

Less Violent Game Design

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Violence can take MANY forms: direct, indirect, physical, verbal, via body language, emotional and more. What is most important for you is to try and understand how much violence, what kind of violence, and the types of violence to avoid or include in a game.

As a game designer, it is often good to have a deep understanding of what makes a game fun and what you are trying to achieve to make it appeal to your target audience. It's a useful design exercise to think about how you might remove or reduce different types of violence in your games. Whether you plan to make a game with a lot, a little, or no violence, this document can be a good tool to help you see things differently and hopefully help you design better games.

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Troy is an award-winning Game Designer and Executive with over 25 years of game development experience at major companies like Microsoft, EA, Ubisoft, Insomniac, Disney, and Samsung. He has shipped 100+ titles on almost every platform and genre.

Troy designed or oversaw bestselling games like *Rainbow Six Vegas*, *Munch's Oddysee*, *Mercenaries*, *Age of Empires 3*, *Command and Conquer 3*, *Roller Coaster Tycoon Mobile* and more.

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OVERVIEW

Many people think of video games as all being violent and incorporating weapons, killing, and other types of gameplay which involve harming or destroying living or inanimate things. While many action video games do include a lot of violence, it is not the only path to successfully creating a great game. While it is not possible to master all genres and all forms of games, it is also NOT required that you create a game that uses violence if you would prefer to take an alternate route.

Here are some lists and articles which might help inspire you for additional ideas:

- [The 25 best non-violent games on PC](#)
- [50 Best Non-Violent Video Games](#)
- [Your guide to intelligent, nonviolent video games](#)
- [Non-violent game design | EGX Theatre | EGX 2019](#)
- [Stop Fighting! Systems for Non-Combat AI](#)

The concept of violence can vary greatly for many people and what they hope to achieve. Are you wanting to avoid ALL violence of any kind? Do you want to avoid violence against humans only or all living things? Are you OK hurting things but not killing them? Where do you want to draw the line? Commonly, people are mostly against human-to-human violence—if you remove this, is some level of “violence” OK with you and the target audience? It’s important to think about topics like this and try to understand what your goals are. There is no right or wrong here. To get started, define what types of violence you are OK with, which you want to avoid, which can be used a little and so on.

WHY make a less violent game? You don’t need a reason! It might just be something you are interested in or passionate about. However, if you want to become a professional game developer and make AAA games, you need to realize that a vast majority of the games on the market include some form of violence. It is important to understand what is a great idea that will also sell well enough to be profitable and successful. So you need to realize that violence is not simply black or white (to most people)—it’s a sliding scale.

A “less violent” game is one where you force or encourage players to play the game without using all or some forms of violence. There is no precise definition, so it is up to you to decide how far you want to take the concept, what potential players would enjoy, and what the game concept would require. Do you want to disallow players to use violence or provide alternative paths that might allow full or limited use of violence (a non-violent alternate path or some combination)? Perhaps you want to reward players for not using violence.

It’s also essential to ensure you know your audience before designing a less violent or non-violent game. Who is the game for? Kids? Adults? Make sure you know your audience and the goals of the game BEFORE you begin; otherwise, many of these ideas could be inappropriate or might just make the game unappealing to the target audience and therefore fail.

Everyone has different reasons to reduce, avoid, or eliminate violence in their game concepts. No matter what you aim to achieve, this document is here to help you brainstorm new ideas for approaching this particular design challenge. Even if you plan to make a game with violence in it, it is still highly recommended to read this document and do the exercises in it to get some ideas about how to create alternative gameplay concepts that can be used in ANY kind of game.

This guide is here not to judge whether violence in games is good, bad, healthy, unhealthy, right, wrong, or anything else. It’s here to hopefully be unbiased and demonstrate how you, as a game designer, can approach a problem. Hopefully, This guide will inspire you to think deeply about this complex subject and have an open, honest dialogue with your team, friends, and the world about violence and what it means to you and others.

Keep an open and hopefully non-judgemental mind when reading this. Regardless, as a design exercise, even if you don’t remove all violence, this guide can hopefully still inspire you to make a better, more diverse and more interesting game with some of the ideas it presents.



VIOLENCE CHECKLIST

How do you want to define the violence in your game? Will you allow it, discourage it, encourage it, or are you not sure yet? This list is a starting point, so feel free to add any specific ideas from your game you want to explore. If needed, write some notes or create some design ideas around anything you are unsure about or wish to understand better.

	Yes	No	Some	Maybe
Killing Anything				
Killing Humans				
Hurting Children, Elderly, Civilians (Non-combatants)				
Human against Human Violence				
Against Animals				
Against Non-Humans (Aliens, Demons, Creatures, etc.)				
Using Guns				
Using Edged Weapons (Swords, Knives, etc.)				
Using Blunt Weapons (Bats, Sticks, etc.)				
Using Body (Martial Arts, Street Fighting)				
Using Vehicles as Weapons (Tank, Airplane, etc.)				
Violence Against Inanimate Objects (Cars, Buildings)				
Violence Against "Unseen" Humans (they are not seen, but present, like inside of a tank or building)				
Dismemberment or Extreme Gore				
Verbal Abuse or Threats				
Emotional, Psychological or Mental Abuse				
Violence Against Women, or Minorities				
Representative Violence (Not Shown or Done Directly)				
Violence as a "Sport" (Boxing, Football, Wrestling, etc.)				
Externalized Violence (Viewed by Player)				

What else might be considered violent? Where do you want to draw the lines?



CONCEPTS IN LESS VIOLENT GAMEPLAY

Before you begin trying to design a less violent game, you should try and understand some of the concepts around their design, development and implementation.

The word WHY is VERY important and powerful. Many game designers fail at doing things because they don't ask, "Why?" They see it in other games or just assume it is what people would expect. It's critical that you ask yourself WHY about everything in this guide. Why is it essential for you to reduce or remove violence from the game? Why should you make a less violent game? Why ask WHY?

Once the WHYS are mostly answered, you can hopefully get deep into the HOWs! This guide should hopefully inspire you to think about the WHYS while also giving you some ideas about the HOWs, acting as both an inspiration and a practical guide.

WHY REDUCE VIOLENCE?

Do you know why you want to reduce or eliminate violence in your game? It is important to understand why you are attempting to do what you want to do. These rules might change over time as you explore the boundaries of your ideas. It's essential to understand why and how you want to do this, to what extent you want to reduce the violence, and if your target audience will be interested.

Remember that most games and game companies are businesses that ultimately need to make money. So while it might sound great to remove violence, it might also make the game concept too niche and something which ultimately doesn't recoup its costs. So be careful to find a balance between doing things for altruistic, moral, or other reasons and creating something with a good enough business model to be considered a success.

IMPARTIAL VIEWPOINTS

As game developers, we are tasked with making a product that is (usually) entertaining and enjoyable for your target audience. These products also usually need to make money to be considered successful. However, we might also be assigned or asked to make a product with an idea, theme, subject, story or something we disagree with. I believe it's important to try not to inject our own beliefs, biases, or viewpoints into our products.

I know this can be tricky, but be smart about it. Even if you vehemently oppose something, it's important to remain professional. Remember, the goal is to make a product that appeals to the target audience and is what the executive team, publishers, and investors expect. You can always not work on a project you are not passionate about or are morally opposed to.

So be careful and TRY to remain impartial on subjective topics like violence. Maybe try and allow players to see all sides of something—allow them to form their own opinions instead of forcing yours on them in an obvious manner.

Avoiding Judgment

The concept of less violent games is also an area you must consider when exploring and designing. Are you going to preach at the player and really hammer home your views on what is right vs. wrong with violence in games? Are you going to make a judgment based on your beliefs? It is OK if you do, but please understand that not everyone will agree with you. I encourage you to explore these ideas and to try and show all sides of an argument.

Try to show the truth and allow players to make their own judgements (if any) about this. If you come across as "violence in games is horrible and ruining people's lives" or take other strong negative stances against it, many will not tolerate it or agree and stop playing. Can you offer healthy and fun alternatives without using strong judgements, which some of your potential players might disagree with?



For some, this topic is very sensitive, so I encourage you to be sensitive in how you handle and design around it. Try rewarding players for using non-violent gameplay instead of telling them how bad it is. Try using positive reinforcement.

TREATMENT

What is the theme, style, or way violence is shown in the game? Is the violence realistic, cartoony, super intense and gory, gratuitous, glorified, purposeful, or something else? How you treat violence in the game will impact how it's seen and understood. Violence is not necessarily bad, but like anything, it can be taken too far, which some games are guilty of.

Remember that it is OK to have violence in your game, and you do not need to take a stand that violence is bad. This paper is about going through the mental exercise and thought process for how you might limit violence, but please don't take it to mean that all or any violence is bad or wrong. Keep an open mind.

The game *This War Of Mine* has some violence but puts players in the middle of a war and the horrors it brings to innocent civilians and the people caught up in it. The violence here serves a purpose and tells a story. Violence in some games can actually be a way to help players think about all the types of violence in the world and what it might mean to them.

Also, the theme of violence can be seen as very different depending on its context. Are you part of a government organization (police, military, spy, etc.), a vigilante, criminal, terrorist, good guy, bad guy, or something in between? Are you performing violence the players might see as fully or somewhat justified? Who are you performing violence on, and is this a person or group the players feel "deserves" the level of violence you are performing? For example, if someone raped and killed your daughter, would players feel OK if the player character only yelled furiously at the perpetrator? What if they punched them? What if the player killed them and everyone in the organization they worked for, or the guy who maybe commanded that person to commit the violence in the first place? Or how about if the

player tracked down that person's family and killed them too? Where is the line drawn for you and the players? This is an impossibly hard question to answer, but something to consider.

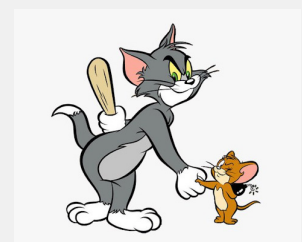
Game Theme and Brand

Remember that context is important in many design decisions. Your game's IP (intellectual property), world, theme, and circumstances will dictate a LOT of what is expected from players. Who is the player, what world do they travel through, and why are you trying to avoid violence? Is the player weak or against violence? Does the world not allow it (perhaps it's a fun and whimsical place)?

Help the player understand their world; this context will allow them to understand why they avoid conflict. If it is defined, show the player who they are. Or, if you are allowing the player to develop their own character, make sure you give them the world or tools to pick desirable paths for them to follow. Remember that cute graphics and art style can also help contribute to the overall theme and feel of the game.

Cartoon Violence

Is your game using cartoon violence—silly and over the top, like that seen in a cartoon? The theming of your violence has a LOT to do with how it's perceived. Just having a gun and shooting someone has a HUGE broad spectrum of possibilities, from a super silly approach to something realistic to something incredibly graphic and gory. This can include the weapon design itself, the attack animations and effects used when it shoots, the effect on the target, how the target takes damage or dies, and many other factors which can go to many different extremes. It's important to note that it's not always the act of violence that is the problem but how all aspects of the violence are treated and depicted.



Use Context

Remember that how an action is used, its intention, how extreme it is, who it's used on, and many other factors can change the context of an action. Adding context can be challenging, but it's important to be aware that it exists and can change how violence is perceived.

Humor as Violence

Remember that some types of insulting, mocking, abusive, or other derogatory language or actions can also be used in a comedic way. Check out *Oh Sir The Insult Simulator* as a reference for using harsh words in a funny way. So once again, context is everything, even in non-physical violent use within a game. But just ensure that if you are trying to make something funny, everyone knows and sees it as funny. Sometimes you really need to exaggerate this to ensure everyone "gets" the joke and doesn't take offense.

International Context

Different cultures have different signs, symbols, actions, and sayings that mean different things to them.



Is this hand signal good or bad to you? In some cultures (like in the US), this means "OK," while in other cultures (like in Latin America), it is a horrible insult, similar to giving someone the middle finger.

Cultural interpretation is important, as what is perceived as verbal or physical acts of violence or insult in different cultures could mean different things depending on who is viewing it. Don't assume that just because something is positive in your culture, it will be good universally. Remember your context, and talk to a broad range of people about the appropriateness of everything in your game.

Glorification of Violence

A large part of violence can be how the subject matter is treated in your game, its story, and the gameplay. Are people who commit violence celebrated and rewarded? If you are trying to make the game less violent, you also need to make sure you are not glorifying the violence. Make sure you understand why and how the violence might affect your players.

Inclusion

Keep in mind that how you treat people, different groups, various genders, races, political groups, regions, countries, minorities, etc., in today's world is constantly changing. You need to be aware of creating a fully inclusive, non-threatening, and non-judgmental environment for ALL gamers. Allowing players to perform violence (physical or emotional) on ANY and ALL people or groups which are different in any way should be avoided at all costs and very carefully considered.

Inclusion can especially be challenging when doing historical games and trying to accurately portray some subjects, eras, situations and events. While this can be a complex topic, PLEASE make sure you ALWAYS are considering if you are properly including everyone in the right ways within ALL areas of your game's mechanics, stories, themes, and beyond. This should also be validated by a group of diverse people rather than just by your team to make sure you are not unknowingly looking at something from a single perspective with some unknown biases.

Regional, Children, and Age Restricted Violence

It's important to know the laws, rules, and restrictions for how much and what kinds of violence are actually allowed to sell your game to your target market. Many countries have certain restrictions on violence, which can depend on factors like age.

Identify your target audience and markets and ensure that what you ship adheres to all guidelines. In general, a game with less violence will not have any restrictions, but if you plan to incorporate some types of violence, you might encounter some issues if you don't perform your due diligence.



For more information, ESRB (Entertainment Software Ratings Board), PEGI (Pan-European Game Information), and other ratings agencies have many classifications, guidelines, and rules for how much and what types of violence can be allowed in a product that you can check out.

NON-PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

It's also important to note that not all violence concerns physical attacks. Violence can come in a variety of forms that leave no marks. You can verbally abuse someone (like yelling at them, calling them names or derogatory sayings, etc.), you can use a wide assortment of psychological ways to intimidate, degrade, hurt, or abuse someone verbally (or in writing) or through other non-physical actions which can cause just as much long-term damage as physical attacks. The pen can be mightier than the proverbial sword, as they say.

Emotional abuse can not only upset people, scare them, cause anxiety and more, but it can also lead to physical symptoms, depression and even suicide. When designing games, it's important to consider other ways that people can abuse someone, control them, and create toxic situations so that we can recognize and address the problem.

REMOVAL & AVOIDANCE

The most obvious way to create a less violent game is just not to give the player any weapons or means of wielding violence, including skills and abilities. Not allowing the player to cause violence is the easiest way to make a non-violent game. However, you still need to validate that this is the right choice to make in your game. Does removing the ability for violence solve the right problems? You can't (usually) take a game with violence and just remove it and think it will still appeal to players.

Keep in mind that many forms of violence are present in many games for many reasons, so just removing it from a game might make the game unplayable. It's better to identify what kind of violence (if any) is allowed in your game.

SKILL BUILDING & MASTERY

Most games are successful because players can learn to master them. They might gain better Twitch skills when playing, learn the right strategies, or have other ways to progress and improve over time (and often beat their friends). Combat is not the only set of systems that requires players to master and improve, so be careful not to treat less or non-violent gameplay as necessarily easier or simpler unless that is also what the target audience wants (like a game for kids). Make sure you don't confuse your target audience with what experience they want, as great games usually still want some level of mastery for players.

Depth

One of the biggest challenges is creating enough depth in the game. Many games use combat, along with progression and mastery, as a primary way to encourage players to keep playing (retention). Even less violent games like *Fall Guys* suffered long term; players got bored with the lack of depth. This is a common problem, but something that could be MUCH more apparent in a non-violent game if you are not careful. What is going to keep players engaged?

DANGER, DIFFICULTY, CHALLENGE, TENSION, & EMOTIONS

Many games build a sense of tension by creating situations where the player is worried about something. Do they want to win a match and are behind in score? Are there enemies around that might hurt or kill them? Is someone chasing them? Think about how the game creates tension. Violence is only one way (often the easiest) to create tension, resulting in an emotional response. Games involving something like a race or a match also need to build tension and a potential chance to win or fail.

Finding the right balance of tension in a game is hard to do for a wide variety of players. This is another reason why difficulty levels can be tricky to get right. Whether it is a fight, a platforming section, a puzzle, a race, or anything task in the



game, you don't want it to be too hard or too easy. Some games pride themselves on being incredibly hard (like *Dark Souls*), but they realize that some players (like myself) hate the repetition required to beat some bosses or successfully win the game. So, know your audience.

The challenge with removing combat is that the things you are replacing must be equally challenging to maintain balance and make it fun. The concept of "rubberbanding" is also one used by many games which try and keep your opponents close to you. This is most commonly seen in some racing games where it's more fun to have someone just in front of you pulling you forward or just behind you, making you worried about them overtaking you.

Failure

A HUGE part of games is about how you fail. How does the player lose? How does the game end? Can the player die? Can the player take damage? What actions, events, or things within the world can cause the player to fail and the game to end? Is there just a score or some way to measure how well a player is doing? Having the tension that you can fail is important to make the player feel emotionally attached. It's essential to define how players can fail.

In a game without violence, one of the most common forms of failure might be getting removed from the game—death. It's important to include ways to fail but not make these failures too hard or punishing. Players need to be able to learn from their failures and do better the next time they play. For example, with a health system, players (usually) take different amounts of damage from a wide variety of sources, and it's not just one hit that equals death. Some games do this, making them VERY difficult as they don't allow for discovery and are more about being perfect or reading the designer's mind.

Players need a way to explore the limits and conditions of their possible failure and feel they are in control of their fate to some degree. When players have something like a health system, they get to make mistakes, try new things, try again, and have a sense of what they are doing wrong and not

just instantly failing. So, when removing violence, make sure the failure systems have some level of forgiveness that doesn't cause instant failures for vague reasons. Avoid instant failures whenever possible.

It's important to remember that actions should have reactions. Actions that edge players towards failure should usually also have a player reaction that can reverse the negative action. For example, suppose a player takes some damage from an attack in a typical FPS (first-person shooter). In that case, they can then heal by using a health kit (item), skill/ability, through a teammate (medic) or NPC (non-player character), over time (if not in combat or proximity to enemies), from a location (device) or in other ways. When players take damage and they know how to heal, as their health gets lower, it increases the tension and forces players to make difficult decisions or take risks. A good failure system should TRY and find ways to increase tension in the failure systems, not frustration.

SETTING THE RULES

It's critical that players understand the rules of the game and world. When setting up a less or non-violent world, you need to make sure the player clearly understands the rules and expectations within it. So, if you allow limited violence, does the player understand why and what is expected of them? Stealth games, for example, can sometimes be confusing because some scenarios (which are basically environmental puzzles) might allow only one path to succeed, but players might think they can play it another way and keep failing. For example, if you give the player a gun or limited attack, they may try to fight their way through a scenario and not realize the only solution is to sneak through it. Make sure that when you change the rules, you properly set the expectations.

Another example is a popular action game where you are told throughout the first two-thirds of the game to follow your commander's orders. In every mission, you must follow their orders (usually to kill someone), or you fail the mission. Then, there



is a big mission where the player has the option to NOT kill the person, follow their heart, do the “right” thing, save the person’s life, and go against his commander’s orders. The development team spent a LOT of time setting up this mission and the branching paths around it but were disappointed when nobody saved the person (everyone killed them). That’s because the expectation was that you must do what you are told, which was reinforced dozens of times, and therefore the option of doing something non-violent was not even considered—if you don’t know a path exists, it’s difficult to take that path.

Make sure players understand the rules and what they can do, especially when you are trying to create more unconventional scenarios. This becomes even more critical if you allow them to use violence occasionally. Players shouldn’t need to read the designer’s mind in order to play the game successfully.

MORALITY: GOOD VS. EVIL GAMEPLAY

Another aspect of violence in games is the concept of morality. Are the player’s actions seen in the world as good or bad (or some other gray area)? Is the player doing something that is perceived as right or wrong? Morality is challenging as everyone and every culture has very different perceptions about many moral issues.

Some games allow players to play with the concepts of good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, etc., allowing the player themselves to choose different paths. Maybe you can have some benefits or rewards for taking an alternate path through the game. Maybe you let people play in the gray areas? Let players have fun with it, and try to keep your morality out of it if you can.

Another gray area for morality also revolves around people whose role is to commit violence against others. Are they civilians or trained for violence (soldiers, fighter pilots, police officers, spies, etc.)? The catch is that these professionals usually work

for a government (unless they are mercenaries or similar) and are—in theory—performing violent acts to protect other people. Defensive violence is often considered morally “good” or at least “necessary.” Most soldiers don’t join the army because they want to fight and kill; they are going to protect their families, their country, their way of life, etc., but here again, the morality can become murky.

It’s OK if your character is fighting for all of the “right” reasons, but does this justify their actions and make the violence OK, or is the violence committed by these types still wrong in your game? It’s a fun intellectual (and VERY difficult) question to ponder and possibly play within your game. Just be VERY careful as ALL of these ideas around morality could very easily get you in trouble with some players, so you need to be extremely careful if including these ideas in your designs or stories.

EXTERNAL VIOLENCE & EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

How violent is the world around the player? Violence can exist in a video game—performed through NPCs or the world itself—which the player can witness but cannot partake in. For example, can the player witness a fight or battle between two people or groups or see the results of it (dead bodies, wounded, etc.)? Is violence directed at the player, but they cannot reciprocate? Does violence exist in the story or game world in other ways?

Some games have done a masterful job of putting the player in a bad situation (like a war), where they must survive and see the results. *This War of Mine* does a great job of this but does allow a little violence when you explore or through some situations, as well as some threats of violence from visitors. What is so good about it, however, is that it does a great job of making you see and feel the horrors of war and its impact on the people. Other games, like *Far Cry*, show the bad guys killing women and other intense violence. This is done to build some logic, reasoning, and emotions from players to help justify their actions.



Empathy

Why could showing (or allowing) certain types of violence actually be beneficial for some games? Seeing violence against others can create empathy or elicit a strong emotional response from players.

Suppose you see the actions and results of violence, especially those against women, children, or innocents—it is often meant as a motivation for why the player’s character in the game is doing what they are doing. In many action movies, for example, something that happens to the protagonist’s (player’s) family, friends, or loved ones (like John’s dog dying in *John Wick*) gives them a kind of license for revenge which sets them on their journey. Games can play on the same plot points; however, keep in mind that this can be harder to execute in games because the protagonist is also the player, and it can be confusing as to which emotions you are appealing to—the player’s or the player’s character—which can cause a disconnect for some.

For example, I’ve played games (like *Heavy Rain*) where my wife or girlfriend is killed in the first few minutes, which was supposed to anger me and make me want revenge. However, I had only just been introduced to this person, and as a player didn’t have time to build an emotional attachment to them, so I always felt the justification for my revenge plot was not strong.

If you want to elicit a strong emotional response, you need players to feel emotionally attached to something before you take it away. While this is not always a case of external violence (maybe your child is kidnapped, and you must find them), it is another related topic you can be aware of and possibly explore.

BRANCHING PATHS & MULTIPLE WAYS TO PLAY

Remember that it sounds great (on paper) to allow players many ways to play. You need to understand the design and development challenges, whether you try to include multiple paths through the game, branching paths, emergent game systems, or any other type of non-linear play. Emergent

game mechanics can help with some problems but are still incredibly difficult to implement properly. For example, just making a stealth game where players can sneak or fight their way through a level is incredibly hard. There are a LOT of variables, and controlling the complexity and level of difficulty is challenging. Do NOT underestimate the complexity of designing and developing a game with multiple play methods—it’s horribly hard! So try and limit yourself (for now).

A common technique to limit combat in many stealth and horror games is to limit the amount of ammunition the player has, which restricts their ability to “run and gun” or go in guns blazing. This limitation, however, can mean that a level needs to have a way for the player to use stealth game mechanics but also to react appropriately if the player uses a weapon or is “caught.” In *Metal Gear Solid*, for example, if a guard sees you or sees a dead or unconscious body, it triggers an alarm, so players not only need to be careful when they use violence but also need to cover up or hide their use of it. The problem occurs when you give someone a gun with limited ammo in a game level but design it only to be solvable with stealth. If you are going to provide the “tools” (weapons and abilities) for violence and still force the players to play a predetermined way, the rules are not clear, and the game will become frustrating as the player feels they need to read the designer’s mind.

IMPLEMENTATION

Many of these ideas are actually very similar to their violent counterparts regarding implementation.

For example, your ability could affect the target positively or negatively. A weapon might cause damage by -X, but you could just as easily have it add X health with some tweaks to the object or its blueprint. You can make something healing or damaging, and just because you start with one version doesn’t mean you can’t change it to the opposite. Unless you have a team to support you, when planning to implement this kind of element, look for existing mechanics, features, or ideas that you can adapt instead of creating something from scratch.



Semantics

Semantics matters in games, and what you call something or say it's doing can impact how the level of violence is viewed. Does the player's gun shoot bullets or rubber balls? Is the person dead or just unconscious? Are they disabling or destroying something? Are they discussing something or arguing? Sometimes this is also a matter of someone's perspective. What you call something and how you treat it will often make all the difference. Look at a game like *Splatoon*, where you spray ink at enemies vs. something like fire or acid—the mechanics are basically the same, but the theme is different.

IDEAS FOR LESS VIOLENT GAMEPLAY

This section provides ideas for designing games with less or no violence. It is not exhaustive, and my suggestions can be combined to create deeper and more diverse gameplay. They can also enhance games that include violence by offering alternative paths and more variety besides repetitive violence.

The goal is to encourage deeper thinking about creating innovative games that approach violence in new or different ways. It is easy to gloss over the topic, but there are a lot of opportunities for you and your team to create less violent games that are still deep, compelling, and fun to play.

Implementing some of these ideas in Unreal on your own could be challenging, so proceed with caution. Consider prototyping with existing systems, mechanics, or blueprints, which are theoretically similar to those used by violent games, in order to streamline development.

EXPLORATION

Exploration in games involves discovering a world, moving through it, and finding items, people, places, stories, quests, and events. A game focused on exploration can reward players in various ways, offering simple to complex movement, collecting items, interacting with characters, and engaging

with diverse content. The focus is on uncovering the unknown, including collectibles, opening containers, and searching for valuable information throughout the game world.

Exploration and movement ideally need a purpose. Why are people exploring the world? What are they discovering in the world (items, resources, objectives, places, people, stories, quests, experience, or more)? How can you create exploration with a purpose?

Movement

Movement in games can be rewarding, and there are diverse ways to add it to levels. Players use various skills, abilities, items, devices, vehicles, and objects to move. Complex systems can create unique movement combinations, requiring player skill, timing, and knowledge of the world for successful navigation.

Hazard/Danger Avoidance

Are there dangerous entities in the game world that can damage, kill, or negatively affect the player? Are these static, or do they move? If they move, is it along a preset path, or can they chase the player? In other words, is there violence against the player when the player cannot retaliate with violence? This includes the world or environment itself or dangerous NPCs, creatures, animals, defense systems, traps, and other elements that players must avoid, disable, or distract to progress in the game. For instance, players may need to find an off switch to deactivate fire blocking their path or use stealth to distract or sneak past a guard.

Chases and Pursuit

Movement can create tense situations through pursuits or chases, either with the player chasing someone or something or themselves needing to escape. This could either be fast and challenging or slow and sneaky, with two things stalking each other using stealth mechanics.

Platforming and Parkour

Games offer a wide range of character movement options that make levels fun to traverse. Games like *Mirror's Edge* showcase amazing movement-focused gameplay, while classic games like *Mario Bros.* exhibit excellent platforming with mild cartoon



violence. Movement in games can serve as puzzles, require player skill, or present complexity, making the world interesting to navigate.

Advanced movement adds complexity, typically with faster pacing, and can also incorporate timed elements like moving or animated objects. Players may need to time jump onto moving platforms or evade hazards, relying on their movement skills to avoid various dangers. These games require significant hand-eye coordination as the player needs to learn how to use and time several different skills.

Movement Denial

Maybe an enemy cannot move the same way as you. Can you change how or where someone can go? Can you move to a place they cannot? Perhaps you can raise or lower a ladder to keep them from a location. Can you turn things on or off (like a moving platform), lock/unlock something (like a door), or raise/lower/open/close something to stop them?

Environmental Damage

Is the game environment itself dangerous to players? Can players be hurt by in-world hazards like falling from a high location or other dangers? Is damage from the environment an acceptable form of 'violence'? If so, what kinds of hazards exist in the environment itself? Can NPCs also be damaged by the world, and can the player lure them to be damaged or killed indirectly by the world?

Quests, Missions, and Objectives

Giving players a wide variety of reasons to play, tasks to complete, and things to do is a great way to encourage continued gameplay. Consider these ideas when you are structuring how players achieve their goals.

Stories

Stories and storytelling appeal to many players, some of whom play games only for their stories, especially for games with interactive stories or ones the player feels they can control or affect. Stories within games can manifest in different ways, enriching the gaming experience.

World

Are there things in the world that can damage or are hostile to each other or that you can utilize? Can you lure one enemy close to another and get them to fight each other? Can you get someone to move into a hazard that damages or affects them?

Level Layout

Less violent gameplay should also be heavily influenced by the layout of the level. A level might be a type of direct or indirect puzzle which players need to move through and use the abilities you provide for them. So make sure you evaluate the level design and systems along with the player's systems and opponents' abilities.

Investigation

Perhaps the player can take on the role of detective, with or without a gun. They'll investigate the world, gather clues, examine items, and use various devices to collect evidence like fingerprints or DNA. Use puzzles to challenge them and interrogations to uncover the truth. Games can offer different detective settings, from old-school to modern or futuristic, and the player's goal may be to prevent violence or crime from happening.

COMBAT

For various reasons, eliminating or reducing direct violence, combat, or fighting in games is a common goal for some people and designers. Combat and conflict can take many forms beyond killing. You need to analyze your goals and what you are trying to avoid. Are you against all forms of violence, fighting, or combat, or simply trying to reduce the amount of violence?

It's important to analyze the reasons behind including combat in games and why players are drawn to it. Are players just looking to kill things, or is the adrenaline, action, competition, and challenge attracting them? When you remove combat from a game, what is the player experience? How can the player gain excitement, mastery, and fun from the game?



Less Lethal “Weapons”

“Weapons” typically refer to objects that cause harm or death and are often associated with violence. However, the terminology can be flexible, so if the device or ability affects an opponent in some desirable way, you can call it what you want.

Modern-day “less lethal” weapons have a lower chance of hurting or killing someone. These were formerly called “non-lethal,” but accidents or fatalities are possible with any type of weapon. These weapons aim to deter targets and encourage them to leave the situation without causing lasting harm. These devices could cause pain (like rubber bullets), hurt our senses (like pepper spray, flash bangs, or loud sounds), cause nausea, intestinal or body discomforts, temporarily make it hard to see (tear gas or lasers) or cause other issues to more humanely deter someone and avoid permanent injury. Governments have researched such weapons for use in police or military conflicts to deter opposition.

Ultimately, your goal is usually to protect yourself from an entity trying to hurt or affect you. There may be various ways to describe something non-lethal, which changes the narrative and allows you to use more traditional game mechanics and “weapons” under different names, which could also require less work for you to implement.

Obstacles

Games can feature non-violent obstacles that affect players without causing direct damage. Examples include challenges inspired by *Fall Guys* or TV game shows like *American Ninja Warrior*, where contestants face obstacles that push, slow, slip, or knock them around. Many opportunities for level elements affect your gameplay but are not perceived as violent.

Stunning

A variety of “weapons” can stun or temporarily incapacitate enemies without causing them lasting harm, such as knocking them out, putting them to sleep, or stunning them.

Stopping/Slowing

Similar to stunning, other ways exist to stop someone or something from moving or continuing to perform hostile actions. These could include glue-like sprays to hinder movement, slippery substances that cause slips, falls or that make steering difficult (like an oil slick), spike strips that take out vehicle tires, or other disruptive mechanisms that incapacitate an opponent long enough to provide time for the player’s escape or bypass.

Martial Arts

Martial arts, boxing, grappling, wrestling, or other forms of hand-to-hand combat can be a less-violent option. Good martial arts fighting systems with attacks, defenses, counters, and grapples can be difficult to implement, however, so be careful when planning. Basic punches and kicks aren’t too difficult and can be used without lethal consequences.

Countering and Limiting

To make many of these systems fun, enemies and players might need items, skills, abilities, or counter-capabilities. For example, if the player turns out the lights to prevent enemies from seeing, the enemy may use night vision or infrared abilities to see in the dark. Some of these counters need time limits or might require using a resource (like power), giving them some limitations.

Indirect Violence

There may be opportunities for indirect violence, where players cause harm or destruction without directly using weapons or physical force. Violence doesn’t require the player to use a weapon or their body to damage or negatively affect something. For example, the player could light a fire that spreads to someone’s house and explodes—they could cause something to fall on someone and kill them or use a switch to trigger a trap that kills someone.

Players could use a vehicle to damage the container another person is in, like driving a tank or flying a plane to shoot at another tank or plane. Though intuitively, we know someone is in the other vehicle, we don’t see that person die. The same may be true for blowing up a building with someone inside who isn’t visible to you.



These are examples of indirect violence; is this allowed? There are many ways to use a system like this, which is a different kind of violence. It does not necessarily need to result in killing. A trigger could allow the player to safely trap something without causing harm.

Some games include factions or groups of things whose relationships toward each other play a significant role, remaining fixed or changing over time due to events in the game or influenced by player action. *In Monster Hunter World*, many large monsters fight each other by meeting randomly or being lured together by the player. This makes the world feel more alive. *Grand Theft Auto* has rival gangs, criminals, cops, and military who like, tolerate or hate each other and who may fight each other if they approach too closely. Can the player use the game's emergent systems, factions, and relationships to cause violence?

Representative Violence

This type of violence is less graphic and more implied. Some games might have violence depicted symbolically. For example, in a card game where two cards 'fight' each other, the cards might each feature a person, but players never see them fight directly.

Some strategy games like chess employ representative violence through abstract representations of battles. Icons or avatars next to each other aren't really fighting, nor are chess pieces "killing" or capturing their opponent. You win by killing the opponent's king. Is chess violent? Is this level of abstract violence appropriate for your game?

Damage and Destruction

While violence is typically thought of as living things doing something to others (human-to-human, human-to-animal, aliens, or other creatures), it can extend beyond direct physical actions between living beings. Violence can also include other types of physical or emotional damage, like destroying property, disrupting essential resources, or giving someone a disease. We aren't usually thinking about this kind of violence and how it could truly affect another. Most games don't bring this up, which is an interesting dilemma. What is considered violence when its effects are indirect? Even collateral damage could be a form of violence.

CHOICES

Games are ALL about interactivity and choice. Players want to feel they are in control. Choices can be offered to players in a wide variety of compelling ways. They might result from a branching path or could just be something that makes them feel they are in control of their destiny.

You need to be careful about offering too many choices, however, as this can also overwhelm players. The promise of an open world or a game with unlimited choices sounds great on paper but often leads to players becoming lost, confused, or overwhelmed. Too few or too many choices can lead to problems, but offering choices is a great way to create an interesting game.

Simulations

Another type of strategy game is simulation. These might be games or pure simulation experiences. They could be things like *SimCity* or *The Sims*, where players build cities and places (theme parks, hotels, airports, night clubs, restaurants, universities, hospitals, you name it!) or create some kind of a simulation where they build something large or small and then optimize it in some way. These games are often about experimenting with the way things work, how much they cost, or how many of something you have.

Builders: Crafting, Decorating and Upgrading Things

A deep crafting* system that allows players to make things they need can be compelling and interesting. It could involve cooking food, making spells, designing and sewing clothing, or building/upgrading a wide assortment of structures, like a house or city. Make a game more about finding things, creation, and artistic expression, if you want; there are many paths to take here.

Many strategy "builder" games (Like *Rollercoaster Tycoon*) are all about building things, decorating them, and mastering the simulation. Builder game players focus on creating something (usually part-simulation) like a business, city, or something else interesting. They might be about creating a working simulation or just about creating something beautiful.



Anything (in theory) in a game can be made or modified by players. This could include finding or getting the raw materials, getting recipes/blueprints or something to tell you how to make it, finding or having a place or tools to do it (like a crafting bench), building the right skills, and more. It might also include things like breeding and raising animals/pets. It's also important to include a wide assortment of different rarities and values for items in your game so that players will want (and need) to keep using this system.

Remember that many players who enjoy crafting/building often also want to show it off, express their artistic prowess, and might want to sell things they make. People use these systems for different reasons.

**Note: Designing a "crafting" system is an entire document of its own. There are MANY options for players to create, customize, modify, upgrade, buy, sell, etc., in a game. The most common things might be player outfits/clothing, gear, weapons, furniture, or more. Player modification systems, housing systems, and pet systems are the most common, but it could be anything.*

Strategy and Tactics

The purpose of strategy and tactics is to make players think. You don't have to make a strategy game to add strategic elements. There are a wide variety of ways to integrate and utilize deep strategy or tactics within a game. Many of these can also be part-simulation and involve crafting and building things. They might include tech trees and skill trees to improve abilities and not just physical objects in the world.

MANY strategy games, simulations, or even "builders" can also optionally include combat. Some RTS (real-time strategy) games like *Age of Empires* can be won through combat or through research and construction. There's no right or wrong way to design these kinds of games.

Artistic Expression

Can players generate UGC (user-generated content)? Can this be used to help them express themselves artistically? This might be seen in customizing a character or building a house or an

entire city. There are MANY ways to let players express themselves and maybe share it with friends. Keep in mind that UGC can be VERY hard to implement.

Puzzles

A huge variety of puzzles and puzzle-like experiences are possible. Remember that a puzzle doesn't have to be a literal puzzle; it can be integrated into the world. Keep in mind, however, that puzzles are complicated to get right and not make them too hard or too easy. Every player has different a different set of knowledge and skills and can easily face a puzzle they just don't get and become stuck.

Progression

Progression is a crucial element in most games, ensuring that players feel challenged, rewarded, and engaged as they advance. In combat-based games, progression often involves gradually acquiring new weapons, facing tougher enemies, and improving player skills. It can be important to progress your game idea and player character as well. In non-combat games, the player character could have a lot or a little bit of RPG progression, with skills, stats, and abilities increasing over time, leading to new areas, quests, or opportunities. Unlocking new movement abilities or devices can contribute to player exploration by opening up new areas to explore and new adventures. Progression may also involve collecting items, cosmetics, virtual goods, or crafting that allows players to gain better or visually distinct enhancements over time, maintaining interest and diversity in the game. A well-designed progression system ensures that players feel a sense of accomplishment as they develop their characters and discover new aspects of the game world.

Learning and Education

Other big areas for non-violent games are education, edutainment or instructional games. You don't necessarily have to set out to make an educational game; you may simply want to include some educational aspects. A game that teaches its players can be a compelling reason to play, however many educational games are not as fun or compelling to play as a typical video game.



COMPETITION

Combat, fighting and conflict are inherently a competition between two or more people or things. Competition takes many forms and is a way to add excitement and tension into a game experience without requiring direct conflict.

Sports

Sports and sporting events, whether solo or in teams are forms of competition with defined rules, winners and losers. Some have scores, time limits, or other ways to encourage competition, just like in a video game. Some sports can involve violence (like boxing, martial arts, or hockey), while others are purely focused on competition. Even sports that some may find boring can offer occasional excitement, like a crash in the Indy 500 car race. Even a game with violence or combat can be turned into a sport with teams, scoring, and competition, like with the rise of Esports. When thinking about your game as a sport, it doesn't have to mirror traditional sports like soccer or football; it can take a more video game-oriented approach, like "Rocket League," which is a virtual version of soccer as a sport.

Races

Another form of competition is the race. A race can be multiplayer against other players, AI-generated NPCs, a timer, or somehow put pressure on players to accomplish a task before someone else does. Racing can also include combat but doesn't have to. Remember that races are usually only fun if you have opponents close behind or in front of you.

Timers

A timed event, quest or other aspect is another way to challenge players and reward mastery in a game. A timer can be long or short. In a puzzle, it adds pressure to players, eliciting emotional response and tension. It can be challenging to balance the difficulty level of timing, so take care not to make it too hard or too easy. Sometimes, an implied timer (which tells players to hurry up without actually having a clock on-screen) is better.

Scoring and Counters

Introducing a "scoring system" to a game can add an element of competition and challenge. Players can track their progress compared to others in the form of races or timed events. These could be a mini-game, a match inside the game, or part of a leaderboard system that encourages players to replay and improve their scores. The concepts of scoring and points can be creatively integrated into the game world and aren't necessarily tied to a numerical representation. For example, I designed a PvP game where both teams competed for the highest 'score,' which was in the form of energy they could earn by killing robots, finding, stealing, or otherwise acquiring. They could earn more energy by fighting better, like getting a headshot, a kill streak, or combos that would drop more energy and increase their score faster. In sum, don't think of these concepts too literally.

COLLECTION

A common, good way for less-violent games to offer a variety of engaging activities is by offering a wide assortment of collectables. These don't strictly have to be items; they can include creatures, characters, or other unique elements that players can pick up, find, gather or collect. To enhance gameplay, players might need special skills or devices or face limitations like inventory space or weight. Players need a reason to collect things, and collectable items may serve many purposes. They could be usable, tradeable, or sellable to players. Some collectables could have a significant impact on the game and gameplay, while others might be an optional bonus for players who like to collect things and earn achievements.

Objects, Collectibles, Resources and Items

There is a wide assortment of collectables, and your options are essentially limitless. Finding, acquiring, using and managing resources is usually a big part of many games. Selling, crafting, or upgrading with them might be possible.



Collecting items may require more than running around and finding random objects amidst the world map or hiding in containers. Acquiring resources might take special skills or abilities or special items or gear required to collect them. To get fish, for example, a player might first need to find a fishing pole, bait or lures for different kinds of fish or improve their fishing skills. Other items might only be available through buying, trading, or completing difficult quests. Some items might be inaccessible until later in the game, like in the second half of *Ratchet & Clank*, where you could get a metal detector to scan the ground, find valuables and dig them up.

Even what seems cliché, simplistic, or boring to design can be made more challenging and fun and scaled with the game to provide better rewards as players keep playing. Don't assume that a collection mechanic *needs* to be simple, though it's fine if it is.

Progression and items like weapons and gear are often closely related in many games. Looter Shooters, Action RPGs, MMORPGs and other genres are almost completely built on gear progression. Objects are an integral part of progression and the core game loop. Players often need to get the next great thing, a component for it, or an upgrade that will ultimately reward them by making them stronger or more powerful. In this case, the core motivation behind combat may not be the act of killing but rather the reward of loot, components, or upgrades.

If so, perhaps violence can be replaced by something else and still provide a dopamine reward to the player.

World Interactions

Players can interact with the world in less-violent ways. Some of these could be tied to resources and collection. Can the player farm, plant, water and harvest crops? Can players build facilities to raise animals, buy or find babies or eggs, and give birth and raise them before using or selling them? Could the player use a device to cleanse the world of something bad, say, cleaning up poison? Maybe the player can change how water moves through the world and use it to irrigate and help crops grow. They could use a hose to extinguish fires, a paint

gun to paint, or use something to clean up graffiti. How can players interact with a game world to make it a better place?

Sets, Groups and Components

Some things can be collected in sets, which are a number of related items that usually offer some bonus when collected in totality. One example might be several pieces of armor. Sets are often found in card games, Pokémon, or other games in which players need a number of similar assets to get a bonus. Another form of sets is parts or components, which could be used in crafting to make things.

Information

Information can be a valuable collectable with various uses, acquired through various means. Players could find information by learning about things in the game world, finding locations of things, or learning about plots. Players might gather this information through reading, sight, hearing, talking to people, or using devices. Players may need to take photographs, videos, record audio, or collect information to be used later.

Creatures, Pets and Things

Players might need to collect an assortment of animals, robots, aliens or other creatures. Think of Pokémon, in which you've "gotta catch 'em all." The game might also include ways to use, upgrade, breed, fight, or interact with them. For example, a Tamagotchi allows you to raise a pet, play with it, feed it, and interact with it. Each category of creature or thing might have different methods or locations for acquisition. You may be able to buy, sell, trade, or raise them too.

STEALTH

Instead of fighting, what about hiding and sneaking to avoid your enemies? A range of stealth mechanics can help you sneak, hide, cover or camouflage to stay undetected by foes. Stealth systems usually use a "Perception System" (vision and sound) that lets enemies detect the player and respond in a variety of ways. Additional systems are typically required to allow the player to affect these perception systems, like throwing a rock to distract the enemy. Stealth



systems most commonly revolve around the noise you make while moving or taking some action, as well as how well you are seen.

Thieves

Perhaps the player adopts the role of a thief and doesn't want to fight stronger, more powerful enemies. They may be sneaking in to steal something and then get out. They may have to bypass guards, security systems, or watchdogs to get the best loot. Being a thief might penalize violence or offer additional gameplay options like puzzles, such as picking a lock.

Horror

Horror games build tension by introducing scary and deadly foes that are difficult to fight.

They often have limited ammo, use stealth mechanics, and take place in darkly lit environments to create a frightening atmosphere. These games can feature supernatural elements, monsters, ghosts, aliens, or other things that go bump in the night. Players often need to use flashlights or be aware not to illuminate themselves too much. Fighting ghosts or other supernatural elements might work well for your game and can either be less violent or more violent. Some horror games might not allow you to fight dangers and instead force you to flee or hide.

Invisibility / Camouflage / Disguises

Similar to stealth, the player may be able to turn invisible using a cloaking device or camouflage to hide their appearance. A disguise might let you hide in plain sight, or a shapeshifter may have the ability to change how they look. This can also be affected by light/dark perception systems.

“Choke / Knockouts”

Can you use a weapon, device, skill or ability to knock out an opponent? This might be a stealth kill performed on someone you sneak up on from behind.

Disable / Stun / Trap

Can players disable or stun enemies, for example, using an EMP to disable electronics like those in robots or security systems? Could a stun grenade temporarily stun an entity in the level? Can you use a trap to stop someone?

“Blinding” / Light

Players can use various tactics to disable, reduce, or change the way someone or something detects them visually or auditorily. They can employ flashbangs to temporarily blind or deafen opponents or use smoke grenades to obscure their visibility. Manipulating lighting conditions can also be effective, such as turning off lights to reduce visibility or blinding creatures that are sensitive to light. Smoke or other visual impairments can be employed to hinder opponents' sight.

ENTITIES

Many games include entities that players play as, interact with, or otherwise encounter. They may be living or inanimate, like a machine or robot, and might be intelligent—or not. This could be a person, alien, creature or animal, robot, machine or anything else players interact with. There are many options for who the player is and the things they find in a game, and while these don't need to hurt, attack or be hostile, the player needs to understand the rules for interacting with them.

Role Playing

Role playing can provide different opportunities for play without being a soldier; players might be doctors, thieves, merchants, or otherwise, and they need to embrace the role to be successful.

RPG Mechanics

RPG mechanics refer to player characters having a series of stats, abilities, or other skills that are typically improved over time and through use. Such mechanics are typically a form of progression but can also be something for players to work toward.

Support Roles

Many games have non-violent gameplay and 'support'-type mechanics. This might include healing, reviving the dead, hacking, crowd control, buffing, etc. Players might be able to succeed by playing a doctor or another supportive role without being a soldier. Consider the amazing story from the movie *Hacksaw Ridge*, where the star is a combat medic who refuses to hurt anyone and saves hundreds of lives. There are plenty of ideas around roles like this for you to explore.



Non-Human Enemies

Are you trying to make a game where humans aren't killed or injured? Instead of humans, you could call them robots, androids, or aliens. Does the name change make it better for you? In some regions, human-against-human violence might be frowned upon, but other types might be allowed. Try to understand how far you want to take this and why. For example, in Germany, it used to be illegal to depict humans killing each other, so the game *Command and Conquer* changed the red blood of humans to black and called them robots. This change was acceptable, it took no time to do, and it bypassed the censors. What are you trying to accomplish and why? This will help you decide if simple changes are enough or if you need to do something more complex.

Merchants and Smugglers

Players might be involved in buying, selling, trading, transporting, or managing a wide assortment of legal or illegal goods. They may need to buy something in one place and sell it in another to profit. Maybe they need to protect their cargo, sneak it in, and make a fast trip through a dangerous area (recall Hans Solo's famous Kessel Run). Gameplay might revolve around being a trader, merchant, pirate, smuggler, or another kind of transporter and could also be combined with crafting or other object systems. It could also include vehicles or transport-related elements.

NPCs and Conversations

Dialog can be fun, interesting, and challenging. It can lead to learning information, obtaining items, or receiving quests. Words can have as much emotional impact on someone as physical violence. The dialog and communication in your game can produce an assortment of emotions and can be used to provoke or diffuse violence. They may be spoken by characters or appear in a conversation in which the player can choose their response. Humor, kindness, and other forms of nonviolent communication can also be used effectively.

A conversation system could be a traditional branching dialog, or could diverge to make it more interesting, add challenge, emotion or more. Dialogs allow you to give orders that could affect the

game. In some cases, conversation has been used as a more significant aspect of game systems and effects the outcome of battles. In the classic game *Monkey Island*, the player can insult the pirate they are sword fighting, and if the insult is deemed good enough, it might help the player win.

Remember, the tone and context of the words are often more important than the words themselves. Some games like *Mass Effect* allow you to choose your emotional response to dialogs as well. Do you let players respond to conversations with a variety of emotions? Can these emotional responses trigger an event, action, or physical response?

As a side note, remember that around 75% of our communication language is physical. Body language has much to do with how we perceive a conversation, as words can be easily misinterpreted. Whenever possible, including animated characters can help people fully understand the situation.

Socialization and Groups

Human beings are social creatures. We enjoy socializing with other people. Can you add aspects to your game that allow players to interact and socialize with each other in new or unique ways? Can you make social interactions the center of the game experience or something that keeps someone playing? Can you include groups, teams, guilds, clubs, or other organized social groups that let players group and have unique experiences with other players?

Team gameplay is something you can explore also. Are there mechanics that a group of players need to do together in order to have success or win?

Romance and Friendships

There is also the possibility of giving players the ability to build real social relationships and connections, either with other players or with NPCs. Can players fall in love, date and create real friendships or other interpersonal relationships? Do these relationships have meaning and gameplay enhancements within them? Is it a yes/no decision, or is there a vast gray area, including varying types of relationships, from casual friends to best friends, from dating to marriage? What gameplay mechanics and benefits come with having friends, partners,



or others in your inner circle? How can you make people care about others in your game?

If you can make relationship and your actions toward people matter, perhaps players will think twice about using violence against people they care about.

Loss of Self

Something that terrifies people is the idea of losing themselves or losing control. A demon, ghost, or monster could take over the player's mind and body. A strange alien symbiote could live inside you, like in the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* movies. Could a device or magical ability give control to someone else and make them act against their will? Is this loss of self appropriate for your game and is this considered violent? In the game *Munch's Oddysee*, the character Abe could create a magic ball used to take control of enemies and attack other enemies. Is this violent to you?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Regardless of whether your game idea embraces violence, minimizes it, or removes it altogether, know that there is no right or wrong choice and a lot of gray areas. The most important thing is to have an honest conversation with yourself or your team about these topics and hope that it stimulates you into seeing the wide variety of possibilities games offer players. While it's fine to be inspired by other games, it can also be good to take time to stop and think about other design solutions that are more out-of-the-box and may push into new areas. Hopefully, this guide will help and inspire you to think differently about how games can be designed and how violence can be better expressed, utilized, or shown in video games.

To recap:

- Determine what types of violence you want to avoid and why.
- Define what types of violence are allowed or can be used in your game.
- Determine your target audience and what they might want to see in the game.
- Determine the core loop of your game concept: is it fun without violence?
- Create healthy dialogue between yourself and others about violence and their alternatives.
- Prototype your ideas and make sure they are fun.

Where you go from here is up to you. Be brave and make great games!



“

At the heart of most games and player experiences are the characters, worlds, maps and levels which players interact with and in. These are the magical places that capture our imagination.

— Troy Duniway, CG Spectrum Curriculum Manager, Game Design

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chaosacademic
partner

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