# 6.3. Social Encounters

Roleplaying and talking with your GM is great, but this *is* a game, after all. If we have rules for punching evil in the face and turning into cyborgs along the way, we might as well have rules for solving problems in a more civilized manner. Player characters don’t depend on their players’ skills with the sword while fending off bandits, so it’s only fair that such characters can be great orators and cunning manipulators even if their players are not. Also, rolling dice is fun!

In this chapter, we’ll first present the rules for solving disputes between only two characters, but covering a wide variety of methods and tactics. Later sections will expand on that, opening up a possibility of including other characters into the argument.

A keen observer may complain that the following mechanics are just copy/pasted from Dogs in the Vineyard Wikipedia page. They wouldn’t be entirely wrong.

Social Encounter Basics:

Every social encounter is played out in 3 phases:

* **Setup phase**, in which we prepare the initial dice pools and determine who has initiative.
* **Talking phase**, where characters engage in a bidding war with their arguments in order to try and come out on top. This is the longest and most important phase of the encounter – it can (and should) be played over a series of rounds.
* **Skill test phase**, in which characters roll the appropriate skills (modified according to the results of the previous phase) to finalize the encounter and determine its consequences.

**Note:** In the rest of this chapter’s text, characters will be equated with their controlling player. So, when it says that, for example, a character says something or rolls a skill test, it probably means that it’s his player that does that.

The Setup Phase:

The first thing to do in a social encounter is for both characters to construct their argument pools. In the next two sections you’ll get a better feeling for what the argument pools represent and how they’re used, but for now we’ll just say that the more dice you have in your pool, and the higher the numbers on them, the better your odds of getting what you want of the encounter.

To construct your initial argument pool, take a number of six-sided dice equal to twice your Presence modifier, plus your Equilibrium modifier, plus 2, that is, PRE×2 + EQU + 2, and roll them.

After both characters have done that, the final remaining thing to do, before arguing can start, is to determine who has initiative, that is, who gets to talk first.

If the table can agree that it would be logical, based on the current situation, if one of the characters had initiative, then, by all means, give it to that character. Otherwise, both should roll a d12 and add their Initiative modifiers. The player who scores higher gets to decide who goes first.

The Talking Phase:

The talking phase is ran as a series of one or more rounds, in each of which the following happens:

**Raise:**

The character with the initiative puts forward a "raise" of two dice from his argument pool, while narrating a portion of the argument beneficial to his side. This narration will usually be quick – a sentence or few, accompanied by a description of what the character does as he’s saying them. However, this is not a hard limit. If the situation calls for an impassionate speech, do it!

**Respond:**

After the first character’s narration is done, his opponent must respond by putting forward one or more dice whose total exceeds the total of the dice which were used to raise, or give up, immediately ending the talking phase. Whatever he does, he must also narrate accordingly. If he can respond with only 1 die, or, alternatively, must respond with 3 or more dice, a compromise is introduced (more information on that in a later section).

**Repeat:**

This concludes one round of the talking phase. If one of the character gave up, it also concludes the whole phase. Otherwise, a new round begins where the same thing happens, but with the initiative transferred from the character who had it to the other one. This cycle continues until one of the characters gives up. The only exception is when a round begins and both characters have one or no dice remaining in their argument pools. In that case, proceed to the skill test phase, but since no character “won” the talking phase, nobody gets a bonus or penalty to their Edge for any test.

**Note:** Apart from the mandatory narration when raising and responding, players are allowed to speak even out-of-turn, if it would make the conversation feel more natural. However, try not to say anything of consequence in this way - anything of mechanical importance should be saved for when it’s your turn.

The Skill Test Phase:

This is the phase that concludes the argument. Each character that tried to convince their opponent into something (as opposed to just trying to “resist” what their opponent was saying) gets to roll a test in one of the three social skills: Command, Consort or Sway. It is opposed by their opponent’s Willpower test.

Which skill is rolled exactly depends on the characters’ employed strategies during the argument:

* Characters that try to establish a dominating presence, whether to inspire, intimidate or otherwise assert their will, roll the Command skill.
* Characters that utilize civil conversation, diplomacy and back up their claims with facts and sensible arguments roll the Consort skill.
* When charming, seducing, persuading or subtly manipulating (regardless of whether you actually lie or not), roll Sway.

In case somebody switches tactics during the argument (for example, they start out with diplomacy but resort to intimidation and blackmail when it doesn’t work out), take into consideration only the last tactic used.

The character who won the talking phase gains +1 Edge on all of his tests during this phase, and also +1d6 advantage for every 2 dice still remaining in his argument pool. **Important:** These bonus dice are not included when determining the difficulty of the test for advancement purposes! Remember that it can happen that nobody wins in the talking phase – then these rules do not apply.

Refreshing the Argument Pool:

The argument pools constructed at the start of the talking phase are by no means final; They can (and should) be expanded as characters pull ever more bizarre shit out of their asses to say to back up their claims. We call these things “aspects”. Aspects come in many forms: They can be characters’ own traits, skills and beliefs, items in their possession, knowledge of their opponents’ secrets and so on (you can find the full list below).

The way players can bring aspects into play is the following: Whenever a character is to put forward a raise, or respond to it, he may choose to narrate it in a way that relates to one of his aspects. If he does, he rolls a number of dice equal to the value of the referenced aspect, and may add those dice to his argument pool before choosing which dice from his pool to use for a raise or response.

Not every aspect can be used in every situation – it’s up to the players and the GM to determine which aspects are suitable for the situation at hand.

Once an aspect is used, it may not be used again for the rest of the encounter.

Aspects:

This section lists all types of aspects that characters can use within the game.

* **Attributes:** Character attributes are applicable as aspects with values equal to the modifier of the used attribute minus 1. As an exception, Equilibrium and Presence cannot be used as aspects, because they’re already used when constructing the initial argument pool.
* **Skills:** Skills can also be used as aspects. To determine the value, take the number of ranks the character has in the chosen skill (plus the ranks of all relevant specializations), and divide it with 2. Some skills cannot be used as aspects (because they are used in other ways for resolving social encounters); They are Composure, Insight, Command, Consort, Sway and Willpower.
* **Traits:** Character traits are an excellent way to get extra leverage if the players can think of a way to present them as relevant. Unless otherwise noted, their values are equal to their cost during character creation.
* **Perks:** Perks can be used as aspects, similar to traits. However, as perks don’t have a cost, it up to the GM to determine how relevant and valuable they are (usually 1 or 2 dice).
* **Beliefs:** What better way to fuel conversations than speaking about something you really believe in! Beliefs also don’t have any numbers associated with them, so the GM determines the appropriate value (1-4 dice) when they are used as aspects, depending on their relevance to the situation and how passionate the character is about them.
* **Items / Money:** This category covers various items in the character’s possession as well as money and other material wealth. They can be used as assets is two capacities: Having the right tool for the job, or using them to outright bribe the opponent. Again, the GM and the players should agree on the aspect’s value, depending on the situation. And remember, almost everyone has a selling point, so there’s no hard limit here (though going above 2 or 3 dice should be a rarity).
* **Special knowledge:** Special knowledge includes anything useful that the character knows, that’s not covered by Lore, Science and other skills. This will usually be newly uncovered information and secrets (about the opponent or some third party), and will be valued with 1 to 3 dice at the GM’s discretion.
* **Duty:** An important duty can be a powerful motivator, and as such it can also be used as an aspect in an argument. The DM allocates up to 4 dice as its value, depending on how loyal and determined the character is.

Talking Phase – Not Just For Talking:

Despite its name, characters can do more than just talk during the talking phase – anything to prove their point goes.

* Showing off your brawn with a Feat of Strength test right on the spot could work.
* If someone wants to hire an acrobat, it’s only natural that you’d perform some stunt and roll Acrobatics to demonstrate your skill.

Of course, these are only examples. In real situations, use common sense to see what goes and what doesn’t.

Compromises:

The section on the talking phase had a mention of “compromises”. Just like real life compromises, they represent some concessions towards your opponent’s point of view.

When you respond with 1 die to your opponent’s raise, you force them into making a compromise for you.

Likewise, when you must respond with 3 or more dice, you are forced into compromising.

**Example:**

**A:** (Raises with a 1 and a 5) *“Your boss ordered to let me into the club.”*

**B:** (Responds with two 4s) *“Fine, you may enter.”*

**B:** (Raises with a 2 and a 3) *“But I’m gonna need you to leave your gun here – no weapons allowed.”*

**A:** (Responds with a single 6) *“How about I shoot you instead and take it inside regardless?”* [Compromise introduced]

**B:** (Gives up) *“Whatever… I’m not getting paid enough for this anyway.”*

Immediately after a compromise is introduced, play is paused for a moment while the players agree on what would be a reasonable concession within the current context. Once set, it can be changed if (and only if) by the end of the argument the situation develops in a way that the original compromise no longer makes sense.

Interpreting The Results:

In this section we’ll go over a few conventions and rules of thumb related to interpreting the results of the encounter after the skill test phase is over with.

The most important point is that, at the end of the skill test phase, failing the Willpower test versus your opponent’s Command, Consort or Sway test means that you basically agree to your opponent’s side of the argument.

Analogously, winning that opposed test means that you remain unconvinced (of course, you can still *choose* to agree, but if that happens, ask yourself if using these rules was warranted in the first place).

The second important point is that agreement does not equate mind control. Whatever the result of the social encounter, it comes down to what characters agree to publicly and formally. It doesn’t always have to mean that they suddenly feel that their opponent was completely right and they were wrong all along (though that could happen as well). Bottom line is, while the characters *can* say “yes” when they really mean “no” and then go scheming behind everyone’s back, and the rules don’t explicitly forbid it, most characters will honour the agreement. A good rule of thumb for both the players and the GM is:

**Don’t be a dick about it!**

Finally, whatever the result of the encounter, it stands (like with regular skill tests). This includes compromises introduced during the encounter. No matter how unhappy one party or the other is with the outcome, repeated negotiations are not allowed until the circumstances legitimately change. In the meantime, they might need to deal with the situation in another way (but that’s not bad either – be creative!).

Additional Rules:

This section will present some additional rules to supplement those already covered, thus providing more flexibility in social encounters.

Change Of Heart:

It can happen that one of the characters in a social encounter is convincing enough that he genuinely changes his opponent’s opinion on the matter even before the talking phase ends. That’s fine – it could even be the best outcome for both sides.

As long as the aforementioned opponent is willing to swallow his pride and admit that he now agrees with the other character, the encounter can end right then and there.

When this happens, as rare as it may be, it is exceptionally allowed to renegotiate or even negate all compromises that were previously introduced.

Offer A Deal:

This rule represents one of the few ways an argument can end prematurely (or, just in the right time – depending on how you look at it).

During the talking phase, any time a character has initiative and puts forward his raise of two dice, he may offer his opponent a deal (his controlling player must make it clear that he’s invoking this rule). If he does, his narration needs to consist of laying out certain terms that he thinks his opponent will find acceptable (and this can include ignoring any of the compromises made in the argument up to this point). The spotlight then shifts to his opponent:

* If he **accepts** the deal, the talking phase ends, the skill test phase is skipped and the whole argument immediately ends. What happens next depends on the terms laid out in the deal.
* If he **refuses** the deal, one die is immediately added to his argument pool, and play carries on normally from there.

Lying:

Characters can always lie and bring up aspects they don’t actually have. When that happens, they need to roll a Deception test opposed by their opponent’s Insight test. The GM may grant one or more dice of advantage to either side depending on how believable or outrageous the lie is.

If the liar wins the opposed test, his argument pool is increased as if the lie he just told were true. However, if his opponent can see through the lies, then his argument pool is increased by the same number of dice. Depending on the situation, lying and getting caught may degrade the character’s reputation and his relationship with other characters (especially the ones he just lied to!). In extreme cases, it may end the argument immediately (see following section).

How Dare You, Sir!

* Degrade opponent’s attitude category by 2 or more during argument -> Argument ends immediately (and combat may ensue)

Dealing With Absurdities:

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Involving More Characters:

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Hidden Argument Pools (Optional):

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