

# Read Aloud Touch Boundaries Workshop Script

25-30 minute workshop by Jon Cole

There is an outline of this workshop on page 17-18

## Introduction (2 minutes)

Hi! I'm [NAME] and I'm an emotional support person for this larp. I'm here to help ensure everyone feels safe and comfortable enough to play pretend together. During game today if you need some emotional support, I'm a designated person ready to provide that. Right now I'm going to lead a short workshop where we'll calibrate our expectations so we'll have an extra fun time together today.

Here's my safety briefing: Larp is not a safe hobby. It is as emotionally risky as real life, which is riddled with the potential for emotional pain. Larp is the extreme sport of emotions, it has inherent risks and big rewards. At the same time as we acknowledge this risk, the most important thing to remember is that the people we play with are more important than the game we play. This means that if the instructions or rules of the larp make you feel unsafe, then we should work together to come up with a solution. Everyone here has the ability stop play or to step out of play. I want to encourage you to take breaks or leave play if you're feeling unsafe and also for little stuff like getting a drink of water. The door is always open. This also applies right here and now to my workshop; you don't have to participate in any exercise you don't want to and can stop participating part way through for any reason at all.

The rest of this workshop is about tools and rules we'll use to actively negotiate the contents of our play. This negotiation is important because larp is a collaborative creative activity. You put in creative work to get fun out, it's that simple. However, there's some tough material that is written right into the play materials and can't be avoided. That material is [GAME SPECIFIC CONTENT WARNING]. This stuff can be difficult and sometimes even uncomfortable. Experiencing safe and productive

discomfort is why many people seek out games like this, so we will not try to avoid that discomfort entirely. What questions do you have about my content warning?

In summary, we're all responsible people here. As responsible people, I expect you to...

1. take steps to care for yourself.
2. find your own fun.
3. tell me if there's a problem I can help solve.
4. follow the rules I'm about to introduce, and listen to me when I reinforce them.
5. Look out for each other.

## **Cut and Largo (2 minutes)**

Let's talk about those rules I mentioned. To call for a pause in the game, say the word "cut" and put a hand up like you are raising your hand.

*Demonstrate this gesture to the players.*

When you see someone using cut, treat it like elementary school—raise your hand and close your mouth. The organizers and I will use cut to get your attention or end the game. The main reason that you might do this is to stop and discuss something that comes up in play. That something might be an emotional or physical emergency, or just if you're very confused about what is happening.

*Note: The above are the default cut rules for this workshop, and some larps use variations of these cut rules. The cut rules used in the workshop and larp should match, so if you're using a variation, you'll want to alter the above so everything is consistent.*

Another way you can control the intensity of a scene is to say “largo”—it’s a music notation term for a very slow tempo—or put your hands up in front of you with your palms facing out.

*Demonstrate this gesture to the players.*

This signals to the other players that they should back off slightly and not increase the scene's intensity—it can be useful in scenes depicting yelling or arguments. This gives you the opportunity to continue play a little more gently, to leave the situation, or negotiate out of character.

What is important to understand is that only one part is necessary and sufficient to use the technique. Either the hand sign or the word works alone. However, most of the time I’d like you to try to use both so you get in the habit of it.

Momentarily I’ll walk us through an exercise where we can all practice using largo. What questions do you have at this point?

## **Go Slow (1 minute)**

I expect us to use largo a lot in play today, since it’s so useful for negotiating an interaction. But largo only works when someone has the opportunity to call for something to slow down. It doesn’t work if I surprise you, which leads to an important principle for play that will support largo, called *go slow*. Whenever you do something in-character that you think someone might want to use largo on, do so in a way that is **slow** and **obvious** to your fellow players.

Go slow applies to stuff like violence, but also some kinds of touch, or even if you want to introduce taboo content into the imaginary world of the game. Go slow does not apply for introducing information or characteristics that are a part of the game materials; we have already talked a little about that and opted in to it.

There's lots of ways to go slow:

- Move in bullet time slow-motion
- Drop not so subtle hints
- Ask in-character
- Ask out of character

## **Casual Touch Boundaries (5 minutes)**

Since this is a larp in which characters will have casual or intimate relationships with each other, you may be moved to touch each other to express this, so I want to check in about casual touch boundaries. With these casual touch boundaries we'll set the default level for fast touch for our game. That is, we'll choose a level of touch between players that no one needs to go slow about. For any level of touch beyond what we decide together we will use our go slow skills to give each other the chance to opt out. This only works if everyone's really comfortable with what we choose, so I've got an anonymous method that we'll use in a moment.

I want to remind you that it's common for people to choose to set different touch boundaries than they have in real life. Some people even seek larps as a safer space in which to engage in more intense emotional or physical play than they experience in their regular lives. Remember that what happens in-game is not the same as your regular life, and that we all have a responsibility to look out for each other during play.

To set our group's touch boundaries I will describe an area that it's okay to casually touch without going slow. For example if I said "hands only" meaning that it's okay to touch someone's hands with your hands, that means you could offer or accept a high five quickly and casually. You would not have to go into slow-motion to give your fellow player a chance to signal largo. To set the right level of casual touch for this group, everyone will close their eyes. Then I'll ask anyone who is not okay with

that level of touch to silently raise their hand. That way we can select a level of casual touch that we are all okay with. Any questions?

I'm going to walk us through 4 levels of touch, stopping when we get to one that everyone is fine with. The four levels are beach body, limbs and back, arms and shoulders, hands only.

*Explain each level. Show reference sheets (in appendix) one at a time to illustrate what areas are would be open for casual touch. You might also slowly, gently touch your own body to show what body parts are in each level. You might mention what behaviors this level is great for.*

### **Beach Body**

Any part of the body not covered by a bikini swimsuit. This includes head, lower back, stomach, thigh. This level applies to the same areas for people of any gender, even if they wouldn't normally wear a bikini.  
Great for: long hugs, touching someone's neck or stomach.

### **Limbs and Back**

This includes arms and legs including thighs and shoulders. It also includes the upper and lower back.  
Great for: side hugs, pats on the back or leg, and arm around the waist.

### **Arms and Shoulders**

This includes all of the arms and shoulders.  
Great for: taking someone's arm, leaning against someone while sitting, an arm over the shoulders.

### **Hands Only**

This includes the palms, fingers, back of hand, and wrists.  
Great for: hand holding, high fives, handshakes.

### Custom Levels Note

*If there are different levels that are more relevant to your community of players or the larp you are playing, feel free to use them. The most important thing is to be consistent about how you divide the levels in any given larp. If the separation between the levels of touch gets muddy players will lose their trust in it as a system and therefore some people will be preoccupied about how someone might try to touch them.*

*Depending on the needs of your larp, you might also set a minimum required level of touch to play.*

### Opting Out Note

*Another viable way to set casual touch boundaries would be to start with the minimum necessary touch level that your larp requires and have players anonymously opt in to more permissive levels. Instead, the Read Aloud Touch Boundaries Workshop starts with permissive levels and has players opt out in order to underscore the skills necessary to use largo during play. Largo rests upon players' abilities to opt out of content they do not want, which something that many people struggle with. This workshop intentionally asks players to practice saying no: first anonymously, and then to their fellow players. Practice shows players that they can decline requests without negative repercussions and that you as the facilitator will help enforce their boundaries.*

What questions do you have?

Okay, I'd like you to all close your eyes.

*Wait for the players to close their eyes.*

I would like you now to think about the beach body level as a place to be casually touched. Casual touch means it could be relatively quick, or done without checking in with you first. If you are **not** comfortable with being casually touched on your beach body please silently raise your hand.

*Observe the group. Facilitator, don't forget to count yourself as your touch boundaries also matter. Please lower your hands.*

**No Hands are raised:** Cut! Please open your eyes. *Raise you hand and wait for everyone to comply.*

This group is fine with casual touching on our beach bodies.

**One or more hands are raised:** Okay, I'm moving on to the next level, please keep your eyes closed.

*Repeat the phrasing for introducing a level, swapping each level.*

I would like you now to think about the limbs and back level as a place to be casually touched. Casual touch means it could be relatively quick, or done without checking in with you first. If you are **not** comfortable with being casually touched on your limbs and back please silently raise your hand. *Observe the group.* Please lower your hands.

I would like you now to think about the arms and shoulders level as a place to be casually touched. Casual touch means it could be relatively quick, or done without checking in with you first. If you are **not** comfortable with being casually touched on your arms and shoulders please silently raise your hand. *Observe the group.* Please lower your hands.

I would like you now to think about the hands only level as a place to be casually touched. Casual touch means it could be relatively quick, or done without checking in with you first. If you are **not** comfortable with being casually touched on your hands only please silently raise your hand. *Observe the group.* Please lower your hands.

**Zero Consent:** Thank you, please lower your hands. *Wait for all hands to be lowered.* Please open your eyes. For this game, we're going to avoid touching anyone without checking in with them first by going slow.

## **Touch Boundaries Conclusion (1 minute)**

We have chosen our boundaries for casual touch. Beyond this touch boundary we agree to go slow so that our fellow players have the chance to call *largo*. Once again, in order for go slow to work, people have to be able to know a touch is coming. This means you should never completely surprise someone with a touch, such as coming at them from behind, even if it's to touch them in an area they've approved for casual touch.

Questions?

## **Non-Verbal Largo Practice (6-8 minutes)**

To practice our go slow and largo skills I've got a quick exercise. Please join me in a circle to the extent that you are willing and able.

*Let the players circle up.*

I'll explain this exercise fully and then we'll start it. Please don't start moving until I've explained the whole thing. This exercise is about practicing largo, practicing go slow, and using both to negotiate touch with one another. One at a time we are going to try to pass a largo-worthy touch around the circle. We'll fail of course, because each of us will call largo on that touch. The person to your right will try to touch you somewhere outside of our default touch boundaries, using their very best go slow skills. For the purposes of this exercise they can use any method to go slow, with the exception of simply asking for your permission. So they might move in bullet-time slow motion, they might drop not so subtle hints, or some combination of the two. To the person receiving the touch I'd like you call largo, with the hand-sign and everything, as soon as you think you know what touch your fellow player is going for. Once you've called largo, make a guess as to what the attempted touch was and they will tell you if you're right or wrong. The rest of us will be playing along in our heads because if you're wrong we get to take a guess as to what the touch was! Then, it will be your turn to unsuccessfully try to touch the person to your left.

If it wasn't clear, for the purposes of this exercise, don't touch anyone beyond our agreed upon casual touch boundaries. The exercise is about the moments leading up to a touch, not the touch itself. So, don't touch someone beyond the casual touch boundaries even if they forget to say largo.

The casual touch boundaries we created together are close to the real life boundaries of several people in this workshop. I'm asking you to almost touch each other in this workshop, which is kind of uncomfortable. Treat



this as an opportunity to bring out your best self. Go slow, watch the person you are moving towards, and be ready to accept their use of largo.

Any questions? Let's give it a try starting with this person. *Select a player to start, ideally someone who can model excellent go slow skills.*

*During the exercise, coach players into using the techniques correctly.*

*You might ask someone to repeat an action more slowly, so their partner has time to react.*

*You might remind players that either saying or signaling largo is sufficient, someone does not have to do both for it to count.*

*Cut the exercise when it is complete.*

Great work everyone! I'd like to talk a little about why I had you use largo to opt-out of all the touch in this exercise. We did this to practice saying no. A lot of people having trouble declining an offer, and largo only works when we are ready and able to call largo in game. Today when we're playing I'd like you to use largo when someone introduces a touch or concept that will be unsafe for you. In fact, I will go so far to say that you have a duty to do so. If using largo will disappoint someone else, you have a duty to disappoint them. You owe it to yourself and to them to decline content that is not right for you. Otherwise, you'll be having a bad time, then they'll be having a bad time, and no one is having fun. Use largo and create a better game for everyone.

## **Verbal Largo Practice (6-8 minutes)**

A reminder that a tool we didn't use in this exercise still works really well in the larp itself: Just asking for permission to do something, in or out of character. Let's take a chance to practice that now. In a moment I'll have

you pair up, and practice your verbal go slow skills. It will be similar to what we just did, where one person will drop not so subtle hints, ask permission in character, or ask permission out of character for a largo worthy touch. Their partner will call largo, hand sign and everything.

Please pay attention! I'm adding something new, I am going to teach you the final part of using largo. When someone uses largo with you in the larp or in this exercise, I want you to say "thank you" to your fellow player. Maybe in the heat of the moment in the larp you will forget to do this, but I really want you to practice saying it in this exercise. Say "thank you" whenever someone uses largo with you. There are two reasons to do this:

1. It confirms to your fellow player that you understood them.
2. Your fellow player is doing you a big favor by using largo with you. Think about it, if they don't use largo you might touch them or raise a subject that could make them really uncomfortable! They are being a total champ by using largo with you, so it makes perfect sense to thank them for doing so.

Okay, I will give you a few minutes to work. Make sure that everyone practices using largo at least three times. If you have any trouble or questions, wave at me. The person you pair with cannot be someone you've already practiced largo with today. Please break into pairs now.

*You may need to pair off with someone and participate in the exercise.*

*Once you think most people have had two or three chances to practice, call cut, wait for players to comply. Tell players to get a new partner and continue. Shortly, have them change partners again.*

Cut! *Raise your arm and wait for players to comply.* Thank you so much everyone, I think you're doing very well. Are there any questions at this point?

## **Conclude Practice (1 minutes)**

Sometimes people worry that they won't understand what they should back off about when a player uses largo with them. However, we've seen that 95 percent of the time it is perfectly clear from context what they'd like you to give them a little room on. And for those few times that it is not, you can just ask that person for what they need out of character.

Please remember that when people use largo in game today they are doing so for a million different reasons, and almost none of them have to do with you. Don't sweat the reason that your fellow player uses largo, since it's not personal. When you use largo please don't justify or explain why, just use it—and if necessary let your fellow player know what behavior you'd like them to change.

## **Scenario Preparation (2 minutes)**

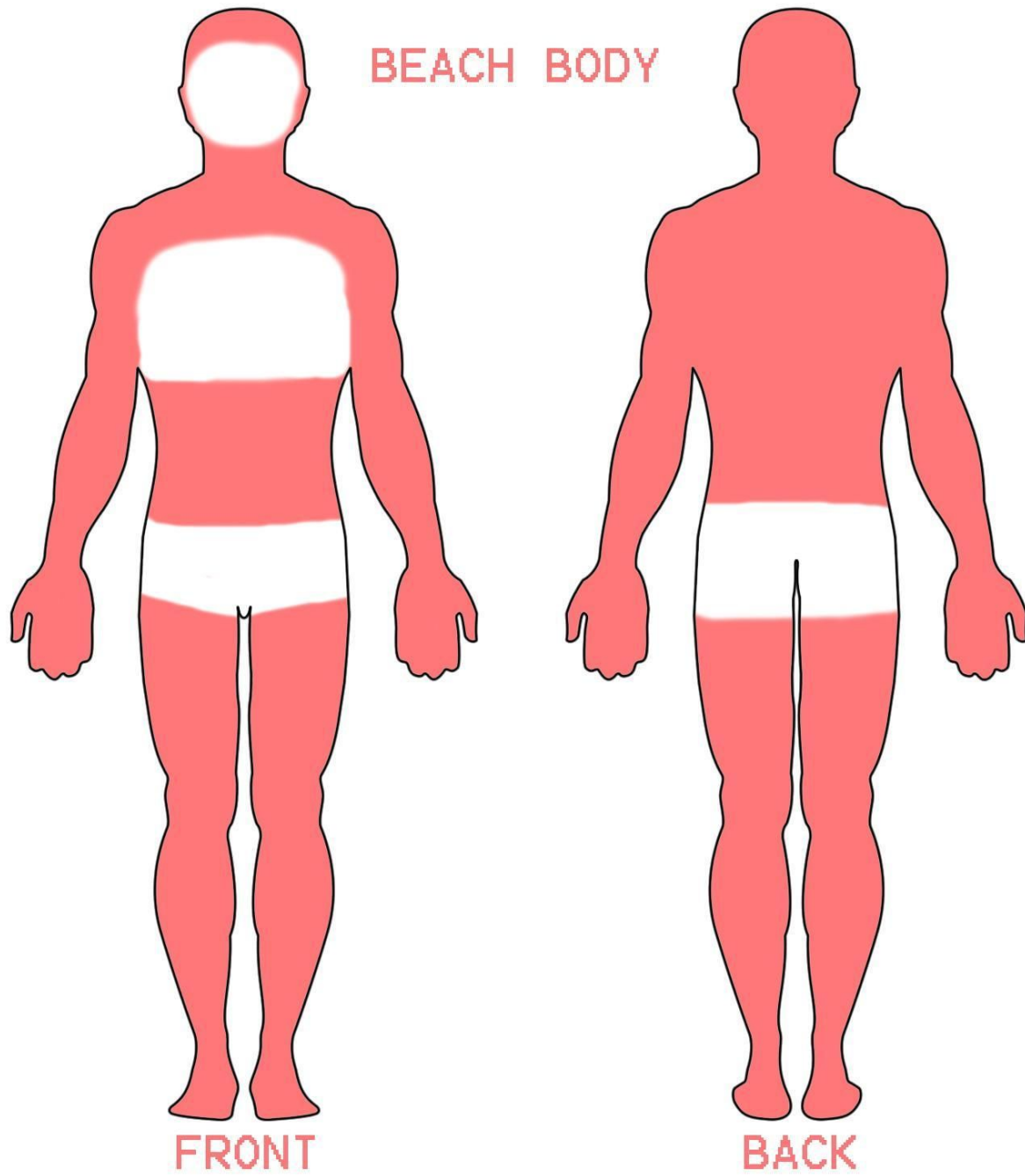
There is one last thing I want to talk about before we wrap up. The tools we practiced today, cut and largo are great, and they only work if we are ready to use them. I'd like you to take a moment to imagine what scenarios that you think could come up in this larp that you might want to use cut or largo for. You are welcome to close to your eyes if you'd like, think about what scenario that you would want to say cut or largo for. This information is only for you and you don't need to share it with anyone. I want to you to be ready to advocate for yourself if any of those situations you're imagining come up. I'll give you minute or two to think about this.

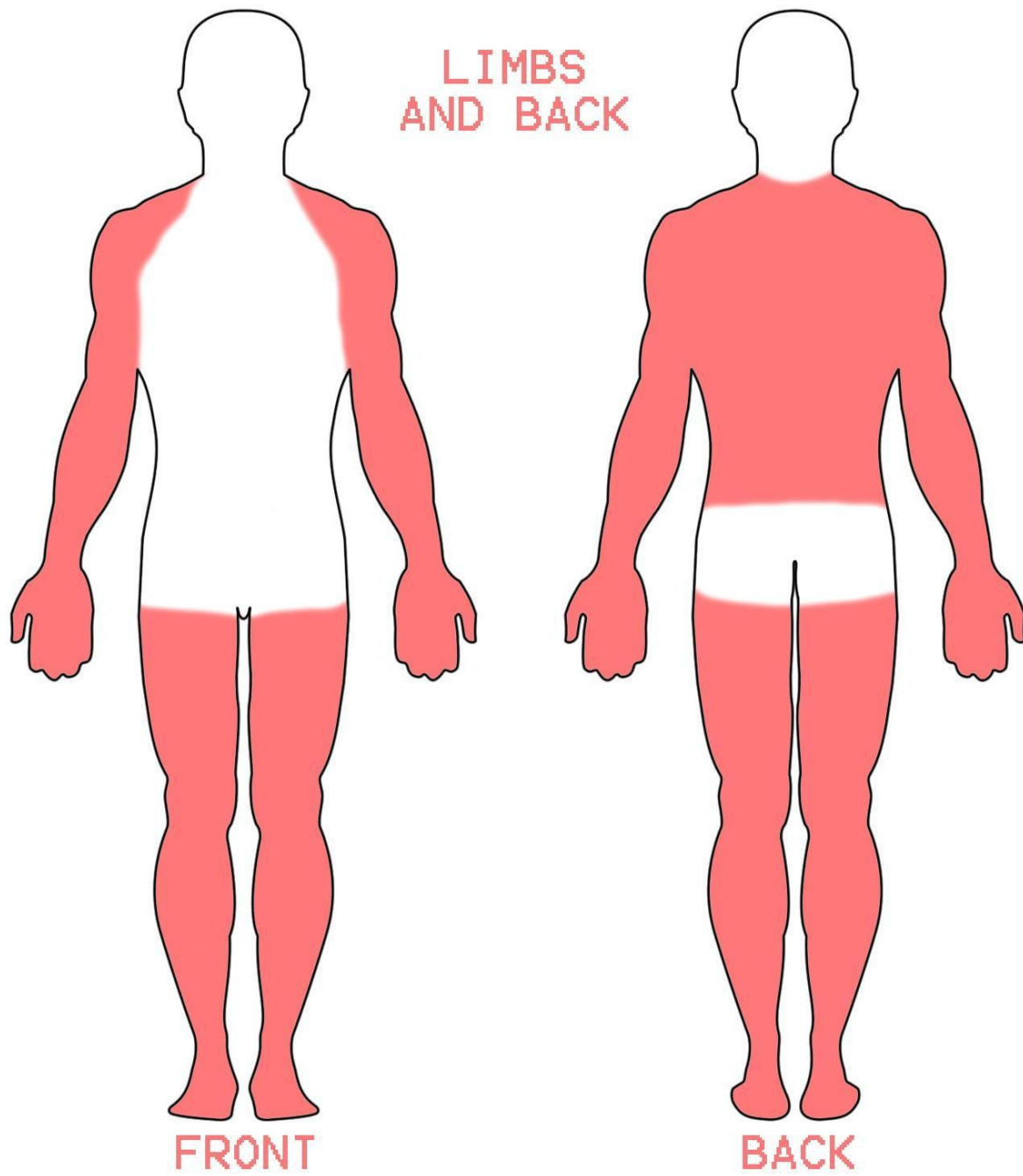
*Wait about 30 seconds.*

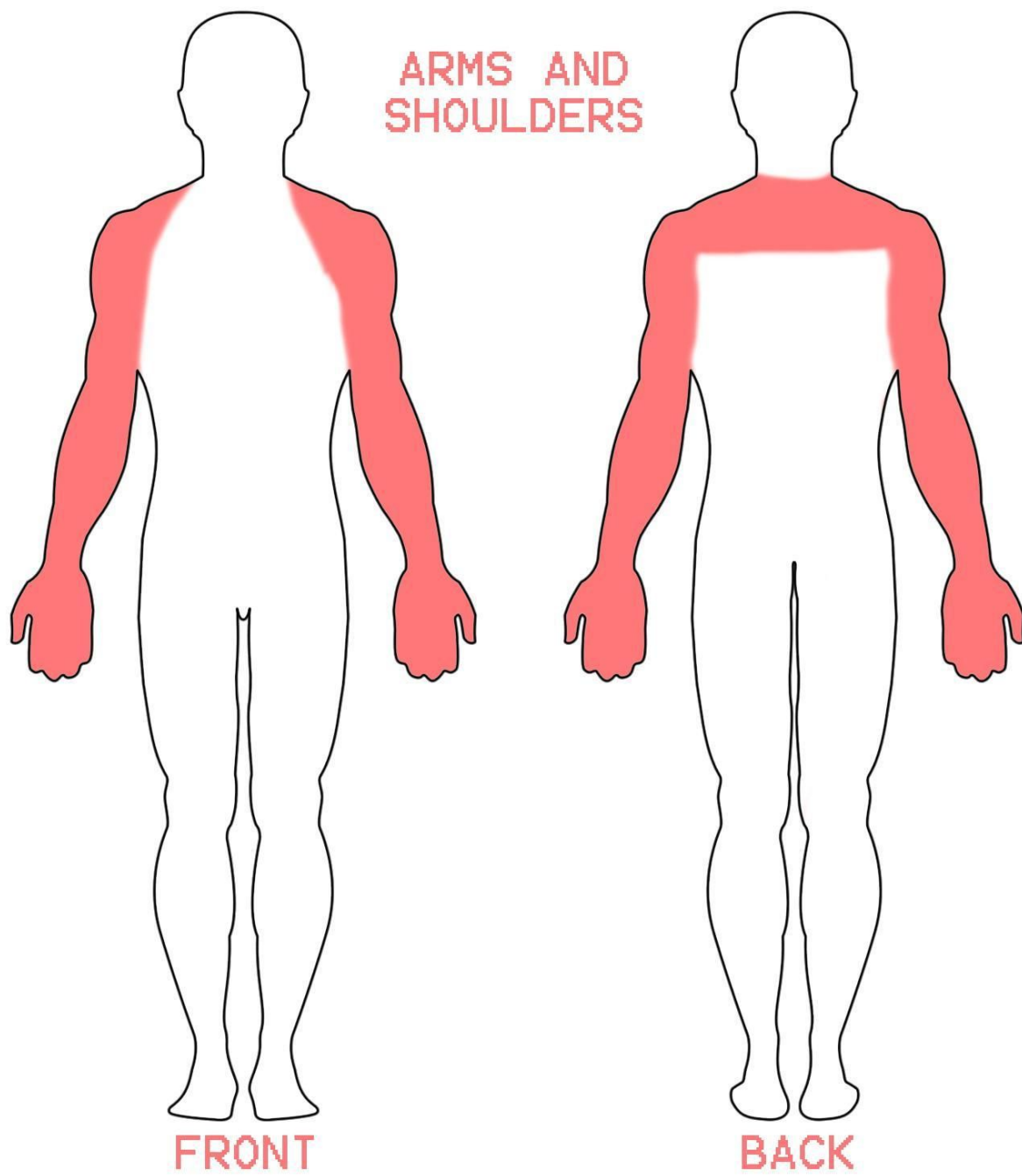
Once you have some of those situations in mind, I would also like you to imagine how you will use cut or largo in them. Think up a couple ways you can use cut or largo in that situation to make it okay for you.

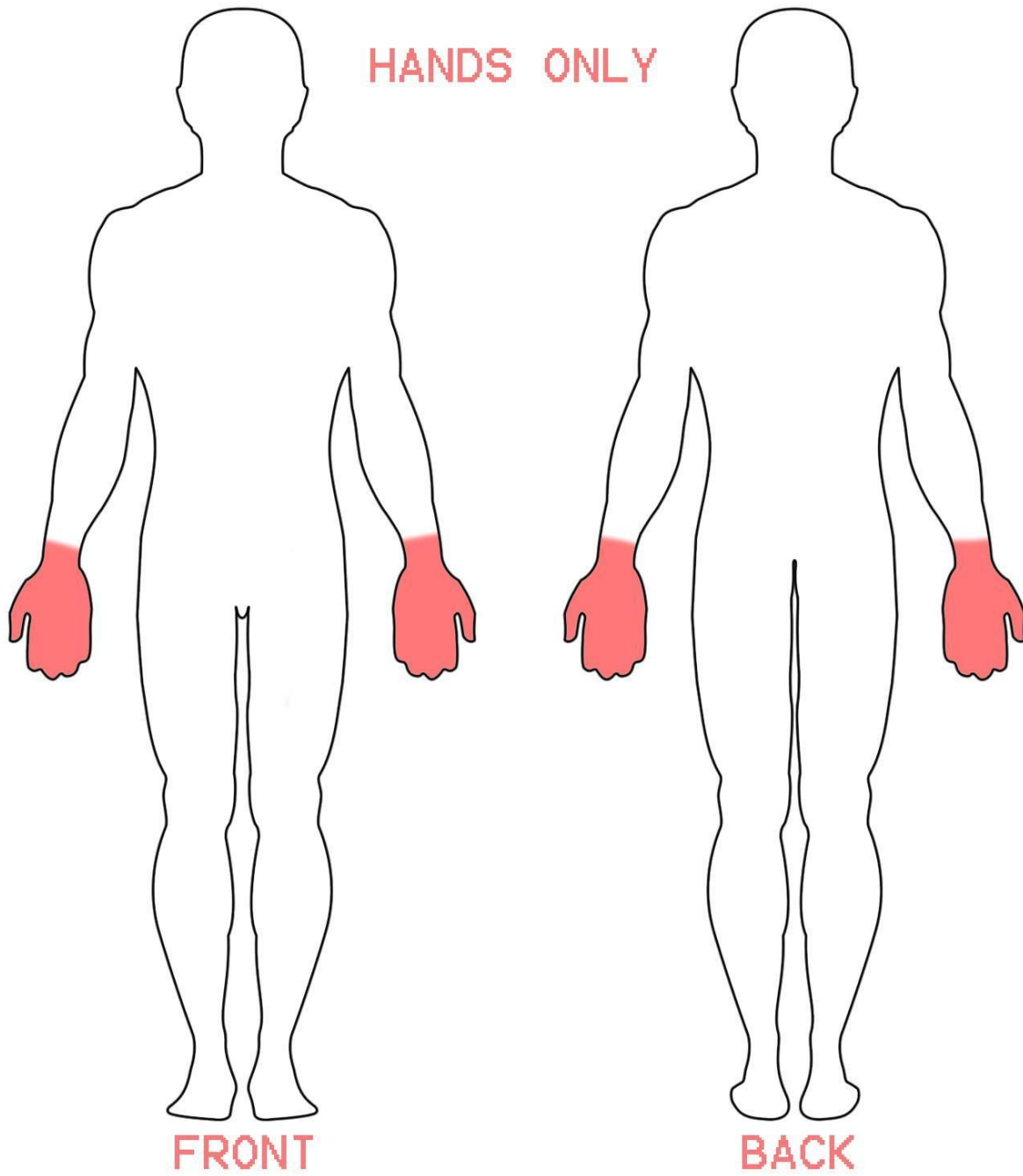
*Wait for most players to look finished.*

Thank you everyone, this concludes my workshop.









# Read Aloud Touch Boundaries Workshop

## Outline

25-30 minute workshop by Jon Cole

1. I'm the emotional support person (2 minutes)
2. Larp is not a safe hobby
3. The door is always open
  - a. Includes this workshop
4. Larp Specific Content Warning
5. As responsible people, I expect you to...
  - a. take steps to care for yourself.
  - b. find your own fun.
  - c. tell me if there's a problem I can help solve.
  - d. follow the rules I'm about to introduce, and listen to me when I reinforce them.
  - e. Look out for each other.
6. Cut and Largo, with hand signs (2 minutes)
7. Define Go Slow (1 minute)
  - a. Whenever you do something in-character that you think someone might want to use Largo on, do so in a way that is **slow** and **obvious** to your fellow players.
8. Go Slow Methods
  - a. Move in bullet time slow-motion
  - b. Drop not so subtle hints
  - c. Ask in-character
  - d. Ask out of character
9. Casual Touch Boundaries (5 minutes)
  - a. Set a universal level for touch that no one needs to Go Slow about, anonymously.
  - b. People often have different touch boundaries in larp than in real life.
  - c. Introduce 4 levels of touch



- i. Beach Body
    - ii. Limbs and Back
    - iii. Arms and Shoulders
    - iv. Hands Only
  - d. Players close eyes and raise hands to opt out of each level
  - e. Set casual touch boundaries to lowest common denominator
10. Never completely surprise someone with a touch (1 minute)
11. Nonverbal Go Slow Practice (6-8 minutes)
  - a. Circle up
  - b. Try and fail to pass a Largo-worthy touch around the circle
  - c. Recipient of touch calls Largo, guesses at what touch was
  - d. Do not touch anyone beyond the agreed upon boundaries.
  - e. It is your duty to use Largo for touch or content that is not right for you.
12. Verbal Go Slow Practice (6-8 minutes)
  - a. When someone uses Largo with you thank them.
    - i. It confirms you understood them.
    - ii. They are helping the game by setting that boundary.
  - b. Pair up, someone you have not worked with yet
  - c. Verbally signal a Largo-worthy touch or content.
    - i. Fellow player calls Largo
13. Conclusion (1 minute)
  - a. Don't ask why someone uses Largo.
  - b. Don't tell why you use Largo.
  - c. When people use Largo they are doing so for a million reasons, and none of them have to do with you.
14. Scenario Preparation (2 minutes)
  - a. Imagine situations where you would want to use Cut or Largo in game today
  - b. Imagine how you will use Cut or Largo to improve that situation

# Credits

Read Aloud Touch Boundaries Workshop by Jon Cole

## Editing

Lizzie Stark

## Input, Inspiration, Encouragement

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Mark Redacted

Heather Silsbee

James Stuart

Kelley Vanda

Probably tons more people I've forgotten! This workshop was built on the shared wisdom of people in the larp community.

## Image source

[cliparts.co](https://cliparts.co)

## Bibliography

[See Me Now](#) by [Liz Gorinsky](#) and Sara Williamson

“[Toolkit: The Tap-Out](#)” by [Johanna Koljonen](#)

[Cuddle Party](#) by [Reid Mihalko](#) and [Marcia Baczynski](#)

“[Creating a Culture of Trust through Safety and Calibration Larp Mechanics](#)” by [Maury Brown](#)

“Trampled by the Herd” by Lizzie Stark in [Crossing Habitual Borders](#)

“[A Primer on Safety in Roleplaying Games](#)” by Lizzie Stark

“[Your Larp's Only As Safe As Its Safety Culture](#)” by [Troels Ken Pedersen](#)

Special Thanks to Liz Gorinsky and Sara Williamson. This workshop's form and content was hugely inspired by the one from their game *See Me Now*. While they are quick to say that their work was inspired by many others, it is their clarity in writing and willingness to share that has been so valuable to me.

## Other Awesome Calibration Stuff

[OK Check-In](#) as described by Imagine Nation

[Convention of Thorns player safety workshop](#) by Sarah Lynne Bowman, Maury Brown, and Mila Ingalls