De-Role Guide

Separating the self from the character

A practical guide for performers after emotionally or physically demanding work

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When actors work deeply — emotionally or physically — in scenes, the body and nervous system can stay activated even after the work ends. **To de-role is to bring the focus back to you** — your body, breath, identity, and present reality.

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1 Grounding the Body

Start with your body before your mind. 1–2 minutes of physical grounding resets your nervous system.

Feet on floor:
Wiggle your toes. Feel full contact with the ground beneath you.

Slow breath:
Inhale for 4 counts, exhale for 6. Let the breath do the work.

Shoulders release:
On the exhale, consciously drop your shoulders. Do this three times.

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2 Movement to Release Emotion

Simple, non-performance-based movement. Movement signals to the body that the scene is over.

Shake your arms, legs, and whole body

Stretch arms wide, then draw them slowly to your heart centre

Gentle neck and shoulder rolls

Dance to a light, upbeat song — together if possible

3 Connection Ritual

Re-establish real human presence. This reminds the brain: we are here, now.

High-five or fist-bump your scene partner

Eye contact + say each other's real names out loud

Say it plainly: "I'm out of character now."

4 Breath & Awareness

Three conscious breaths, with intention.

In —
Feel the ribs expand. Let it be full.

Hold —
Notice your body. Where is there tension?

Out —
Release consciously. Let the character leave with it.

Ask yourself quietly:

Where am I now?

What do I feel physically?

Is this sensation from the scene, or from me?

5 Mindful Transition

Choose an intentional closing phrase and say it aloud — this reinforces a neural shift away from the character.

> *"Work stays here. I leave now."*

> *"I am [your name]. Not [character name]."*

Cold water on the wrists is a simple, effective physical reset — rinse them slowly and let the sensation bring you back to yourself.

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6 After-Scene Tools

Use one or more of these after intense scenes or rehearsals.

— Quiet reflection (3 minutes)	— A short walk outside
— Water and nourishment	— Journal one line on how you feel
— Short body scan (feet to head)	— 20 connected breaths
— Light a candle and blow it out	— Cold water on the wrists

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7 Post-Show Rituals

With heavier material, grounding after the show supports your mental and physical health across the run.

- Walking in nature or a gentle evening stroll
- Meditation or stillness practice
- Reading, cooking — something that grounds you in the everyday
- Running your wrists under cool water as you consciously release the role

The pub is tempting — but with heavier themes, rest and nourishment will carry you through the run more sustainably. You know yourself best.

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8 Check-In Questions

Used after rehearsal or performance — take a moment to check in with yourself honestly.

What's in my body right now?

Do I feel present, or "stuck" somewhere else?

What support do I need tonight?

What helps me feel safe and grounded?

SUPPORT

UK Resources for Artists

SPECIALIST PERFORMING ARTS SUPPORT

BAPAM — Performing Arts Medicine & Mental Health 020 8167 4775 · info@bapam.org.uk

Equity Bullying & Harassment Helpline 020 7670 0268 · harassment@equity.org.uk

Actors' Trust — Wellbeing webinars & mental health resources actorstrust.org.uk

Royal Variety Charity — Confidential support for UK entertainment professionals royalvarietycharity.org

INTERNATIONAL — SAG-AFTRA MEMBERS

Entertainment Community Fund — counselling, mental health assessment & referrals entertainmentcommunity.org

Free online support groups and stress management workshops Available to SAG-AFTRA members

MINDFULNESS & WELLBEING

NHS Every Mind Matters — guided mindfulness meditation for stress & anxiety nhs.uk/every-mind-matters

GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH

Samaritans — 24/7 emotional support, free 116 123

Mind UK — mental health information & local support mind.org.uk

NHS Mental Health Services — via GP or 111