



CHALLENGE ONE: GROUP AGREEMENTS

WHAT'S THE CHALLENGE?

We need to establish a workshop space that celebrates everyone as individuals and provides room for young people to explore themselves, but does not “single out” or draw attention to young people who are LGBTQIA+ or are maybe experimenting with their identity.

APPROACHES/TOOLS TO TRY IN SESSIONS

1 Names and pronouns plus...

Regularly (once or twice per session) ask everyone in the room (including adults) to share their names and invite them to share pronouns if they are comfortable. By doing this you show you know that the ways we refer to ourselves are not fixed, and that that's OK!

Why we like it:

This exercise enables young people to be in charge of whether they're known by a nickname, to correct the pronunciations of their name, and to check-in with themselves about their pronouns. These may be different to what has been filled out on a form. It's also great access for those in the room with slower processing speeds, as it helps to normalise asking multiple times what somebody's name is.

TIPS:

Ask the group to tell everyone their name, pronouns plus... The 'plus' could be to answer a check-in or reflective question, a movement, a sound or gesture. You could add a 'show and tell' element by asking young people to bring in an object that means something to them. The 'plus' shifts focus away from the names and pronouns, and can create connections or uncover shared likes/dislikes between young people.

2 Group Agreements – what do you expect from me, what do I expect from you, what do we expect from each other?

Group agreements are a good way to have a conversation about creating a space that celebrates multiple identities, uplifts and includes those who are exploring who they are. There are many ways of facilitating and establishing a group agreement, but we think it is important that the young people and leaders come up with it together.

One way to frame this conversation is for the leader to begin by asking the young people: “What do you need from me?” before asking them “what do you think I need from you?” and then “what do we need from everyone?”

Why we like it:

This framing places the agency with the young people from the start, and underlines that everyone in the room has a responsibility as part of the team. It can be particularly helpful at the start of a rehearsal process. If specific LGBTQIA+ inclusion doesn't naturally come up, you can prompt by modelling an example, for example: “I need everyone to feel that the people in this room care that everyone is referred to as they would like to be”.

TIPS:

If the agreement is getting too complicated and wordy, get the young people to summarise the top five key ideas into statements that start 'We will...'

You may wish to get everyone in the room to sign the agreement, and to revisit it regularly.





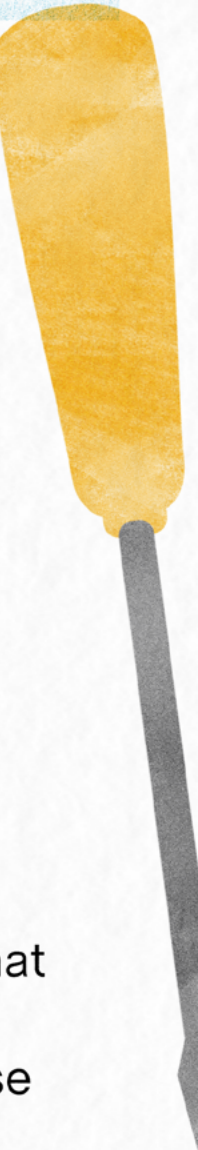
CHALLENGE TWO: CASTING

WHAT'S THE CHALLENGE?

How do we enable young people to play roles that affirm their identity or expand their idea of who they could play? If we are including LGBTQIA+ coded roles or storylines, how do we ensure we are not recreating harmful stereotypes surrounding queer characters (the LGBTQIA+ character as the villain, ending up alone or unhappy etc.)?

LGBTQIA+ CASTING TOP TIPS:

- ⬡ If you're holding auditions, enable young people to "sign up" for whichever role they'd like to OR make a rule that everyone auditions for all roles. Allow young people to audition for whichever roles they would like to.
- ⬡ Try multiple options for roles in the rehearsal process – if you're constantly gender-swapping roles it will become a normal part of how you make work.
- ⬡ Consider if and when gender is essential to the role. Have this conversation with the young people and use it as an opportunity to deepen your understanding of the character.
- ⬡ Think about how you describe the roles you're casting for – can you describe them by character traits rather than using gendered language (male/female/boy/girl)?
Consider what's 'essential' to the character. For example, Peter Pan: courageous, brave, self-centred, honest.
- ⬡ Think about ways your work can subvert gender stereotypes. Have this conversation with the young people.
- ⬡ Can you make all your casting gender blind?
- ⬡ Devise roles with the young people so they have more agency over designing the characters they'll play.
- ⬡ If you have a young person who wants to play a role that subverts the sex they are/were assigned and you're worried about them being singled out, can you increase gender flipping across the casting?
Remember: we are all playing a character here – sometimes we are casting for young people to be dragons, robots, farm animals, or a box of fruit and vegetables. It's not real to begin with, so why limit yourself?





CHALLENGE THREE: NAMES IN PROGRAMMES

WHAT'S THE CHALLENGE?

It is possible that young people in our workshops might be known by a different name. This could be anything from a nickname, to a single letter, to a totally different name to their "government" or "given" name. Whilst they might feel safe to use this name in sessions, this might not be a name they are using freely outside of our space. This can cause a real challenge when it comes to printing programmes or cast-lists for shows.

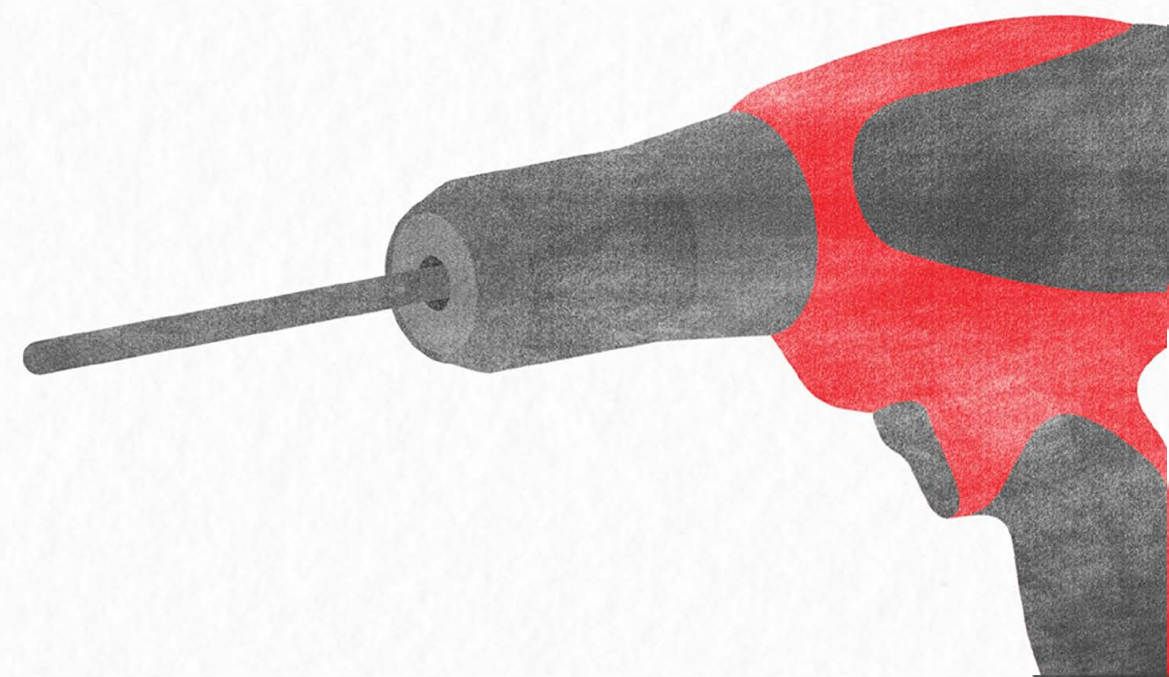
IN THIS SITUATION WE RECOMMEND YOU:

- Consider whether you need to print cast lists/programmes at all! The decision not to print programmes could be for environmental reasons, as much as LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Have this conversation with the young people.
- If you'd still like to do them, could you use character names only?

EXTENSION:

If you're going to do programmes, can you add names and pronouns of cast, crew and staff, along with a note about why this is important? Again, have a conversation with your young people first.

- If you want to put names on them, show a proof copy to the young people well in advance of the show. If there are any young people who are using an alternative name in sessions to outside, catch them before/after the session and double-check with them what they will be known as. Make a note of this information and ensure that colleagues are also aware.
- Remember – mistakes happen but leave enough time (i.e. starting the programmes conversation early) and put a system in place to try and ensure that young people are as safe as possible.





CHALLENGE FOUR: PARENT/CARER COMPLAINTS

WHAT'S THE CHALLENGE?

This challenge area is our most broad – it's hard to predict all the different types of negative or clumsily-phrased feedback we could receive as youth theatre leaders.

HERE ARE TWO COMMON COMPLAINT AREAS AND HOW TO RESPOND TO THEM:

1 Complaint: it's not appropriate for young people to share their pronouns in sessions.

Response: as an organisation we share pronouns as a way of showing respect for each other. No young people are ever forced to share, but we do give it as an offer and our staff model by sharing their pronouns too.

2 Complaint: you shouldn't be talking about LGBTQIA+ themes or stories with young people.

Response: our organisation wants to reflect the diverse, technicolour world we live in. It would be strange not to include LGBTQIA+ stories!

TIPS:

⬡ If you are a queer-identified youth theatre leader, seek support from ally colleagues where possible when dealing with parent/caregiver complaints around LGBTQIA+ topics. You can also reference our self-care manifesto!

⬡ If you are a youth theatre, consider having a proactive conversation about the possibility of parent/carer complaints with your organisation. If they have an equity, diversity and inclusion policy then there should be a clear procedure for dealing with these complaints that will kick in to support you.

⬡ If you are a non-queer youth theatre leader, consider ways you can show up for and support the LGBTQIA+ community by supporting your queer colleagues and young people.

⬡ Consider approaching these conversations as pragmatically as possible. You do not have to single-handedly change somebody's mind about the LGBTQIA+ community, but you should be able to communicate the policy of the organisation or group you are running.

