



## **Guidance on Physical Contact Between Students in Scenes**

In our sessions, physical connection between students can be an important part of storytelling. However, to maintain a safe, respectful, and professional environment, we have clear boundaries regarding physical contact of an intimate or sexual nature in classwork and scene study.

### **Why These Boundaries Are in Place**

- *To Prioritise Safety and Consent*  
Without professional intimacy direction and/or fight direction, we cannot guarantee the necessary level of physical and emotional safety for work involving intimate or violent acts.
- *Safety and Professionalism Come First*  
Just as we would not rehearse a fight without a qualified fight director, we do not rehearse or perform intimate physical acts without proper support.
- *To Encourage Creative Solutions*  
Theatrical storytelling offers many expressive tools (gesture, proximity, breath, stillness, blocking, abstraction, stylisation) to suggest intimacy or violence effectively without direct contact or explicit enactment.
- *Because This Is a Scene Sharing, Not a Production*  
The work presented is a scene sharing for invited guests only, focused on learning and process rather than a public or fully staged production, and, as such, does not have the demands of a fully-fledged public performance.

This approach allows us to explore complex and meaningful material while keeping a safe and inclusive environment for all visiting students.

### **What Is Allowed**

1. Physical Contact Appropriate to the Context  
Examples include situational comedy, social status/workplace relationships, family dynamics, camaraderie, and friendship:
  - *Supportive touch*  
Examples: handholding, hugging, lifting, high-five, hand on shoulder or face.
  - *Assertive touch*  
Examples: restraint, holding someone back, escorting offstage.  
*Important:* This type of touch must avoid medium to high levels of force (since we don't have fight direction). All participants should receive clear instructions and give informed consent. The work should always be guided by mutual respect.
  - *Workplace/status-based touch*  
Many of Shakespeare's plays include physical actions related to social hierarchy (e.g., servants and masters, commanders and soldiers). These may involve comedic routines or camaraderie. When exploring these, discuss power dynamics, give clear instructions, and ensure consent.

2. Stylised Physical Contact or Abstract Portrayal of Intimacy

Such techniques can only imply intimacy in a stylised manner. In order to achieve this, please use placeholders (a verbal way to mark where the action takes place in the scene) more info on that further down in this document.

3. Non-Contact Forms of Portrayal

Contact is not always necessary. Intimate or violent intention can be portrayed by creative blocking, eye contact, proximity, spatial awareness, embodiment of emotion and tension levels.

### **What Is Not Allowed**

1. Any intimacy requiring an intimacy director or wellbeing professional:
  - Mouth-to-mouth kissing or kissing on body or hands or other mouth based intimate actions such as licking.
  - Any simulated sexual action or touching of private areas.
  - Simulated sexual sounds or orgasms.
  - Nudity or implied nudity.
  - Any abstract, stylised, or naturalistic performance of sexual assault.
2. Naturalistic performance of fights or high-risk violence:
  - Battles, brawls, torture, mutilation, sexual assault.
  - Any other action that would normally require a fight director or stage combat teacher which Higher Education cannot provide.

### **Steps for Safely Staging Intimacy or Low-Level Violence in Class**

#### **Preparation**

- Provide students involved in an intimate scene with advance notice of when you plan to review that moment with them. This notice should be given no later than one session in advance.
- Check if they would like to look at the moment with the whole cohort present or separately. If the latter, please divide the room so you can have space to walk through the guidelines below. Please note we cannot provide a separate room.

#### **1. Start with the Context**

- Understand why the intimacy or violence exists and how it serves the characters or story.

#### **2. Articulate Your Vision**

- Explain what you'd like the actors to do and why.
- Share how you imagine the scene and offer alternatives.
- Connect the moment back to character, relationship, or story arc.

### **3. Use Placeholders First** (if using touch)

- Before adding touch, mark the moment with a stand-in.
- Examples: say "Romeo kisses" or "Macbeth attacks".
- This helps students explore the beats of the scene before physical contact.

### **4. Pause and Discuss the Moment**

- Ask: *What's the purpose of this action? Do we need contact? Can we stage it differently?*

### **5. Check Boundaries**

- Have students show where touch is okay and how strong it can be (light, medium, strong).
- Ask about injuries or sensitive areas.
- Ensure specific informed consent for each moment.

### **6. Stage the Moment Together**

- Replace placeholders with safe, stylised choices (gesture, abstraction, minimal contact).
- Maintain open communication and frequent check-ins.

## **Foster Choice and Empowerment in the Ensemble**

Invite students to share feelings and needs as actors and as people. If anyone feels uneasy, tired, or needs a break, pause and discuss. Students can change or withdraw consent at any time.

## **Trauma-Sensitive Classroom**

Non-contact or abstract staging can still be triggering. To create a trauma-sensitive environment:

- Communicate clearly.
- Provide students agency to stop action if needed.
- Allow time for check-ins and debriefs.
- Encourage agency, choice, and creativity.
- Reinforce that *"trying is not agreeing"* and boundaries can change.

This document is not exhaustive, other scenarios may appear that have not been fully covered. If you have any questions on the above or experience any concerns or queries from students when teaching that you can't answer or are unsure on, please contact Josiah O'Brien or Craig Ritchie.