

# Consent and Intimacy Practices

A WORKBOOK FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

By Allison St. John and Hannah Hutchison

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	CHECK-IN BEFORE REHEARSAL
2	CONSENT AND INTIMACY INTRODUCTION
4	PICKING A SHOW WITH INTIMACY IN MIND
6	MAKING A COMMUNITY AGREEMENT
8	CONSENT AND INTIMACY IN REHEARSAL
11	GETTING CLOSURE
13	APPENDIX: ANSWERS
16	REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

*Note: It is recommended that you go through the workbook yourself first and consult the Appendix for supporting information on each page, as needed.*

# Check-In Options

*It's important to check-in before you start any rehearsal process. You can do this verbally or nonverbally. Here are some different options on how you may check-in with each other before starting a rehearsal.*

How are you on a scale from 1-10?  
*Circle a number or hold up your fingers.*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Show how you are feeling with your thumbs:

Thumbs Up: Good



Thumbs Sideways: Okay



Thumbs Down: Bad



*Raise your hand and share how you are feeling or write it down in the text box below.*

*Circle any of the emotions below that describe how you are feeling.*

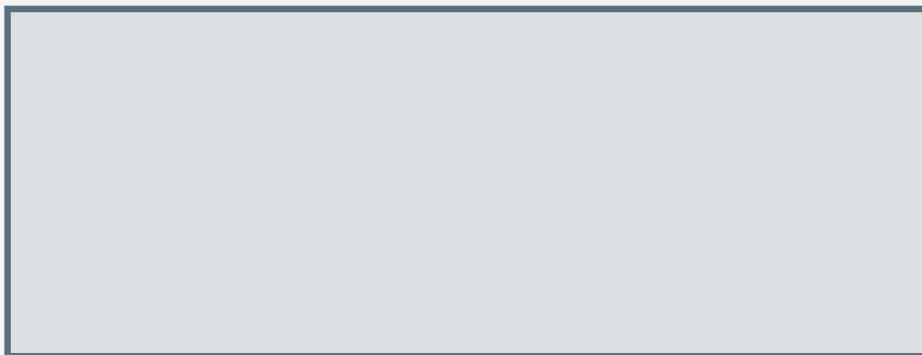
## EMOTIONS LIST

angry  
annoyed  
anxious  
ashamed  
awkward  
brave  
calm  
cheerful  
chill  
confused  
discouraged  
disgusted  
distracted  
embarrassed  
excited  
friendly  
guilty  
happy  
hopeful  
jealous  
lonely  
loved  
nervous  
offended  
scared  
thoughtful  
tired  
uncomfortable  
unsure  
worried

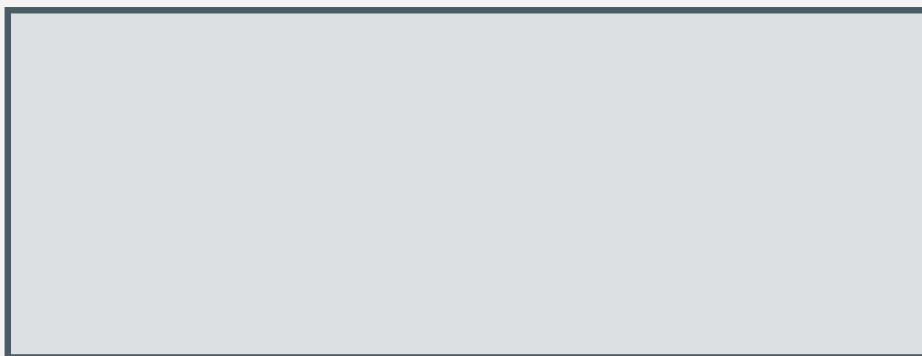
# DEFINING CONSENT

*Teachers: Give your students sufficient time to answer the following questions.*

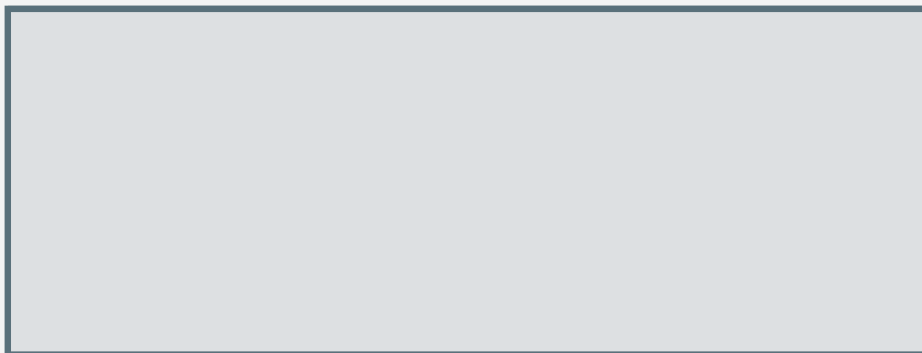
How would you define "consent"?



In what ways do you give or not give "consent"?



How would you define intimacy?



*Teachers: Explain the definition of consent and intimacy and what is required for consent to be established.*

# Consent Practices



## What is consent?

Consent is defined as, "permission for something to happen or agreement to do something." This agreement must be enthusiastic from both sides and both partners must understand that permission can be taken away at any time without blame or consequence.

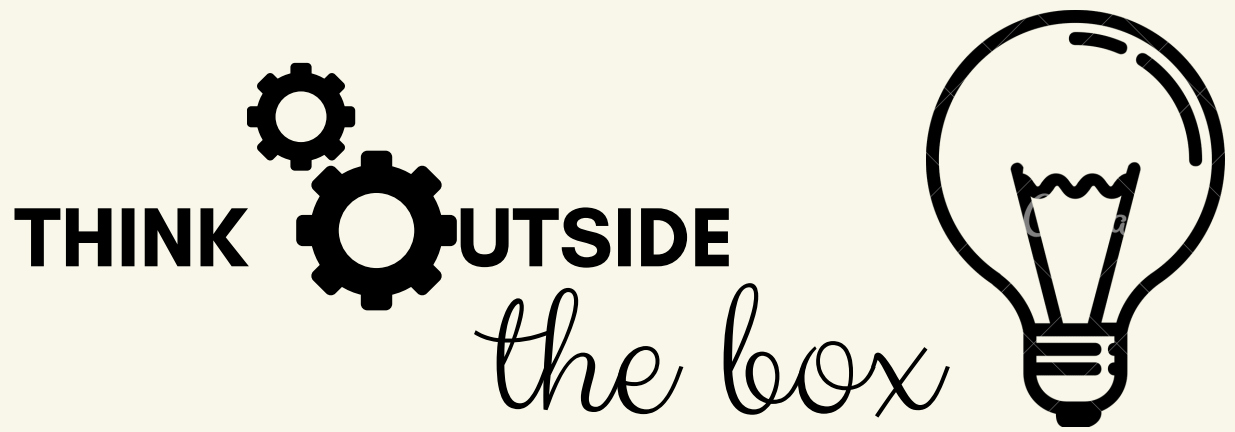


## Why is consent important in theatre?

Communicating consent is important in theatre because it helps establish trust and respect between you and your scene partner. Most importantly, it creates a safe space to limit or prevent harm towards you or your partner.

## How do we practice consent?

- **"No-Fly" Zones:** Tell your partner where they are not allowed to touch you.
- **Ask for permission:** Always ask someone "Can I touch you [here]?" before touching them.
- **Safe word/gesture:** Establish a safe word and/or gesture that communicates with your partner that you need space.
- **Permission and Touch:** After you've completed the above exercises, "Permission and Touch" is a good way to show your partner where they CAN touch you. Take your partner's hand and place it where you have given them permission to touch you. You can give as much or as little permission as you want and it must be consensual.



List all the shows you would like to do at your school. As many as you can think of!  
They can be plays, musicals, one acts, etc.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin green border, intended for students to list shows they would like to do at their school.

Show Name:

# Getting to Know Your Show

## ABOUT

(What is the show about?)

## THEMES

(What kind of themes are explored in the show?)

## AUDIENCE

(Who is your audience for this show?)

## MOVEMENT

(Is movement explored in the show?)

## STAGE COMBAT

(Is there any stage combat in the show?)

## INTIMACY

(Are there any expressions of intimacy in the show?)

## Example:

### Our Community Agreement:

#### Open Communication

Communicate your needs and let the director know if you will be late to rehearsal

#### Respect

Be kind and considerate of other's feelings and give people space if they need it

#### Feedback

Give feedback with care and honesty

#### Compassion in Conflict

Assume good intentions and talk to the other person directly

\*This is a suggestion. Your community agreement can take many forms and should be specific to the needs of your performers, designers, etc.



## How to Make a Safe Space for Your Show

What do you think a community agreement is?

*Teachers: Explain what a community agreement is.*

Why do you think a community agreement would be important?

*Teachers: Explain the importance of a community agreement and creating a safe rehearsal space.*



# BUILD YOUR OWN COMMUNITY AGREEMENT

Think about what would make you feel safe and heard in the rehearsal process.

*What would make you feel supported in a creative space? How do you want conflicts handled? How should we as performers treat each other and what sort of etiquette is necessary during rehearsals? What is important to you?*

Write all of your ideas down below.

*Teachers: Allow students sufficient brainstorming time.*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---


## Create a Community Agreement!

*Teachers: Get out a giant piece of paper or a whiteboard. Ask students to share what they have written down and write it on the whiteboard or paper. Alternatively, you can have each student come up and write down ideas they feel are important. When you are done, ask the students where they could group similar ideas together. From this, you can either come up with an acronym or make a more refined version of your community agreement and display it in your classroom.*

# CONSENT AND INTIMACY ACTIVITIES

If your show has any sort of intimacy, consider doing a consent and intimacy workshop with your students. It is suggested to do this before the rehearsal process begins. Depending on how long your rehearsal process is, you may opt to do a second workshop if needed. This workshop is important because it brings awareness to your students' boundaries by letting them learn and practice respecting each other's boundaries. It also lays a strong foundation for how your students should interact with each other. This should take place after getting-to-know-you and/or community-building exercises and it should be planned into your rehearsal schedule.


Here is a sample of activities you might want to try during your training session:



Start with "No-Fly Zones" or "Permission and Touch" from the Consent Practices page. These are great introductory activities that allow your students to vocalize their boundaries to their partner.

"Contact Improv": After the students have established boundaries with partners in previous exercises, allow them to apply those boundaries and express their bodily autonomy. Start by playing some fun music. Allow the students to explore movement with their partner without touching. Then move into "Touch Don't Touch." When the teacher says "touch," the students make contact while exploring movement, keeping each other's boundaries in mind. The teacher will alternate between "touch" and "don't touch" for a sufficient amount of time. Once students are comfortable with "Touch Don't Touch," allow them to decide when to touch or not touch each other, using the same rules. Teachers can change music and encourage students to explore space, levels, tempos, etc.

"Simon Says": Play one round of Simon Says normally. Then, play another round but this time the anyone can say "no" to Simon. Finally, play another round with the "no" rule and the "button" rule. The "button" rule allows participants to say "Can I try \_\_\_ instead?" or "Can I do something else?" or "Can I sit this one out?" Students shouldn't be afraid to say "no" if something makes them uncomfortable or to voice their concerns if they need accommodations. This breaks down power structures in the rehearsal space.



"The Yes Game": Form a wide circle with your students; you can do multiple circles if needed. In this game, Student A stands in the middle of the circle and makes eye contact with Student B (any student). Student B must reply "Yes" before Student A can take their spot and then Student B moves to the center. Continue doing this until all students are comfortable. Then, you can add a level of difficulty where once Student B says "Yes," they must make eye contact with another student and receive a "Yes" before Student A reaches their spot. This lets students practice consent and honor consent when it is given or not given.

# BEST PRACTICES

.....

Many of these best practices can be incorporated with the whole cast or just with the students that have one-on-one intimacy. If there is serious emotional or physical intimacy, hiring an intimacy director is the best option. Keep in mind that you can handle intimacy with creative solutions that may not require as intense scenes. Do not be afraid to interpret the script in a different way if it creates a healthier space for your students. In addition, consider your audience and what they would want to see.

- Discuss why there is intimacy in the show and what purpose it will have. Make it clear to your students that there is no tolerance for teasing or harassment.
- Practice the consent exercises such as “No-Fly Zones” and “Permission and Touch.” Make sure to continue doing these exercises throughout rehearsal, as what your students consent to may change.
- Choreograph the blocking for the intimate scene like you would a dance. The director should vocalize where the actors should touch each other and to what degree the touch is, i.e. “Feather, Clay, Cement” or the force behind the touch. Make sure to de-sexualize the language.
- Repeat the scene slowly at first and work up to the normal scene pace. Then repeat the scene multiple times until the actors are comfortable with the scene. The choreography should not be changed unless both students agree to it and the director has approved it.
- Students should never rehearse intimate scenes without the director present.
- Establish a safe person that your students can go to if they need to talk to someone about any issues.
- *Remember: Students can change their minds about how they feel towards emotional or physical intimacy at any time, even if they have given consent in the past.*

## CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

This is personal and does not need to be shared with your teacher or other students. This is a moment for you to reflect on what you have learned thus far.

How would you define the word “consent”? How do you practice consent and respecting boundaries in the classroom and/or in rehearsal?

On a scale from 1-10, where would you rate your comfort with staging scenes that contain emotional intimacy?  
(This might look like portraying love, trauma, embarrassment, etc.)

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

On a scale from 1-10, where would you rate your comfort with staging scenes that contain physical intimacy?  
(This might look like hand-holding, hugging, kissing, etc.)

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

# Closing Ritual

**AFTER EVERY REHEARSAL, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CLOSE OFF WHAT WE DO TO SEPARATE OUR CHARACTERS' LIVES FROM OUR OWN. THIS CLOSURE HELPS US LEAVE BEHIND ALL THE HEIGHTENED EMOTIONS WE MAY HAVE HAD IN REHEARSAL.**

---

## **HOW DO WE GET CLOSURE?**

Here's a list of recommended closing rituals that your ensemble can choose from:

- Shake it Out: Shake out your entire body and let it all go.
- Yoga Breath Cycle: Breathe in for 4, out for 8. In for 4, out for 12. In for 4, out for 16.
- Vocal Release: Scream into the void.
- Drink Water: Take a big gulp of water!
- Meditation: Spend 3 minutes sitting down with your eyes closed and focus on breathing and clearing your mind. Or, use a short guided meditation online.
- Sensory Activities: Smell a candle, pass around a squishy ball, crumple up a piece of paper, etc.

## **WHY SHOULD IT BE A RITUAL?**

Closing rituals will become more effective over time because your brain will associate the ritual or action as a transition from rehearsal to reality. This means it is important that you continue to do the same ritual after every rehearsal to establish this connection.



# Reflection

What is the most valuable thing you have learned?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What is something you want to learn more about?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



# APPENDIX

This contains answers to the questions posed in the workbook as well as some supporting information and important factors to think about. The information is coordinated with the page number and the page name.

## 1. Check-Ins:

- a. The check-in gives your students a chance to step back and see how they are feeling before entering the rehearsal process. It also gives you a chance, as the director, to see how your students are feeling and the energy they are bringing into rehearsal. If someone gives you a thumbs down, then you know that they may not be at 100% throughout the rehearsal and might need extra support. If a student repeatedly gives a thumbs down, you may need to have a conversation with them and see if there is something more serious going on. Check-ins allow you to account for your student's mental health.

## 2. Defining Consent:

- a. Definition of Consent: \*This definition is also on the Consent Practices (next) page\*  
Consent is defined as, "permission for something to happen or agreement to do something" ("Consent," Oxford Dictionary). This agreement must be enthusiastic from both sides and both must understand that permission can be taken away at any time without blame or consequence. Consent is important because it creates safe boundaries and ensures that students have the space to voice concerns and control their level of comfortability with touch and intimacy.
- b. In what ways do you give or not give consent?: Consent must be verbal and direct.  
Consent cannot be coerced. You can give consent with intimacy by verbally saying, "Yes, you may touch me (here)." Be observant of body language and whether the other person looks uncomfortable or not. To not give consent, the student can either verbally say, "I no longer consent to (this)" or they can use a safe word or gesture to step back from the scene.
- c. Definition of Intimacy: Intimacy is any intimate act that requires closeness, whether it be a friendship or a relationship ("Intimacy," Oxford Dictionary). Intimacy can be emotional/mental or physical. Emotional intimacy focuses on the emotions associated with love, trauma, sadness, etc. in any relationship. Physical intimacy focuses on physical elements like hand-holding, hugging, kissing, etc. Both forms of intimacy are important and generally go hand-in-hand.

## 3. Consent Practices:

- a. See the 5 C's of Intimacy for more guidance (Morey).

## 4. Think Outside the Box:

- a. You may use this time to either pick a show with your students or take note of what sort of shows your students are interested in doing. If you are able to collaborate with your students on show choice, that may help them feel more included and get them thinking about the full workings of putting on a production.



# APPENDIX

## 5. Getting to Know Your Show:

- a. Make sure you and your students are on the same page in what you expect from them in whatever show you choose. If you're aiming for a Broadway-level show, make sure that is clear.
- b. Be upfront about the content of your show. Tell your students at auditions that the show contains intimacy. Put information about the show on the casting call. If applicable, send a note home to the parents that the show may contain various levels of intimacy and include warnings on your show's program.
- c. Give your students context as to why intimacy is important to the show. This may help the students feel less awkward about the show's content and give them a sense of safety.

## 6. Community Agreement:

- a. Definition of Community Agreement: "A community agreement is a living document that is created collaboratively between the members of the group, outlining expectations for how the group will work together" (from "The Toolbox" by Alli St. John). The community agreement should contain anything students think might be important in their collaboration with each other. This includes, but is not limited to, communication practices, expectations in behavior, consequences for breaking the community agreement, etc.
- b. Explain the importance of a Community Agreement and creating a safe rehearsal space: The more you emphasize community and safe spaces, the more comfortable your students should feel. Hold your students accountable for their behavior—remember that your students have lives outside of rehearsal and that intimacy may affect that. Building a community agreement may help with making the rehearsal process and intimacy less awkward.

## 7. Build Your Own Community Agreement:

- a. Feel free to add anything you think might be valuable to the community agreement. This is an agreement between you and the students just as much as it is an agreement between your students.
- b. You may include consequences that relate to your school theatre program in the community agreement. This will allow students to understand that any intentional negative behavior has repercussions.
- c. Example of community agreements as acronyms:  
If you condense your community agreement, you might be able to create an acronym that your students may remember. For example, ABCS could stand for accountability, balance, communication, and SMART goals.

## 8. Consent and Intimacy Activities:

- a. These are some suggestions. There may be more that are developed, so definitely do a google search and see if there are more intimacy and consent activities. Alternatively, any other theatre game can be adapted to break down power structures or allow students to practice consent if you change some of the rules.



# APPENDIX

## 9. Best Practices:

- a. Be open to your students' creative suggestions and allow them to voice their concerns.
- b. Teaching your students how intimacy should be handled in shows will give them some idea of how intimacy in theatre should be handled in professional theatre. By implementing these practices now, you are helping your students be more comfortable in their voices and ensuring that they are more likely to voice their concerns in the future, where power structures are not as broken down as they should be. Help your students become more comfortable with saying "no."
- c. "Feather, Clay, Cement." These are different forces of touch or different types of pressure that can be applied. "Feather" is the lightest, "Clay" is medium (think of what molding clay feels like), and "Cement" is the hardest. You can add more touch levels as you see fit. The most important part is de-sexualizing the language involved in choreographing an intimate scene.
- d. View "The Kissing Protocol" by Tonia Sina for kissing choreography.
- e. Even though you are given a list of best practices and different methods of handling emotional and physical stage intimacy, it is important for you to understand that you are not a trained professional intimacy director. If there is serious intimacy involved, you need to account for that and seek out an intimacy director or make creative solutions. This is not to discourage you from having intimacy in your show. This is about your student's safety and comfortability.
- f. Encourage your students to think creatively. If one of your students is uncomfortable with what a scene is asking for in regards to intimacy, be understanding of that and work with them to make a creative solution.

## 10. Check Your Understanding:

- a. Give your students space to answer honestly. This needs to be personal for them so that way they have a chance to acknowledge their comfort levels and reflect on all the information they have learned. Feel free to complete this page as well.

## 11. Closing Ritual:

- a. Closing rituals can be individual or you can collectively decide to all have the same closing ritual.

## 12. Reflection:

- a. Feel free to reflect as well and share what you have learned with your students.

# REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Breeding, Lucinda. "Up Close & Personal: Educators Consider How Intimacy Direction Will Shape School Theater Programs." *Denton-Record Chronicle*, 25 March 2020, [https://dentonrc.com/entertainment/denton\\_time/up-close-personal-educators-consider-how-intimacy-direction-will-shape-school-theater-programs/article\\_97920faa-88e8-5a7f-8671-e85062d706f0.html](https://dentonrc.com/entertainment/denton_time/up-close-personal-educators-consider-how-intimacy-direction-will-shape-school-theater-programs/article_97920faa-88e8-5a7f-8671-e85062d706f0.html).

"Consent." Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2021, [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/consent\\_1?q=consent](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/consent_1?q=consent).

Derr, Holly L. "The Art and Craft of Intimacy Direction." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, Emerson College, 30 Jan. 2020, <http://howlround.com/art-and-craft-intimacy-direction>.

"An Interview with Intimacy Coach Siobhan Richardson." *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 180, no. 1, Fall 2019, pp. 52–56. EBSCOhost, doi:10.3138/ctr.180.009.

"Intimacy." Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2021, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/intimacy?q=intimacy>.

Morey, Erika. "The 5 Cs of Intimacy: In Conversation with Siobhan Richardson." *Theatre Art Life*, 1 April 2018, <https://www.theatreartlife.com/one-and-done/5-cs-intimacy-conversation-siobhan-richardson/>.

Noble, Adam. "Sex & Violence: Practical Approaches for Dealing with Extreme Stage Physicality." *The Fight Master*, Spring 2011, <https://earlhamtheatrearts.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/extreme-stage-physicality-adam-noble.pdf>.

Pace, Chelsea. *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy*. New York, NY: Routledge. 2020.

Pace, Chelsea and UMBC Faculty and Staff. "Theatrical Intimacy and Instructional Touch Policy." *University of Maryland, Baltimore County*, 26 August 2019, <https://theatre.umbc.edu/current-students/theatrical-intimacy-and-instructional-touch-policy/>.

"The Pillars: Rehearsal and Performance Practice." *Intimacy Directors International*, 2016, [www.TeamIDI.org](http://www.TeamIDI.org).

Sina, Tonia. "Safe Sex: A Look at the Intimacy Choreographer." *The Fight Master*, Spring 2014, pp. 12-15.

# REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- Smith, Charlene. "Staging Sexual Assault Responsibly: Lessons from The Changeling." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, 10 July 2019, <https://howlround.com/staging-sexual-assault-responsibly>.
- St. John, Allison. "Consent and Staged Intimacy in High School Theatre Programs: A Qualitative Study with Real Life High School Theater Students." Graduate Student Paper, Arizona State University, January 2021.
- St. John, Allison. "High School Consent and Intimacy Practices: Considerations for Staging Intimacy." Graduate Student Poster, Arizona State University, 2021.
- St. John, Allison. "The Toolbox." Graduate Student Paper, Arizona State University, 2020.
- Theatrical Intimacy Education*. Theatrical Intimacy Education, 2020, <https://www.theatricalintimacyed.com/>.

Created with Canva. 1st Ed., 23 April 2021.