BOUNDARIES CONVERSATION GUIDELINES

Different levels of intimacy

Level **A** **Professional**	**Touch:** Limited to handshakes and high fives.
	Content: Limited to topics appropriate for a professional setting. Specifically excluding sex, violence, and drug use. This should be subject matter that would be considered appropriate in a workplace.
Level **B** **Social**	**Touch:** Touching arms, shoulders, hugs. This may also include holding hands, dancing with one another, or other agreed upon touches with which acquaintances would be comfortable.
	Content: Social content would include things that you would be able to talk about in community spaces with mixed company. Subjects that are appropriate with acquaintances, relatives or people you don't know that well.
Level **C** **Friendly**	**Touch:** Kissing (peck on cheeks or lips), closer hugs, holding, sitting on laps, and stage combat such as fake slaps or punches.
	Content: Friendly content can include things you would openly talk about with your peers in a small group setting. This may include more explicit language or content, potty talk and flirtatious behavior.
Level **D** **Trusted**	**Touch**: Anything more intimate or violent. Such as biting, slapping or hitting with contact. Open-mouthed kissing, miming sex acts, nudity or a representation of nudity, carrying another person, etc. **If it requires consent in the real world, it requires consent in the improv world.**
	Content: Trusted content will depend on the group, but should be thought of as something you would normally only speak about with a very trusted friend. This especially includes content like rape, sexual violence or abuse, child abuse, derogatory or sexual explicit commentary. At the trusted level especially, content should be addressed directly and specifically, with a clear understanding of the range of acceptability and comfort.

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Defining the appropriate levels and settings boundaries

Before you do **ANY** work with a group or a class, you should discuss at which level of intimacy you are going to be staying. All new groups, as well as groups that include minors or strangers (such as Space Jam), should be at Level A: Professional.

Once you have established the overall level of intimacy the group will stay at, it's important to ask if players have specific needs within those boundaries. Start the conversation by asking each player to complete this sentence: "Today I'm up for (level of touch/topics player is comfortable with), and I'm not up for (levels of touch/topics the player is uncomfortable with)."

Higher levels of intimacy or violence require discussion, consent from all members, regular check-ins, and work as a group to increase comfort and trust. A group/class could move to higher levels or it could remain at Level A for the duration.

Addressing issues in the moment

If a player feels uncomfortable in a scene, they can call "time out" (and make a T with their hands) and the rest of the group will applaud, recognizing that player's courage, and the issue will be discussed on the spot. Don't put the burden of discussion on the person who called time-out; make it a group problem, not the individual's problem. For example, a teacher/coach could ask, "How could this scene have gone better? How will we make better choices in the future?"

Regular check-ins

At the beginning of class/rehearsal

Do a quick check-in about how every player is feeling, physically and/or emotionally, for example: "Today I'm up for (level of touch/topics player is comfortable with), and I'm not up for (levels of touch/topics the player is uncomfortable with)." The purpose of this check-in is not to be repetitive or burdensome, but rather to allow players to communicate about changed boundaries (such as a result of a recent injury) as well as to normalize this conversation.

After the show

When discussing notes after a show, go around the circle and **EVERYONE** (so no one feels singled out) shares a point of celebration and a point of contention. Points of contention can include moments where boundaries were violated, players didn't feel supported, or other ways for the group to improve.

Exploring Boundaries Further

Working on intimacy in a group

High level of intimacy and trust in a group comes with work and experience working together. Many theater and improv exercises can help build this over time. For example, games that involve safe contact or rehearsing stage combat moves. Note that some exercises, such as the many genitalia-centered warm-ups common in improv, might destroy trust among group members.

Discussing boundaries for a given level

For each specific type of contact (ex: kissing, missing a punch, etc.), get input and consent from all players:
- Go around the circle and everyone consents or does not consent to allowing a particular action. Use a phrase and/or gesture of positive reinforcement to welcome each player's input, whether it's a consent or not. Such positive reinforcement can be clapping, everyone saying, "the improvisor in me honors and respects the improvisor in you," etc.
- If there is a chance that group dynamics prevent some players to be fully open if they're not ready for a specific type of contact, use paper slips to get an anonymous vote. If there is a no, then the group is not yet ready for that particular action.

Discussing personal boundaries in more details

It can be very useful to also discuss in more detail types of contact and themes with which everyone might feel comfortable or not comfortable. This requires a longer sit-down conversation, where everyone is invited to speak in detail about his/her/their personal boundaries. This can also be done with everyone writing down first what those are, then sharing it with the group. Do **NOT** call out specific people or identities (e.g. women, minors) as the reason we need to talk about boundaries. As a facilitator, encourage players to participate by sharing your own boundaries.