Morality

The Morality system described in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** provides a workable system for measuring the effects of characters’ behavior upon their psyches, but it has a few problems. Most of those problems stem from terminology. The system doesn’t measure morality so much as behavior, and the consequences (increased willingness to transgress the “hierarchy of sins” and, potentially, derangements) are more akin to post-traumatic stress disorder than the actual effects of the crimes on the list.

The Morality system is designed to evoke the Gothic/Victorian ethos in which a person’s sanity was thought to be a function of their morality. It was also designed to be mutable enough to change and provoke a moral or spiritual framework for the various supernatural beings. So when a mortal becomes a vampire, “Morality” becomes “Humanity” and measures how much of the Man has fallen to the ravenous Beast. If a mortal undergoes the First Change and becomes a werewolf, the trait changes to “Harmony” and reflects whether the character is living with a lycanthrope’s spiritual duty. A human being stolen by the Fae tracks Clarity, measuring how well he can trust his own senses and to what extent he has become like the Gentry, and so on. In this respect, the Morality system works quite well. But in emulating the Victorian ethos, we wind up implying that one can commit murder and become schizophrenic. This isn’t the case, and the system suffers from inconsistent and inappropriate terminology and from trying to signify too much within the game.

To revise it, though, we need to consider what a Morality system should mean to a World of Darkness game. The underlying thematic push here is that what a person does has an effect on their mental state, which is probably fair. However, better representations for that effect than derangements are possible, especially with the rules revisions in this book.

With all of that in mind, the following rules replace the Morality and degeneration rules found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Breaking Points

When a character performs certain actions or endures certain experiences, he might reach a *breaking point*. A breaking point (replacing a “sin” in the original rules) simply means that what a character has done or seen has outstripped his ability to rationalize or handle it.

A breaking point can fall into one of the following categories:

• The character performs an action that violates his own personal moral code, *or* that is considered unacceptable in society.

• The character witnesses something traumatic, terrifying, or that rattles his understanding of the world.

• The character is the victim of a supernatural attack, whether physical, emotional, or mental.

Breaking points are somewhat subjective, obviously. A homicide detective with 30 years experience seeing dead bodies and hearing confessions of killers has a somewhat higher tolerance for human depravity than a sheltered 20-something in a middle-class liberal arts college. During character creation, it might be advisable for the Storyteller to come up with several hypothetical situations, so that the player can determine if, in her judgment, those situations would be breaking points.

Note that a breaking point is not necessarily something that the character considers wrong. A character might kill someone in a clear-cut, unambiguous case of self-defense, but the experience is probably still a breaking point, even if the player (and the character!) feels the act was entirely justified. Actions take a toll on the psyche, regardless of whether the actions were righteous.

The notion of breaking points replaces the notion of “sins,” and therefore removes the need for a “hierarchy of sins.” If the action would cause a character psychological stress, it’s worth considering whether the action constitutes a breaking point. Note, too, that the character may experience breaking points that do not stem from his own actions. Witnessing the gruesome realties of the World of Darkness, supernatural or otherwise, can do it.

“My Character Kills People All the Time”

Is it possible for a character to reach a point when killing another human being is *not* a breaking point? Players might make the argument for soldiers, policemen, gang members or good-hearted serial killers to be exempt from suffering breaking points from taking life, after a point. For mortal, non-supernatural characters, our recommendation is that if a character kills a person, it’s *always* a breaking point, even if the player gets a positive modifier to the roll.

Note that we said “mortal, non-supernatural” character. Vampires, werewolves and other shadow-folk aren’t fully human and don’t play by the same rules. Their rules, in fact, will be addressed in the appropriate books.

System

When a character experiences a breaking point, the player rolls Resolve + Composure, with a modifier based on the character’s Morality rating:

chart

Morality Modifier

8-10 +2

7-6 +1

5-4 0

3-2 -1

1 -2

End chart

The Storyteller can also impose modifiers based on how heinous the breaking point is, relative to the character’s experience. The chart below gives some suggestions, but again, the Storyteller and the player are encouraged to develop the character’s moral framework and life experience to the point that modifiers can be customized. Modifiers are cumulative, but the total modifier from circumstances should not exceed +/-5 dice.

chart, again

Breaking Point Modifier

Character is protecting himself +1

Character is acting in accordance with his Virtue +1

Character is protecting a loved one +2

Character is acting in accordance with his Vice -1

Witnessing the supernatural (nonviolent) -1

Witnessing the supernatural (violent) -2

Witnessing an accidental death -2

Witnessing a murder -3

Committing premeditated murder -5

Killing in self-defense -4

Killing by accident (car wreck, e.g.) -4

Causing visible, serious injury to a person -2

Torture -3

Enduring physical torture -2

Enduring mental/emotional supernatural attack -2

Enduring physical supernatural attack -2

Character witnesses a supernatural occurrence -1 to -5, depending on severity

end chart

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character’s world view has been damaged, perhaps beyond repair. The character suffers from traumatic stress. Lose a dot of Morality and choose from the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Broken, Fugue, or Madness. Also, take a Beat.

**Failure:** The character’s world view has been shaken, and he probably questions his sense of self, his ability to relate to people, his own moral worth or his sanity. Lose a dot of Morality and choose one of the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Guilty, Shaken, or Spooked.

**Success:** The character has come through the breaking point intact. He might feel guilty or upset about what happened, but he can cope, somehow. Choose one of the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Guilty, Shaken, or Spooked.

**Exceptional Success:** The character somehow manages not only to survive the breaking point, but to find meaning it, to reaffirm his own self-worth, or to pass through fire and become tempered by it. The character takes a Beat and regains a point of Willpower.