

Department of Drama

Consent and Boundaries regarding Physical Touch

We at the Department of Drama recognize it is important to establish clear parameters around consent and boundaries when it comes to “physical touch” in the context of creative practice and collaboration. When these considerations are well defined and respected, then everyone can participate in a safe environment without inhibition.

It is important to recognize that touch is a crucial creative and pedagogical tool. Touch may be required in the classroom, rehearsal hall or in costume fittings. Situations where physical touch may be anticipated include but are not necessarily limited to: during the demonstration and practice of physical exercises related to voice, movement (including stage combat); in the blocking and execution of scene work; and in the context of a costume fitting.

Consent must always be voluntary, explicit (verbal), and integrated into one’s practice both in the classroom, and during rehearsals that may be conducted outside of class time.

In the context of physical touch, we have adapted the following definition of consent from Planned Parenthood’s acronym FRIES:

Freely – no coercion and provided verbally

Reversible – anyone can change their mind at anytime

Informed – you only consent to something that you have full knowledge about

Enthusiastic – only do the things you want to do, not things you feel you must do

Specific – that you are only saying yes to what you have agreed upon regarding physical touch

Also, refer to the University of Saskatchewan’s document on sexual violence, prevention, and response for a similar definition of consent:

<https://students.usask.ca/essentials/safety/sexual-assault.php#Sexualviolence>

It is very important in the context of creative practice that you check in with yourself about what your personal boundaries are with respect to the following:

Physical – how and where you want to be touched and where your partner(s) may wish to be touch

Intellectual – you are entitled to your own thoughts and opinions as are others

Emotional – you are entitled to know how you feel in any given situation, as are others

It is crucial that one states what their boundaries are in the context of creative practice because: no one can read another person’s thoughts; respectful interaction is crucial to developing healthy and reciprocal working relationships; and stating boundaries protects and develops one’s own self esteem.

In any situation – and certainly in the context of creative practice – one must always feel they can freely express to their peers, mentors, and professors where or how they may, or may not, wish to be touched.

If you encounter a situation where you have crossed a boundary it is always best to repair the situation as quickly as possible. Here are some steps you may wish to take:

- Do not get defensive or try to justify what you have done
- Apologize and accept responsibility
- Empathize with the individual
- Offer up a solution and find a point of closure

If you feel your boundaries have been crossed and you cannot rectify the situation the following course of action is available to you:

- First reach out to your professor. If that option is unavailable, then...
- Reach out to the Head of the Department of Drama. If that option is unavailable, then...
- Reach out to the Associate Dean, Student Affairs in the College of Arts and Science