nobody owes you their trauma as explanation), and actively checking in before, during, and after a game.

The toolkit

Different safety tools work better for different people and games. Finding the ones that best suit the needs of everyone at the table is important, and should be facilitated through discussion at the start of every new game or new group.

This guide provides summaries of some safety tools and techniques to add to your own toolkit. This includes the **X-card/veil system**, the **Script Change RPG Toolbox**, and the **Luxton Technique**.

Sources and links are provided at the end of this guide for the full original materials, alongside links to other resources.

Before the Game Begins

Session 0

Session 0s are a great way to begin communication, set expectations on the kind of story and play, and introduce and discuss what safety tools will be used at the table.

Lines and Veils

Lines and veils are used to set boundaries on content in a game. **Lines** are hard limits on content, things that the GM or the players don't want to engage in. Setting up a line means that content won't show up in the game at all. **Veils** are soft limits, things that are ok "behind a curtain" or when they "cut-to-black." Setting up a veil means that the content might be in the game but not spotlighted or described in great detail. **Lines and veils** can be adjusted as needed throughout the game.

Script Change Rating

Script Change ratings are used to set tone and boundaries for your game. Using film ratings (or your own), you can outline what audience you're playing for (e.g. PG-13 vs R). The **rating** also addresses what content players do want to see as well as what they don't want to see. Make sure to balance and respect everyone's do and don't wants. **Ratings** and do-and-don't-want content can be adjusted as needed throughout the game.

Luxton Technique Discussion

In the **Luxton Technique**, have an open discussion between everyone at the table about potential trauma triggers. This is with the understanding that it's not possible to identify every single possible trigger or trauma, and that there is no social pressure to go into details or individual justifications for a trigger.

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During the Game

X, N, and O Cards

X, N, and O cards are check-in tools. They can be used by tapping physical cards, typing the letter in the chat function of the video conference software or virtual tabletop you are using, or using hand signals. Before the game begins, remind everyone that they are available and how to use them.

The **X card** can be used at any point if a participant is uncomfortable with the content happening in-game. When the **X card** is used by tapping the card or typing an “X” in the chat, the group can change, rewind, or skip the content.

The **N card** can be used at any point if a participant feels like they are headed towards an X. When the **N card** is used by tapping the card or typing an “N” in the chat, the group can change the content or have the scene “fade to black.”

The **O card** can be used at any point if a participant wants to continue with the content. When the **O card** is used by tapping the card or typing an “O” in the chat, the group is ok to continue with the content. They can also regularly be prompted by a “O?” asked out loud or in the chat to check-in if everyone is still ok.

Script Change

The **Script Change RPG Toolbox** is a collection of tools that can be used to adjust play and content. They can be used by tapping physical cards, typing the letter in the chat function of the video conference software or virtual tabletop you are using, or using hand signals. Before the game begins, remind your players that they are available and how to use them.

Rewind (<<) can be used when something has happened in play that makes a participant uncomfortable. When **Rewind (<<)** is used by tapping the card, typing the shorthand in the chat, or stating it out loud (“I’d like to rewind...”), be clear about what content is being adjusted, rewind to a point before it happened, and play starts again.

Fast Forward (>>) can be used when a participant would like to skip past uncomfortable

content or to the next part of the story for pacing. When **Fast Forward (>>)** is used by tapping the card, typing the shorthand in the chat, or stating it out loud (“I’d like to fast forward...”), skip forward to a new spot in the story that everyone agrees on.

Pause (II) can be used when things are too intense, but you still want to continue playing the scene. When **Pause (II)** is used by tapping the card, typing the shorthand in the chat, or stating it out loud (“I’d like to pause...”), you can take a break and/or discuss the content as needed. After the **Pause (II)**, you can **Resume (>)**, **Rewind (<<)**, or **Fast Forward (>>)**.

Resume (>) can be used when everyone is ready to continue play, often after adjusting or discussing content. When **Resume (>)** is used by tapping the card, typing the shorthand in the chat, or stating it out loud (“Let’s resume...”), continue with play.

Luxton Technique

With the **Luxton Technique**, when a participant comes across triggering content in play, they can choose to discuss it with the other people at the table. The participant is given complete control over that content, expressed as a need or want for how play will continue. This can include in-game directions for plot and characters, as well as out of game needs such as breaks. After the need and wants are expressed, everyone continues play to accommodate the requests.

Open Door

The **Open Door** is the assurance that someone can leave or take a break from the game for their own safety and well-being without being judged. State this at the beginning and periodically throughout the game.

Breaks

For games longer than 2 hours or games that have intense content, having a short built-in break is recommended to allow people to stay focused and process. Allow for discussion, bio breaks, or any other needs during this time.

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After the Game

Bleed

Emotions and stress from the game can bleed over into post-game life. This can affect the enjoyment of the game, as well as out-of-game relationships between players and GM if not worked through.

Being open and honest about where the game begins and ends, and being conscious of which feelings belong to the player and which are just bleed, helps to mitigate the effects.

Aftercare

Together as a group after the game, check-in with everyone to see how they are feeling. This is an open way for everyone to emotionally decompress, talk through, and process the events of the session in a safe environment.

Encourage everyone to practice their own forms of self-care and remind them that their mental health comes first.

Debriefing

Debriefing as a group is a great way to reflect on the game, identify possible issues, highlight the fun things to continue, and work through potential bleed. Debriefing can happen right after the game or in the days following the stream.

Stars and Wishes

Stars and wishes are used to reflect on the session and communicate feedback in a positive and forward-facing way. At the end of the game, go around and get everyone to state a star and wish.

Stars are things that the participants really enjoyed and loved about the game. This could include a particular moment of roleplay, an encounter created by the GM, or anything else that stuck out as something awesome during the game. **Wishes** are things that the participants would like to see in future sessions. This could include particular interactions between characters, potential story moments and development, or anything else that could make the game even better in the future.

Highlight Reel and Wrap Session

Similar to **stars and wishes**, Script Change has **Highlight Reel** and **Wrap Session**. The **Highlight Reel** is used to reflect on the session and highlight moments participants enjoyed. At the end of the game, go around and get everyone to state highlight of the game for them. This could include a particular moment of roleplay, an encounter created by the GM, or anything else that stuck out as something awesome during the game. The **Wrap Session** is an opportunity for the group to reflect on the session and discuss what could be improved going forward. At the end of the game, go around and open up discussion about the game. This could include content participants didn't feel comfortable calling pause or rewind at the time, or talking about emotional impacts and bleed.

There should be no social pressure to disclose the details or trauma to justify why someone felt uncomfortable or unsafe during the game, as long as the discussion moves towards how to address the issues going forward.

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Safety in TTRPG Actual Plays

Applying Safety Tools to Actual Plays

When sharing your game via livestreams, podcasts, videos, etc., safety tools become incredibly important as there is another level of performance and intensity that is now public.

Audience as a Participant

Because of the interactive and immersive nature of actual plays (especially livestreams), your audience becomes another participant in the game. Therefore, safety tools can and should be extended to them to some extent.

Open Door

The Open Door is also extended to the audience. State at the beginning of the game and periodically throughout that they can leave or stop listening/watching at any point for their own safety and well-being without being judged.

Content Warnings

Consider including a content warning about potentially uncomfortable content that regularly appears in your game. This can be done on streams via commands or within the overlay, and on podcasts and videos somewhere on the site.

Other Tools

For livestreams, you can implement other tools like the **X**, **N**, and **O cards**, **Script Change**, or the **Luxton Technique** for the audience via the chat. However, consider how to best implement them for your game and audience to accommodate needs while also mitigating possible misuse and disruption.

Audience Bleed and Decompression

Audience can experience bleed as well, so having a space for them to discuss and decompress is recommended. Consider implementing tools such as **stars and wishes** and the **Highlight Reel** and **Wrap Session**. This can be done in a post-game on-stream chat with the cast, or in a community forum like Discord or Twitter.

Sources and Acknowledgements

Sources

Lines and Veils were designed by Ron Edwards
<https://rpg.stackexchange.com/questions/30906/what-do-the-terms-lines-and-veils-mean>

The X card was designed by John Stavropoulos
<http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>

The O card was designed by Kira Magrann
serpencyborggames.com

The N card was designed by Mysty Vander and Adam Cleaver, based on the Support Flower by Taylor Stokes

The Script Change RPG Toolbox was designed by Brie Beau Sheldon
briebeau.itch.io/script-change
<https://briebeau.com/thoughty/script-change/>

The Luxton Technique was originally written by P.H. Lee and reposted by Brie Beau Sheldon
<http://briebeau.com/thoughty/2019/03/the-luxton-technique-by-p-h-lee/>

The Open Door was designed by Eirik Fatland
<http://leavingmundania.com/2014/02/27/primer-safety-in-roleplaying-games/>

Additional Resources

Safety and Calibration cards was created by dTwelves
drivethrurpg.com/product/281432/Safety-Calibration-Cards

The Support Tools Compilation was created by RPG Natalie
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TRK10f_2CliquNmXTSa1oXpT6NhLUCPNNO1hMHchZlg/edit?usp=sharing

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many members of the TTRPG community on Twitter for reviewing the TTRPG Safety Toolkit Guide in its different development.

Find this guide and many more resources at bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit