



safer  
spaces  
project

# Internal Culture Guide

Prepared By :

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# How to use this document.

This document is intended as a starting point to consider how to create a culture of care within your organization, team, and/or project. This is not intended as a comprehensive list to ensure safety for all, but rather this is an initial brainstorm for your continuous inquiry into what you can do as a leader and what your responsibility to creating a culture of care and compassion can encompass. Some of the things outlined may be more relevant than others. Take and run with what serves, but consider the totality of things discussed in this document.



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**PROGRESS IS A PROCESS,  
NOT AN EVENT.**

**RUBY BRIDGES**





# Safer Spaces Statements & Policies Checklist

This is a list of statements and policies that would serve as your organizational handbook. We recommend working with a third-party anti-racism/anti-oppression (ARAO) consultant to develop these statements and policies for distribution among existing team members and onboarding new members. This Internal Culture Guide document will cover things that are great building blocks in creating the recommended statements and policies below.

- \* Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression Statement + Policies
- \* Harassment & Bullying
  - Consider protocols to prevent harassment, address/stop harassment as it is happening, and reporting/accountability/reparative processes after it has happened.
  - An example of preventative protocols:
    - Create a code word system to signal staff/team to be alert of potential harassment or bullying. Ex. Signs in the bathroom saying if you feel like you're in danger of harassment, go to the receptionist and say "Have you seen the new narwhal documentary?" Which will signal the team member to keep that person safe.
- \* Complaint Process
  - Internal complaint process
  - Community-facing/external complaint process
  - Consider and determine when external support is needed (third party mediation/ consulting)
  - Include how folks will be called in, should the complaint be about them. And describe how the victim or complainant will be supported
  - Appeal process
- \* Conflict Resolution Process
  - For lower scale conflict that does not yet warrant a formal complaint process
  - Appeal process
- \* Power Dynamic Statement
  - Organizational Chart
    - Who's who in the organization. How does accountability flow within the organization?
  - Organizational/Leadership 360 Review
- \* Commitment to team member mental and emotional health
  - What are accommodations offered to help support nervous system regulation
    - Ex. mental health days, budgeted "peace treats" during high-stress projects (financial bonus for massage, therapy, any outlet for joy, peace or ease)
  - Routine check-ins, both 1:1 and group, to assess needs and nourish connection and trust



# Key Terms & Definitions

Below are some key terms to familiarize yourself with and seek understanding of. How do you and your organization define them? How do your policies and group agreements plan to integrate them? How do your projects, leadership or offerings remain anchored and committed to safer spaces frameworks?

We've offered proposed definitions of safer spaces and braver spaces from various sources, as well as definitions of the components that these spaces require. A safer space centres comfort and acceptance of all folks, where they are met with validation and affirmation. A braver space is where the conditions for healthy conflict are met. Social justice transformation requires a braver space. Braver spaces are born from safer spaces. Both safer and braver spaces need to operate from an anti-oppression, anti-racism, and trauma-aware framework.



## SAFER SPACE

- \* A place (as on a college campus) intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations. ([merriam-webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com))
- \* A place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment or any other emotional or physical harm. (*Oxford Dictionary*)
- \* A safe space is ideally one that doesn't incite judgment based on identity or experience - where the expression of both can exist and be affirmed without fear of repercussion and without the pressure to educate. While learning may occur in these spaces, the ultimate goal is to provide support. ([alternativebreaks.org/safe-or-brave-spaces](https://alternativebreaks.org/safe-or-brave-spaces))

# BRAVER SPACE

- \* "Full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs." (Source: Adams, M., Bell, L. A., Goodman, D. J., & Joshi, K. Y. [2016]. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* [third edition]. Routledge.)
- \* A brave space encourages dialogue. Recognizing difference and holding each person accountable to do the work of sharing experiences and coming to new understandings - a feat that's often hard, and typically uncomfortable. ([alternativebreaks.org/safe-or-brave-spaces](http://alternativebreaks.org/safe-or-brave-spaces))

# CARE + ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

## Consent

- \* Create conditions where consent is sought after and advocated for. In environments with unchecked power dynamics, one might give their consent out of fear rather than out of truth. Spaces and relationships need to consider what conditions need to be agreed upon, co-created and upheld so that folks feel empowered to say "no." Where people are empowered to say "no," and "no" is received with affirmation and validation, then the "yesses" in that space are more likely to be empowered and true "yesses."

## Accountability

- \* Taking responsibility for one's actions, harm and triggers.
- \* If an environment is one that centres transformative/restorative justice rather than punitive measures, then the act of taking personal accountability isn't as scary.
- \* Environments and relationships should work to create clear frameworks and after-care plans for taking accountability.
- \* Annual 360 peer reviews is highly encouraged for leadership personnel and where applicable, the broader organization. When power dynamics are at play, which they inherently always are, team members may not always feel safe to bring feedback forward which means leaders may not always be aware of the kind of environment they are creating. An anonymous 360 peer review is a powerful vehicle for transparency, reflection and accountability.
- \* Make the 360 review available to current and incoming collaborators, staff, team members. Ex. Including it with any onboarding documents: contract, policies, handbook, etc.

## Boundaries

- \* A big part of care is giving space for the creation, naming and redefining of boundaries. What are the agreements of the space and the relationship? How do they honour individual and collective care? What do folks need in order to feel safer and braver? What is the process when boundaries are crossed?

## Accommodations

- \* Working one-on-one with individuals on what support they need to thrive and be successful in a space. (Ex. Work from home flexibility, wheelchair access, ASL interpretation, ability to take time off, fat-friendly furniture, etc.)
- \* How do you meet the needs of others who have accommodations that differ from your own? How do you negotiate organizational/project goals with the access needs of individuals? How do you negotiate accommodations when they come into conflict with another's accommodations?

# CONFLICT, HARM, VIOLENCE

## Harm

Harm is a complex term, people define and understand it in a multitude of ways. It can manifest as:

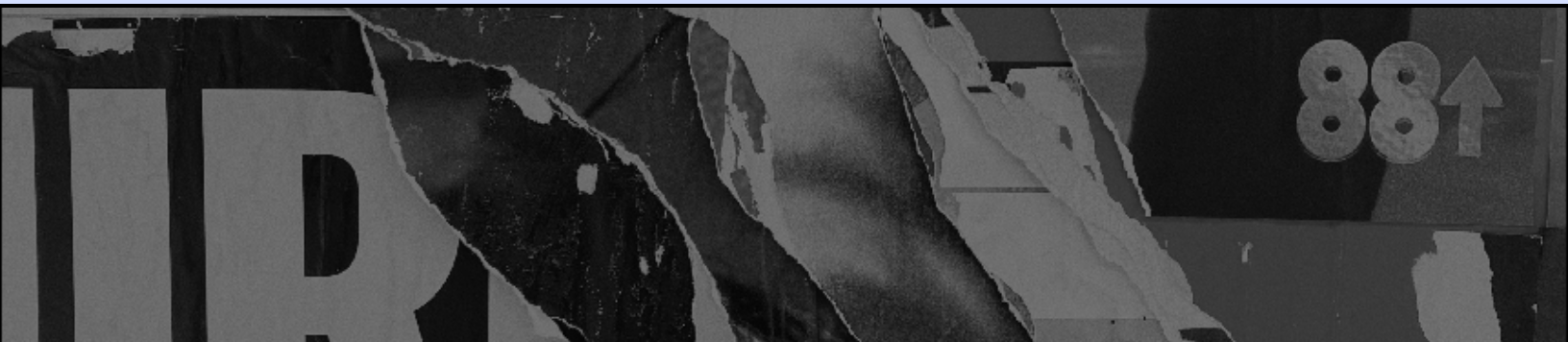
- \* Microaggressions
  - Unchecked Power Dynamics
  - Emotional/Verbal Abuse
  - Dismissiveness/Gaslighting/Minimizing

## Healthy Conflict vs. Toxic

- \* Healthy conflict is suspended beyond the binary of right and wrong, whereas toxic conflict is punitive and blame-ridden. Healthy conflict understands multi-truths and sets up the conditions for compassion and comprehension of multiple perspectives rather than truths competing with each other to be the "truest truth."

## Transformative / Restorative Justice / Conflict Resolution

- \* A process where care is given to all sides of the conflict. The process centres mutual understanding and creating an action plan forward that prevents repetition of harm. It aims to get clear on the individual, relational, and environmental conditions that gave way to the occurrence of harm. This process is patient and accountable, not punitive, and it seeks to provide all parties with tools for healing.
- \* Active listening. Repeating what you understand from the other person to make sure you are understanding their point of view.
- \* Non violent communication.



## OTHER IMPORTANT TERMS...

### \* **Anti-racism**

Actively opposing & challenging racism and advocating for equality, justice & inclusion.

### \* **Anti-oppression**

Identifying and challenging xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, fat-phobia, ableism, etc.

### \* **Privilege**

Advantages, benefits, or opportunities based on their social identity or position in society.

### \* **Fragility**

Defensiveness or emotional upset when confronted with criticism, challenges, or truths.

### \* **Social Location**

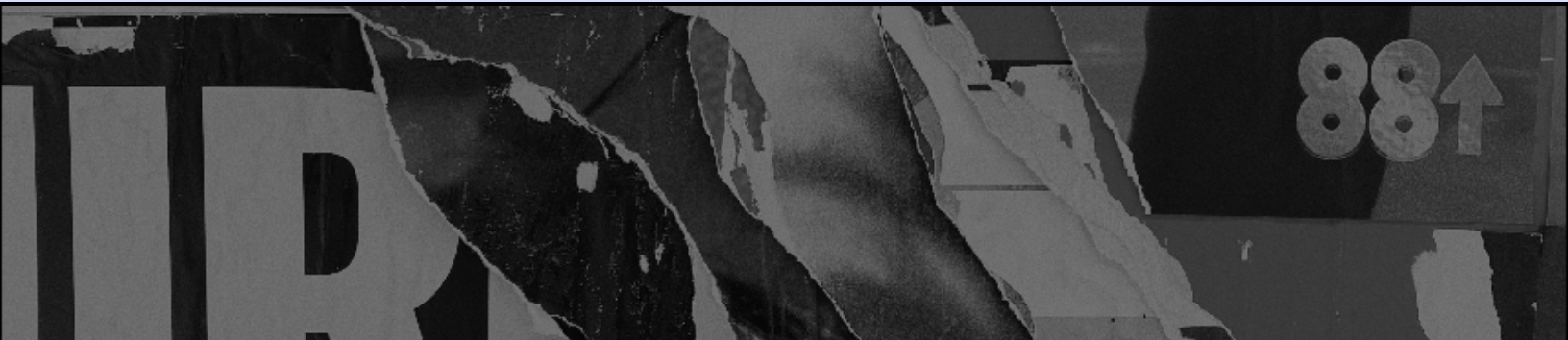
Social and cultural factors that shape an individual's identity, experiences, and opportunities.

### \* **Trauma Awareness**

Understanding its impact and how it can affect behaviour, relationships, and well-being.

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## **OTHER IMPORTANT TERMS**

...to define and understand for yourself

\* **Anti-racism**

\* **Fragility**

\* **Anti-oppression**

\* **Social Location**

\* **Privilege**

\* **Trauma Awareness**



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## Space

There are a number of components that make a space welcoming, inviting and accessible. A Safer Space is one that not only creates the conditions for greater accessibility to folks with diverse needs, but also considers how to make more folks feel at ease in the environment. Whether the space is a fixed brick and mortar, an outdoor event or a virtual gathering, the following are some suggestions to help make your space inviting for more folks.

- \* A clear welcome desk where there is always guaranteed personnel, such as a Care Coordinator or staff member, available to welcome and help.
- \* Water & Inclusive Snacks (i.e. vegan, gluten free, allergy friendly snacks).
- \* Visual signs incorporated in the space that empower individuals with self-agency to navigate the environment.
- \* Accessibility considerations for disabled folks.
  - Ex. Mobility considerations.
  - Ex. Subsidized transportation.
  - Alternative methods of receiving information or communicating if someone can't write, speak, hear or see.
  - Ex. ASL Interpreter. Voice to text captions. Sound system that links with hearing aids. Real-time captioner at events.
    - ONLY provide ASL Interpreter support if it is certain that there are deaf folks in attendance, otherwise we potentially take a much needed resource away from where it is beneficial.
      - For events that are recorded or live-streamed, providing ASL interpretation is encouraged to make the viewing accessible to deaf folks viewing from home



## Virtual Space Protocols

- \* In advance of the event, in the registration process, prompt folks to list any accessibility accommodations needed.
- \* Clearly identifiable event personnel:
  - Host, Chat Moderator and at least one Care Coordinator present and available to assist folks 1:1 in virtual breakout rooms or direct messaging
  - Profile names of personnel should include:
    - Name + Pronouns
    - An \* at the start of their profile name so that it always appears at the top of the participant list making access quicker should someone need to direct message them.
- \* Have all participants on mute upon entry.
- \* Name protocol of how to pass the mic.
- \* Offer agency around how to participate and be present.
  - Give permission to log on/off
  - Permission to turn off video, but perhaps turn on video if you're talking
- \* Closed Captioning / Transcription.
- \* Consider the accommodation needs of who is in the virtual room.
  - Example, if there are deaf folks in the group who are using an ASL interpreter, how does that impact screensharing (does the ASL interpreter get lost from the screen?) or chat box usage (it may be hard to focus on chat box shares and ASL interpreter simultaneously)





# Care Team

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Safer spaces need to be co-created and tended to by a Care Team of Care Coordinators. A Care Team is a diverse group of individuals that value compassion, understanding, the wisdom of lived experience and the uncomfortable process of being solution oriented in a full-spectrum way.

There are a few potential roads one might explore in creating a Care Team. For example, a Care Coordinator could be an external contractor, existing permanent employee, someone hired on as project-based support, someone contracted to the space year-round, or something different that fits the needs of your project and/or organization. With this in mind, it is important to consider how the way your Care Coordinator or Care Team is hired and contracted might impact dynamics of power within the space/project/organization. Using the example and context of the Hamilton Festival Theatre Company (HFTco), this company hires an external Care Coordinator to support their summer Fringe Festival project. Having an external contractor to this project allows for staff to more comfortably access someone not tied organizationally to HFTco for support, because it means this person is a staff resource solely for their care and wellbeing without judgement. However, when dreaming up and creating the positions of a Care Team within the Safer Spaces Project, this was always in the context of a team to govern an artistic community space. In this example, hiring a year-round Care Team as part of the space and organizations who are

responsible for the space may be a more effective option as these folks can build policies and practices of care for a space that folks are accessing throughout the year.

Not sure how your organization can incorporate a Care Team? Reach out to the Safer Spaces Project team. We are happy to support you in assessing organizational needs, power dynamics, and what the best fit might be for you!

Ideally the care team consists of at least 3-4 coordinators; more members would allow for more diversity in lived experience and insight. Depending on logistics (financial, availability, etc), an option could be to have less members on the Care Team or one Care Coordinator, that are directed by a larger diverse Steering Committee. The Care Team should employ folks with lived experiences of marginalization (ex. racialized, queer, disabled) because of the attuned empathy that lived experience grants them. Just because one carries the title of "Care Coordinator" does not automatically guarantee trust from the folks who require care, especially when the Care Coordinator occupies a more privileged social location. With this in mind, a white person on the Care Team could potentially confront any instances of white supremacy, minimizing potential harm toward the racialized Care Team members, however your Care Team should not be solely composed of white team members. We say this understanding that the social locations of individuals are completely unique, not monolithic. We say this also to recognize the powerful impact of representation.

## Qualities / Understandings

- \* Welcoming, accepting, open minded and curious. Not dismissive.
- \* Humble. Active in their management of anger and ego.
- \* Understand the importance of being responsive, not reactive.
- \* Able to collaborate with different needs, can anticipate needs to various demographics BUT not assume needs.
- \* Open to hearing feedback.
- \* People aren't products. Honour pace. Give space for folks to think, allow people to lean into their pace of processing and expression.
- \* Trauma awareness, mental health awareness, dissociative identity disorder awareness.
- \* Experiences working in social services.
- \* Emotional Literacy/ Intelligence.

## Responsibilities & Accommodations

- \* Create a 1-10 microaggression scale, dealing with them accordingly.
- \* Develop and employ conflict resolution framework.
- \* Develop and employ incident management and protocol policy.
  - On the team, who's the best in a crisis?
  - Who are the emergency contacts of the building?
  - What are the building safe words and code words?
  - During an incident where police are involved, the Care Team is the go-between to shelter victims from potential further harm from police. Advocate. Mediator.
  - Who is the first responder?
  - Who is the security guard? Consider partnering with a security company to make sure the personnel have safer spaces or sensitivity training.
  - Consider Negotiation Training / Hostage Negotiator
  - Guidelines of what situations necessitate to call the police 911.
    - When calling 911, let them know of any disability issues: deaf, blind, serious mental health, etc
    - In physical danger: weapons involved, bombs, threats of violence
    - If there is a missing child, at what point do we call the cops? Make it collaborative with parents or care-givers.
      - What is our legal responsibility when a child goes missing?
      - Do we call the police regardless just to receive next steps?
      - What happens when parents aren't in agreement about calling cops?
    - Fire
- \* What support is there for the care coordinator?
  - What does the coordinator need to decompress?
  - Support from someone with a psych/therapist background?
  - Do they feel safe working alone?
    - Maybe we make it a rule that there's always at least 2-3 ppl on staff (3 is sexual harassment prevention). Build policy, building staff requirements and pay requirements so that staff is never alone.
  - Intentionally select emergency contact: who can come to you or advocate for you? Nurture community.





## Internal Protocols // Group Facilitation with Artists or Staff

- \* Consistent check-ins, check-outs.
- \* Co-create group agreements.
  - Communication needs and boundaries (ex. No texting or IG dming)
  - Feedback Process for each individual in group (how does each individual receive feedback best)
  - Oops/ow protocol
  - How to create conditions for healthy conflict and transformative care
    - “Make the roller coaster safe enough so that we choose to ride it.” - Kai Cheng Thom on conflict work.
    - Holding space for paradox, multi truths
      - When we’re prepared for conflict, our capacity to stay within our window of tolerance is greater - our ability to hold space for paradox, and suspend “right/wrong” is greater
    - Take responsibility for one's own triggers
    - Ask group conditions for bravery/safety to express/share/self-advocate
      - Offerings and requests
- \* Front load protocols of inclusive language/behaviour and give a heads up of what might not be inclusive.
  - Ex. We talk about food in a positive way, we use pro-trans language, etc)
  - IDEA: Create a document that sets names the values and protocols of care
    - Ex. Zine on inclusive language
    - Ex. Zine on microaggressions: how you’ll be called in, how you’ll be supported if you victim
- \* Acknowledgement of each individuals social locations.

## Protocols for Hosting Public Guests

- \* Welcome:
  - Greet every individual. Introduce yourself and offer your pronouns should you feel comfortable to do so.
  - Let folks know how to navigate space (ex. where the washrooms are) and any physical accessibility issues exist.
    - “Just to let you know, the bathrooms aren’t wheelchair accessible.”
  - Let them know you’re available for any needed assistance and where they can find you should the need arise. The offer of a private check in.
    - “I want to let you know that I’m here for you if you need anything.”
    - “If there is anything that I can do for you, let me know.”
      - Gives agency to folks with physical disabilities without assuming that they aren’t capable
      - Be actively ready and accessible to receive requests for help.
    - Here’s where you can find me if you need help.”
- \* Inclusive language when prompting folks (Give me a thumbs up - what if the person doesn’t have arms?)
- \* Alternative methods of receiving information (when someone can’t write, speak, hear, see).
- \* Communicate the protocols for care: protocols for microaggressions.
  - Zine/pamphlet at front desk
  - Page on website





# Trainings for Incident Management

- \* Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Trans Inclusion Training
- \* Advocating for children and youth
- \* CPR
- \* Self-defense
- \* Conflict Resolution
- \* De-escalation
- \* Intimacy Coaching
  - Preventative
  - Onsite during rehearsals
  - Touch related, consensual touch
- \* Sexual Harassment Training
- \* Crisis Management

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**HOW WE CHANGE IS HOW  
WE CHANGE THE WORLD.**

ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN

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