

## **Theatrical Intimacy and Instructional Touch Policy**

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County Department of Theatre adopts the following Best Practices in alignment evolving with industry best practices and standards for theatre training.

**Instructional Touch** is any physical contact made between instructor and student. Instructional Touch best practices are also be encouraged between students. Examples of Instructional Touch include:

- Adjusting alignment/positioning
- Bringing awareness to physical use
- Partnering for demonstrations
- Correcting actor placement in space
- Adjusting Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Costume Fittings

### **Instructional Touch Best Practices**

- Ask before you touch
  - Be specific about the contact
    - Where
    - For what purpose
  - Try Open Questions
    - “Does that work for you?”
    - “How would you feel about \_\_\_\_\_?”
    - “Would you be open to \_\_\_\_\_?”
  - Be prepared for “no”
    - Offer alternatives
      - Visualization
      - Demonstrating on yourself
      - Using their own hands
      - Using Props
      - Careful Observation and Note-taking
- Establish Boundaries
  - Use a physical boundary establishment method such as The Boundary Practice (see appendix 1).
  - Integrate The Button
    - In any exercise, a participant says “Button” if they need to briefly hold to clarify a boundary.
    - When a participant calls “Button”, the participant offers a way to continue working that works for their boundaries
  - Use Placeholders (such as palm-to-palm or high-five, etc) when someone needs more time

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Please note: Instructional Touch is different from touch made in situations where the touch is made in an attempt to prevent or minimize injury in an emergency. In those situations, all participants should act immediately to reduce harm or risk in accordance with their safety training. Check-in afterward regarding touch if necessary.

**Theatrical Intimacy** is the simulation of intimate physical acts for theatrical purposes. Examples of Theatrical Intimacy include:

- Kissing
- Embraces
- Sexual innuendo
- Revealing Clothing
- Nudity or partial nudity (including on-stage costume changes)
- Simulated intercourse

Theatrical Intimacy may also include heightened imaginative sexual or intimate circumstances for a character.

### **Theatrical Intimacy Best Practices**

In addition to the Instructional Touch Best Practices, Theatrical Intimacy requires the following:

- Practice a consent-based process
  - Use an Audition Disclosure form to allow actors to opt-in or out of theatrical intimacy.
  - Use The Button.
- Establish Boundaries
  - Use the Boundary Practice exercise.
  - A third party such as Stage Management must always be present for the staging of intimacy.
  - Productions with Intimacy should have a no-cell phone policy in rehearsal and backstage for all members of the production.
  - Directors and choreographers should never step in to stage intimate moments or have any physical contact with the actors during the staging or rehearsal process of intimacy.
- Desexualize the Process
  - Use non-sexual language for staging the intimacy or discussing it with the actors.
  - If you need to talk about the character's actions, use character names.
  - Refrain from making sexual jokes, innuendo, or comments.
  - Offer De-Role-ing (differentiating oneself from the character).
- Choreography
  - All theatrical intimacy, regardless of how simple or straight-forward it might be, must be choreographed.
  - Choreography must be notated by performers and stage management.
    - Notation should be written, but can also be in the form of an audio recording.  
Video recordings of intimacy should not be created for actor privacy.
  - Performers must not deviate from choreography.

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- If a performer's boundaries change that alters the choreography, they should notify the instructor and/or choreographer as soon as possible so modifications can be made.
- In Production, Directors must discuss any changes to choreography with the choreographer and may not make changes themselves.
- Placeholders should be used until choreography is set.
- Placeholders may be used anytime after choreography is set except during performances.

### **Costume Shop Best Practices**

When an actor is cast in a department production, they should come to their scheduled fitting prepared to participate in the fitting process at that time.

Fittings involve:

- Removal of street clothes down to undergarments (Actors are responsible for wearing opaque, neutral-tone, full-coverage undergarments to all fittings)
- The fitting of garments close to the body
- Physical touch to adjust fit to designer specification
- Interaction, including physical touch, by various personnel including the draper, designer, and assistant designer

Students and Shop Personnel have the following tools in a fitting:

- Saying "Button"
- Request two-minute break
- Request a reduction in the number of people in the room
- Request that the door be open or closed
- Request to be fitted in an open or closed area of the shop
- Request help or additional privacy for dressing or undressing
- Request that the appropriate faculty or staff member makes the adjustments, rather than a student designer or draper.
- Ask questions for clarification

The measuring process for costume fittings requires accuracy. This process involves physical contact with the measuring tape and minimal touch from the measurer. Students and Shop Personnel have the same tools available during measurements as above.

### **Communication Best Practices**

In production, if you have a concern regarding theatrical intimacy or instructional touch, speak with your instructor or another faculty or staff member associated with the production (i.e.: Director, Choreographer, Voice Director, Assistant Production Manager/Stage Management Coordinator, Production Manager, or Department Chair).

In non-production coursework, address your concerns to the instructor or to the Department Chair.

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**Instructional Touch and Theatrical Intimacy Policy: Syllabus Language**

The Theatre Department at UMBC is dedicated to integrating consent-based practices into all classroom and production environments. In all Theatre Department related activities, all participants are expected to abide by the Instructional Touch and Theatrical Intimacy Best Practices. All participants in UMBC Theatre activities are expected to communicate their boundaries, ask before they touch, and maintain a professional working environment. The full policy detailing the Best Practices is available on the department website.

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