

# Creating Safer Spaces at Tejas Web Events, Meetings and Gatherings

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*Tejas Web gratefully acknowledges the work done by the Spiralheart and Wild Maine Reclaiming Communities to address safer spaces at WitchCamp. We have borrowed heavily from their excellent work. Thank you to those who contributed to it, and thank you for sharing it. We also thank RCGSA for letting us draw on their process for formal conflict resolution.*

The goal of this policy is to support campers, attendees and organizers in maintaining a safer space at Tejas Web WitchCamp, at Tejas Web events, and within the Tejas Web community. By using “safer” instead of “safe”, we recognize that the work we do can be deep, complex and intense. It asks that we stretch and approach things differently, and be willing to take risks. In that process sometimes issues arise that can benefit from processes like this one, that offer guidelines, agreements and solutions when conflict arises in community.

In addition, this policy provides transparency and guidelines for what Tejas Web Reclaiming culture considers appropriate behavior in community. It is intended to give individuals a way to work through conflict safely and with support, and to give community leaders support in decisions around recurrent problematic behaviors and individuals.

Tejas Web has had few problems at our events. When issues around Racism, Ableism, Sexism, Ageism, and all the other forms of oppression that can, and do, exist within the Pagan community arise, this policy provides a path to making transparent and acknowledging marginalization in our own community. It’s our commitment to continuing our work to address the patriarchal over-culture by recognizing and checking our privilege and our prejudices. We hope this policy gives all who attend our camp and events a way to step into that important work, as a community.

## **Personal Responsibility in honoring and supporting diversity**

Reclaiming attracts, embraces, and celebrates diversity. That can present unexpected challenges. When challenged, you’re asked to think well of others; you’re asked to balance thinking well of yourself with a willingness to question how your own unrecognized shadows of prejudice and oppression play out in community and in relationship. We also encourage you to speak out in defense of others if you ever witness unacceptable behavior.

By attending Tejas Web WitchCamp and events, you agree to abide by the Code of Conduct that follows. Tejas Web reserves the right to eject, and/or ban from future events, any individual found to be in violation of this code.

If, at any point during camp or another Tejas Web event, a group, an individual or a situation makes you feel uncomfortable, the approaches in this policy offer you as much support as you indicate you need to explore possible resolutions.

## **Code of Conduct** (with much appreciation to the Spiralheart policymakers)

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We acknowledge that we live in a culture steeped in ambient racism, sexism, trans/homophobia, and myriad other forms of oppression. We acknowledge that all forms of oppression are interlinked and that we have all been deeply affected by our society's social programming. Behavior is learned, and we recognize how difficult the work of shifting learned behavior can be. As we take on the difficult work of shedding our prejudices and our personal privilege, there will be times when we mess up. We will relapse into old habits and familiar responses. Tejas Web does not expect you to be perfect; only that you commit to continuing the process in all its complexity and with all its challenges. We ask that you commit to examining your responses, to having difficult conversations, and to engaging our cultural shadows with the knowledge that this work is how social justice starts.

If someone finds something you do or say offensive and communicates that to you, please consider the validity of that person's lived experience. Take the time to look within and consider whether you may be struggling to recognize or overcome a learned behavior or social programming.

If someone says or does something that you find triggering or offensive, or is related to this culture's legacy of fear and oppression, we encourage you to speak up. We also encourage you to bear in mind that hearing difficult feedback can be a painful process. If you choose to offer constructive feedback, please do so with compassion.

Our intent is that you be empowered to take whatever action is appropriate for you on this, our collective journey toward personal accountability and social revolution; and that you do so in a way that allows for the complex journeys of those who travel alongside you.

By following this Code of Conduct you help us to create the kind of community we'd all love to be a part of. Thank you.

## Definitions of Unwelcome Behavior

The following behaviors are considered inappropriate and unacceptable at Tejas Web WitchCamp and events, regardless of whether they are considered to be "legal" actions in the state of Texas.

### **Sexual Misconduct**

Sexual assault and rape, stalking, violation of restraining orders, drugging victims with the intent of taking advantage of their incapacitation. *Unwelcome or unwanted:* harassment, lewd comments, sharing or taking of photographs of a sexual/private nature, physical contact/groping, invasion of personal space, and any ongoing sexual pursuit or harassing flirtation. *If it makes a person uncomfortable and the antagonist has been asked to stop already, it is an infringement regardless of actual physical harm.* If it is wanted or welcome, it is not an infringement.

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Tejas Web does not tolerate any form of sexual misbehavior and will take action to either educate or bar violators from its events. We strongly believe in the principles of enthusiastic consent. “No” means no, “Ummm” means no, “Not right now” means no, “I’m not sure” means no, “I’m uncomfortable” means no. “Yes!” and “Omigods yes!” means yes. Our goal is to create a culture in which everyone can freely engage in expression of their bodies and sexuality; a culture in which everyone is confident in expressing their boundaries and speaking up when uncomfortable; *and* a culture in which everyone is respectful of the boundaries expressed by others. **If you are ever unsure whether your behavior is welcome, ask.**

## Physical, Mental & Emotional Abuse

- **Physical** – assault, threats of bodily injury, nonconsensual rough play, forcing a person into any physical situation against their will through use of force or threats.
- **Mental/Emotional** – intimidation, harassment, bullying, personal insults specifically designed to make the target feel ill at ease, angry, or sad; the express exclusion of certain people based on gender or sex, sexual orientation, race, belief system, age, or political affiliation from participating in any camp activity (optional offerings, affinity groups, rituals, etc.) *Alternatively, we respect and support meetings and caucuses that may seem exclusionary, when their purpose embraces the liberation of all. We welcome expressions of concern, difference and conflict as antidotes to white supremacy culture, and commit to struggling together.*

## Sooner is Better

Should you choose to initiate a conversation or complaint in response to unwanted behavior or comments, it’s best to do it sooner rather than later, particularly at a Tejas Web WitchCamp. Initiating resolution sooner lets the resolution take place in person, with the appropriate support.

## Options Offered for Resolution

A part of moving beyond learned cultural behaviors is recognizing when our boundaries have been crossed. The next step is addressing that violation. Any and all of the following are available to you.

- You can take a walk in nature and ask the elements, the spirits of the wild and/or your own guides for insight.
- You can ask to meet with the person one on one and work to resolve the issue.
- You can ask an Organizer or event team member to facilitate; to meet with you and the person with whom you have a complaint. Please see the section on “Conflict Facilitation” for details on this process.

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- You can file a complaint (see process in the next section).

## Complaint Process

If someone is violating the Code of Conduct, or making you feel uncomfortable in some way, a WitchCamp Organizer (who will be identified at camp) or other member of the team anchoring an event (who will be identified at the event) needs to know so that we can take action—even if that action is just to listen. If an incident does occur, and either you or the individual to whom you report the issue feel that it is problematic enough, the WitchCamp Organizer or Event Anchor will record a formal complaint.

## Filing a Complaint

All formal complaints will be recorded in an area away from others in order to provide privacy and maintain confidentiality. The WitchCamp Organizer or Event Anchor (the “Recorder”) will record your complaint including the following details:

- Name of person against whom complaint is being filed (the “Respondent”)
- Complete description of inappropriate behavior with full situational context
- Location, date and time of incident
- Names of anyone who may have witnessed the incident
- Any physical evidence of incident on complainant

If the complaint involves inappropriate sexual behavior, the Recorder will ask whether the aggressor was asked to stop the behavior. This does not reflect on the credibility of the complainant—we will not engage in victim blaming. Our intent in asking this is to discern whether the aggressor was told that their behavior was *unwanted* and *unwelcome* so that we know whether further education is required. Therefore we encourage you to communicate when someone is crossing your boundaries, *when you are able to do so*. If the aggressor was aware, or was told, that their behavior was unwanted and unwelcome then it is sexual misconduct (as described above) and should be filed in a formal complaint.

Both the Recorder and the complainant will sign the complaint. The person against whom the complaint is filed (the “Respondent”) has a right to know what is in the complaint. Complaints will be kept confidential. Confidentiality means that relevant information will only be disclosed to those involved in the investigation and decision-making process.

Both complainants and respondents have the right to ask that a member of the Complaint Response Team be appointed to act as an advocate on their behalf. An advocate’s responsibility is to safeguard the interests of the person who has requested their assistance. An advocate is empowered to speak on that person’s behalf and will provide emotional support when

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appropriate. In addition, each person can bring one person of their choosing for emotional support, but that person is not empowered to speak.

## **Consequences of Formal Complaints**

Our goal in establishing a formal complaint process is to reach an appropriate resolution. This policy ensures Tejas Web can remove persons of concern from our events, and establishes that action as one appropriate resolution to a complaint. It is not our place to judge anyone, or declare them innocent or guilty. This process establishes we will not take any action based on rumor or gossip, but only on actual first-hand reports of misbehavior. After a formal complaint has been filed, it will be processed in the following manner:

- The Recorder will pull in two other Tejas Web leaders from WitchCamp Organizers, On-site Organizers, the Teaching Team, the Hearth Team, and/or Tejas Web community leaders. This team of three (the “Response Team”) is empowered to assess all complaints.
- If possible, the Response Team will determine whether it is the first complaint made against this individual, or whether there have been previous related complaints.
- They will assess the level of risk to determine if the individual (the Respondent) should be immediately ejected from camp, or if it is minor enough not to cause serious harm. Any witnesses to the incident named by the complainant will be sought out for input.
- If the Response Team determines the incident is a minor infraction, the Response Team is empowered to speak with the individual against whom a complaint has been filed (in complete confidentiality). The Response Team will ask for the Respondent’s side of the story, whether their behavior was deemed inappropriate or unwelcome, and assess whether the person can learn from the situation. The Respondent may be asked to read the definitions of unwelcome behavior as detailed in our Code of Conduct above. The Response Team will inform the Respondent that their behavior will be monitored going forward and that further violations may lead to ejection from the camp and/or being barred from future events.
- In cases where ejection from camp is a possibility (the behavior is determined to be a clear violation of our Code of Conduct, represented serious threat of physical/mental harm, has recurred in several independent complaints, is confirmed by witnesses, admitted by the perpetrator, etc.) the Response Team will gather as many members of the Tejas Web Organizers and other Tejas Web leaders as possible who will then use consensus process to make that decision.
- If those leaders decide to eject an individual from camp, that individual will be asked to leave immediately. This decision will be recorded in our records.
- Following the event, Tejas Web leaders will discuss whether the individual will be welcome at future events.

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Should the complaint possibly be something prohibited by laws of the State of Texas, or national law, the complainant and/or Tejas Web may consider reporting the incident as appropriate.

## Availability

This Safer Space Policy will be available year round on our website, at [tejasweb.org/saferspace](https://tejasweb.org/saferspace). A summary of the outcomes of any complaints filed during the year (excluding identifying information) will be available at the first meeting of the organizing team of the next Tejas Web WitchCamp or Tejas Web Dandelion.

## Process for Mediated Conversation

Any event or meeting attendee, event anchor, organizer, or member of the Tejas Web community can request mediated conversation.

List of Meeting Roles: Monitor, Mediator, Vibes Watcher, Complainant, Respondent, Advocate. Additional attendees may be requested but must be approved through the Monitor prior to the meeting.

A mediated conversation can take place with a Complainant, Respondent and Mediator/Monitor or with the addition of a separate Mediator, Vibes Watcher, and an Advocate for Complainant and/or Responder. The Complainant can request the three-person conversation, but the Response Team may determine the additional roles are needed.

*Monitor*: the Monitor is in charge of the accountability for the Process. The Monitor may be the Recorder, a member of the Response Team, or a leader or community member chosen by the Response Team. The Monitor is responsible for:

- Arranging a meeting time and a place that is neutral to the Complainant and Responder.
- Updating event Organizers or Anchors on the status of the mediation, if the complaint took place at a Tejas Web event, while keeping confidentiality in mind.
- Acting as a neutral communicator between those involved.
- Arranging for other roles (Vibes Watcher, Mediator), as necessary.

*Mediator*: the Mediator facilitates the conversation using the guidelines in the Process. The Mediator may stop the Complainant or Respondent and coach them on how to follow the Process.

*Vibes Watcher (optional role)*: the Vibes Watcher will be selected by the Monitor to work with those involved. It is the Vibes Watcher's role to step in and redirect if emotions become too extreme for the Process to continue.

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*Complainant:* the person that feels that there is a need to address the Responder's impact on them. A Mediated Conversation may have more than one Complainant, but the process is completed with one Complainant before going on to another.

*Responder:* the person that is being addressed by Complainants as needing to receive feedback on their impact. If a Complainant asks a Responder to enter into mediated conversation and the Responder refuses, the Responder can no longer attend Tejas Web events, gatherings or meetings.

*Advocate:* The Responder and Complainant may request one additional person each to be present to support them during the Process, but the Advocate must agree to be nonverbal during the Process.

## Guidelines for Mediation

1. The Responder must “mirror” the words of the Complainant by paraphrasing what they heard.
2. The intent of this mediation is not to determine the truth or assign blame but instead is to create a safe space for the Complainant(s) and Respondent to express their experience and their feelings and needs within that experience. It also provides additional information to the Response Team and other Tejas Web leaders so they can determine the best path forward, which may include asking the Respondent to leave the community temporarily or permanently.
3. During the Process, only the Mediator, Complainant and Responder may talk. The Vibes Watcher and Monitor may intervene only when needed.
4. If at all possible, a Complainant should be present. If a Complainant submits in writing rather than in person, the Mediator will read and use their discretion regarding mirroring.

## Steps of the Process

### During the Meeting

1. At the commencement of the meeting, the Monitor shares the intention of the meeting, reads the guidelines and goes over the steps for the Process.
2. The guidelines include an agreement to use “I Statements” – that the Complainant and Respondent will speak for themselves and only themselves.
3. The Mediator directs the Complainant to state how they felt during the situation using observable behaviors and feelings words. It may look like, “I felt (feeling words), when you (observable behaviors) because my need for (state need) was not met. (Example: “When you hugged me after ritual I felt unsafe, as my need to consent to touch was not met.”)
4. The Mediator then asks the Respondent to mirror back step 3 by paraphrasing the Complainant's statement and focusing on the feelings and observable behaviors. (Example: “I hear you saying you don't like hugs” (not mirrored well) or “I hear you saying I made you



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feel unsafe when I hugged you because to feel safe, you need to be asked for and give consent before you're touched" (probably deemed to be mirrored well)).

5. The Responder then asks "Do you feel like I mirrored what you said? Can you tell me more about that?" If the Complainant has more to share or wishes to clarify, step 4 and 5 are repeated. Once the Complainant has shared all that they wish and feels like the Responder is clear on what they said, the next step of the process can be started.
6. The Mediator then asks the Complainant to express what it is that they would like and how their need can be met. This is a request and not a demand. This may look like, "What I would like is..."
7. The Responder mirrors back step 6 by paraphrasing the Complainant's statement and focusing on the feelings and observable behaviors. The Responder then asks "Do you feel like I mirrored what you said? Can you tell me more about that?" If the Complainant has more to share or wishes to clarify, step 6 and 7 are repeated. Once the Complainant has shared all that they wish and feels like the Responder is clear on what they said, the next step of the process can be started.
8. Next, the Complainant states what they can be counted on for. This may look like, "I am willing to..."
9. The Responder mirrors back step 8 by paraphrasing the Complainant's statement and focusing on the feelings and observable behaviors. The Responder then asks "Do you feel like I mirrored what you said? Can you tell me more about that?" If the Complainant has more to share or wishes to clarify, step 8 and 9 are repeated. Once the Complainant has shared all that they wish and feels like the Responder is clear on what they said, the next step of the process can be started.
10. Now the Responder has the opportunity to share their experience. The Mediator asks the Responder if they would like to address the Complainant. If so, repeat steps 3-9 with swapped roles. If not, move on to step 11.
11. If there are multiple Complainants, move on to the next Complainant and repeat steps 3-10. If not, move on to step 12.
12. The Mediator now offers the Responder an opportunity to share how she will bring her actions into alignment with the Code of Conduct.
13. The Mediator determines when closure has been reached.

## **After the Meeting**

1. The Mediator writes a report about the meeting and its outcome and sends to the other two members of the Response Team. If the Response Team feels further action needs to be taken to ensure the safety of the Tejas Web community, the Mediator will send the report to six others in the community (the "Post Meeting Response Team", generally Organizers, event

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anchors, teachers or other leaders in the community) who agree to hear and act on the findings in the report.

2. Within one week of the Mediated Conversation, the Post Meeting Response Team will meet. The Monitor will present the findings. The Team people will determine, by consensus, if further action should be taken with the Responder, and will meet with the Responder to communicate that decision.
3. If there are conditions to the Responder remaining in the community, the Responder must agree to in writing and fulfill ALL parts of the condition in order to return.
4. Subsequently, if anyone in the community who was involved in the decision process feels the Responder is not meeting the conditions set, they will communicate that to a member of the Post Meeting Response Team. The Team will consense if they believe conditions are not being met and the Responder is asked to leave the community permanently. The Team may also determine by consensus that all conditions have been met, and the Responder may fully return and function within the community. Should an original member of the Team or Response Team be unavailable, a remaining member of the Response Team will choose a replacement.