

NOTES ON THE ANTI-ABUSE POLICY FOR SPACE HOLDER

The anti-abuse-policy is an adaptation of the code of conduct of HOME restaurant in Oakland, USA. It was adapted to serve as a policy for Karada House, a queer, kinky safe(r) space in Berlin, Germany.

This policy aims to be preventive and preemptive. Offering consideration to the inclusive diversity in every space. Not only does it interrupt typical patterns of misconduct before an incident happens. It also allows the space holders to intervene and dissolve the misinterpretation of neurodiverse behaviour.

We have been experimenting with this policy successfully for a while now.

So far our record has:

- a) multiple „yellows“ that we as the space holders called ourselves when we had a gut feeling that a guest in our house needs to be watched by us because something doesn't feel right. No guests have called a „yellow“ so far.

- b) 6 „orange“ calls that all lead to us communicating with the people that were called out in private. Some of them were able to understand that they were making others uncomfortable and immediately changed their behavior and apologized. Others we asked to leave and think about what had happened. Some of them later came back to have a one-on-one talk with us, others simply never came back. So far the „orange calls“ turned out to be either people just not being aware of their own behaviour and how it makes others feel or they were very aware and did it on purpose to take space, nonconsensually dominate people and situations etc.

- c) We are happy to report that so far no „red“ has been called.

This data was gathered between August 2019 - June 2020.

HOW TO USE THE ANTI-ABUSE POLICY

Prerequisites

1) This policy calls on you to actually hold space the entire time, preferably with more than one person as the space holder.

2) Guests of your space must also know who they can talk to at any point in time.

3) This policy is based on 3 guiding principles: We do not judge people's intuition („Really? Are you sure they did x and y? Did you maybe misunderstand a and b?“). We believe them and we take care of their needs by being their witnesses and their advocates in the communication that happens after a yellow, orange or red is called.

Also, we step in and take over the communication process for the people involved. This means that we take the person that called a yellow, orange or red out of the equation.

If necessary they are brought into another room and we take care of them and their needs for safety first. Then we take care of the potential offender. We also take this person aside as this process is not aimed to shame or shock and is also not intended to be held in an open forum with other people eavesdropping or getting involved.

Calling a yellow, orange or red is not only for our guests but also the space holders themselves as well as facilitators in the space. If a space holder or facilitator is directly involved we also get another space holder to take over the process as this person is not emotionally and psychologically affected.

YELLOW

Yellow serves as a disruptive moment right in the beginning when something starts to not feel right. The aim is to acknowledge people's gut feelings and just be in awareness that a person in the room makes someone feel uncomfortable. In our lived experience these „yellow“ calls have led to two outcomes so far:

- 1) The person did indeed show disruptive behaviour that led to problems or other guests feeling uncomfortable that could be stopped rather quickly and before anything escalated.
- 2) The person turned out to be neurodiverse or anxious/introverted etc. and therefore behaved a bit differently and we were able to help them navigate situations because we were aware.

Yellows call for a bit more attention, a closer but not intrusive look which allows space holders to be in more awareness but also to very subtly change possible patterns that could lead to incidents. It makes us think of quantum mechanics where it is known that by sheer observation one can change patterns and behaviour.

ORANGE

We recognize a call of „orange“ as a very serious sign that we need to immediately step into what is happening. Even if the call reaches us only hours or days later. We realize that these situations are sometimes hard to communicate right away as they may be triggering. We nevertheless step in even if we only get informed much later.

When an „orange“ is called, we ask the person what has occurred and try to get as much information as possible. We do not judge or question their experience. We then take the person to a different space and take care of their needs for safety and support. If enough people are holding space, once stays with this person until things are resolved. Another space holder (maybe even more than one, depending on the situation) approaches the person who was called out in a calm manner and asks them to step outside or into another area for a private conversation. We then anonymously state the allegations and engage them in an immediate process of accountability that includes hearing them out but also very clearly stating what breaches of consent & boundaries have occurred.

We try to be structural and fair, not emotional in this process as it aims to bring clear understanding but also a very clear communication of boundaries. Depending on the person, their reaction, the wishes of the person whose boundaries were crossed and the severity of the situation we have several options that range from a conversation and swift adaptation of behaviour plus (if wanted) communication and apologies between both parties to sending the person home and getting their contact details so we can engage in a more complex accountability process at a later date. We never drag the person whose boundaries were violated into this process unless they want to and agree to it.

RED

A „red“ call happens when there is a very clear (and therefore usually severe) violation of boundaries or consent. In this case we again take care of the person whose boundaries were crossed first, making sure they are separated, safe and taken care of. We then approach the other person and ask them to step outside. There we confront them with the knowledge we have gathered and state clearly that this is a serious violation of the person and the space's rules and regulations. We tell them that they are as of now not welcome in the space anymore until they have successfully undergone an accountability process. We also may call the police in severe cases. We will take the persons contact details and then ask them to gather their things and leave the space. We then turn all of our energy to the person that was hurt, making sure they get the best attention and treatment possible.

In a „red“ case we then engage some days later with the person who caused harm to start an accountability process.