



This guide was written & illustrated by Maeril | @itsmaeril - Translated in English for The Middle Eastern Feminist

Intervention

A short larp by Mike Young

Introduction

I recently saw the illustrated guide by French artist, Maeril, on how to assist someone who is being harassed. (It's on the last page of this document. Go ahead and skip forward and read it and come back).

It is a really good process called non-complementary behavior, and the illustration is a very well done guide on how to implement the process.

But it can be daunting to step between a hostile stranger and their target, so I had the idea that a larp could be created to allow people to practice this.

Unlike other larps I have written, this one does not have lengthy characters. You are given a role. You have some workshopping of techniques and ways to get into the role, and then you are thrown into a situation of harassment and you need to deal with it using the techniques listed in the guide.

Trigger Warnings

This larp deals with public verbal harassment. This means that some characters will be encouraged to yell or speak loudly in a threatening manner at other characters. This can be triggering for some people and even with the safety techniques described below, they are encouraged to not participate in this larp. (Nobody will think less of you; in fact, I will think better of you because I really admire self-care.)

Safety Techniques

Because Intervention can be loud, agitated larp, I recommend the following safety techniques. They may be used by anyone during interaction.

- **Largo:** This is a safeword that is used to slow down the intensity and volume of the larp. Any participant can say “largo,” and if they do, then *all* other participants *must* reduce the intensity and volume of the roleplaying. There is no need to stop the larp or check in on anyone. Think of largo as “turning down the volume” of the larp. Largo may be used multiple times in a row if the lowered intensity is not low enough.
- **Cut:** This is a safeword that immediately stops the larp. Any participant can say “cut,” and if they do then *all* other participants *must* stop roleplaying in the larp and must immediately break character until all players agree that the larp may continue. It is perfectly acceptable to leave the larp during the “cut,” and it is also acceptable to use “cut” to stop the runtime part of the larp to move on to the cool off period.
- **Lookdown:** This is a visual signal that indicates that you need to leave the larp but do not want others to stop roleplaying. To indicate you wish to leave simply put your hand above your eyes like you were blocking out the sun and look down. Then leave the larp space as quickly as you feel comfortable. If any player does this, the rest of the players should not stop roleplaying and should continue the larp as if the player was never there. If the player of the *Target* (see below) uses this technique then runtime stops immediately and the larp proceeds to the cool off period.
- **Check In:** This is a visual signal to check on the player state. To use it, flash the “ok” sign at another player. This is a query asking them how they are doing out-of-character. They should reply with thumbs up (I’m doing ok), thumbs down (I’m not doing ok), or with a flat hand (I don’t know). This can happen during roleplay without breaking the roleplay. If the response is thumbs up, continue roleplaying as normal. Otherwise, treat this as a cut. Pause the larp until the issue can be resolved. This can involve a player leaving the larp due to being overwhelmed. It’s ok if that happens and it is always better to err on the side of emotional safety. For that reason the flat hand (I don’t know) should be treated the same way as a thumbs down.



Check In Gestures

In addition, I recommend a safe space nearby where people who need to leave the larp can decompress and take a break as needed.

Warmups and Workshops

At the start, the participants will warmup together and then will separate into two different workshops.

Start with energy and group mind warmups. I suggest:

- Have the participants form a circle and each introduce themselves with their names and a strange fact about themselves.
- Get the participants to sing “head, shoulders, knees and toes” or do the hokey-pokey.
- Have the participants play zip, zap, zop. Someone says “zip” and points at another participant. That person says “zap” and points to someone else. That person says “zop” and points to someone else. And then it’s back to zip. Keep going, getting faster and faster and faster.
- Keep the participants in a circle and ask them to describe an instance in which they have encountered or witnessed harassment. Participants may pass if they are uncomfortable describing an incident or are having difficulty remembering an incident because they were put on the spot. It’s ok to jump around the circle; people don’t have to go in order.

I also suggest workshopping all of the safety techniques. Break participants into groups of four and have each one practice largo, cut, and lookdown while the others pretend to roleplay around them. Then have them practice checking in with each other. Here are some potential scenarios for each technique that could be used.

- **Largo.** The characters are at a restaurant. One is the waiter and the other the customer. The customer starts berating the waiter about the food, getting louder and louder until the waiter says “largo” and then the customer dials it back.
- **Cut.** Same scene, but use cut. The action stops as soon as cut is said.
- **Lookdown.** One person starts describing their day, and the other looks down and walks away.
- **Check in.** One person roleplays being upset and the other flashes the ok sign. The first person responds with thumbs up. If you mess the signs up, try again.

Afterwards, separate the participants into three groups.

- One participant should be **the Target**. The target will be the target of the harassment during the larp, and should be a volunteer who knows what they are getting in to. In real life, of course, the targets of harassment do not have a choice, but here we are trying to make a simulation of harassment for real life purposes. There are no special workshops for the Target and they can either wait, or join the Escorts (see below). The Target may want to consider a bit about their character background and why they are in the public space where the larp is set.
- Split the rest of the participants into two groups, the Harassers and the Escorts. There should not be more Harassers than Escorts. **The Harassers** have the unpleasant job of verbally harassing the Target. As a workshop, they should work on their group cohesion and adrenaline.
 - Start by having the harassers read their runtime instructions. Make sure they understand them and are willing to perform them. If not, they could sit out or join the Escorts.
 - Allow the Harassers to come up with simple backgrounds for themselves. They could all be friends, or they might not know each other at all. It should be made clear to the Harassers that they are playing characters other than themselves, and if they want to brainstorm some reasons why their characters might harass a person in public, this would be a good time.
 - Once that is done, start to build energy. Choose a random sound and have the Harassers go around in a circle each making the sound individually and getting louder and putting more emphasis and intensity on it each time. Do this two or three times, going in a different direction each time.
 - Have the Harassers pick something unpleasant (poison ivy, fingernails on a chalkboard, being sick, and so forth) and then go in a circle talking about what they hate about it and getting louder each time.
 - Have the Harassers count down in a circle. Start with eight and have them count 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and shake their right hand in the circle. Then the left hand, then their right foot, then their left foot, each in turn. Then do the same for 7, then 6, and so forth down to 1. Increase speed and intensity with each number. When they are done, finish it off with a “gooooo team!”
- **The Escorts** have the job of intervening between the Harassers and the Target during the larp. They will have the opportunity to practice the process illustrated by Maeril.
 - The last page of this document contains a handout, the one this whole larp was inspired by. Give a copy to each Escort and have them read it.
 - Review each step in a non-harassing environment. Make sure that each participant understands what each step means and how to do them. Workshop the steps if necessary, so that each participant feels capable of performing them in the larp. For example, for step 2, you could brainstorm a list of potential things to discuss.
 - The Escorts do not need to build a background or camaraderie for their characters beforehand, although they are welcome to if they want to.

When all participants are ready, begin the larp. Feel free to take a short break between the workshop and the larp.

Runtime

The larp is set in a public place, like a subway station, or on a bus, or in a shopping center. Have the participants agree to the location before starting.

The Target should enter first and find a comfortable place to sit or stand.

The Escorts and **The Harassers** should enter the play space in next. They can enter as they feel comfortable, and may talk to each other as they desire.

During the larp, the Harassers should only speak gibberish. They should not use real words when talking to each other, or when harassing the Target, especially when harassing the Target.

Once all participants are in the larp space, the Harassers start roleplaying verbal harassment on the target. Do not get too close; leave space for the Escorts. In fact, the Harassers should not touch the Target at all; keep the simulated harassment verbal only.

After the harassment has begun, the Escorts should intervene. Use the method described in the handout. Engage the Target in conversation. Keep up the discussion. Build a safe space. And, eventually, escort the target away from the Harassers. The harassers should not follow. Remember, the Escorts should not touch the Target unless the Target has given consent to be touched.

The larp ends when the Target has been escorted out of the larp space. Continue to the debrief session.

Debrief and Discussion

First, give the participants a chance to wind down emotionally. The Harassers may feel bad for their actions, and the Target or Escorts may feel emotionally vulnerable. A trust exercise or a group hug might be in order (if the participants are ok with such things).

Next, allow the participants to discuss how they felt during the runtime, if there is anything they want to say to each other, or if they discovered anything about themselves or the process. Make sure that everyone who wants to have a say does so, but do not pressure anyone who doesn't want to speak.

Then move on to discussing the process described in the illustration. Did it work? How did it feel? How did the Target feel during the process?

Afterwards, some participants may wish to try the larp again with the opposite roles. The event organizer may want to play for this ahead of time. Some people may also want to take some time to digest or discuss their feelings; it may be helpful to have someone available for them to talk to if they way.

Thanks

Thanks to Maury Brown, Ben Morrow, Sarah Lynn Bowman, and Harrison Green for developing and introducing me to these safety techniques.

Thanks to Maeril for the illustrated guide.

Thanks to Sarah Lynne Bowman and Laura Boylan for review and sage advice.

Must the Harassers speak gibberish?

By not using real words, the Harassers do not need to worry about accidentally saying something offensive when roleplaying. This will hopefully let them get more into the physical, emphatic roleplaying.

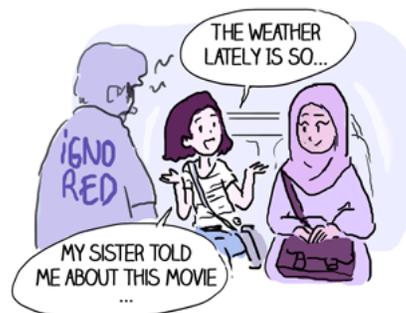
However, your group might find gibberish to be too silly. You are welcome to try using real words. In this case, I suggest you find a topic of harassment that the target does not care about, like a silly hat, or what they had for breakfast.



- 1 **Engage conversation.**
Go to them, sit beside them and say hello. Try to appear calm, collected and welcoming. **IGNORE THE ATTACKER.**



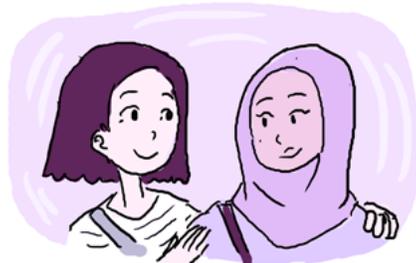
- 2 **Pick a random subject and start discussing it.**
It can be anything: a movie you liked, the weather, saying you like something they wear and asking where they got it...



- 3 **Keep building the safe space.**
Keep eye contact with them and don't acknowledge the attacker's presence: the absence of response from you two will push them to leave the area shortly.



- 4 **Continue the conversation until the attacker leaves & escort them to a safe place if necessary.**
Bring them to a neutral area where they can recollect themselves; respect their wishes if they tell you they're ok and just want to go.



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Illustrated guide by Maeril <http://maeril.tumblr.com>

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