



## **Resources For Youth Theatres**

### **Group Contracts**

A drafting of a group contract allows for open discussion among leaders and members regarding what they can expect from each other and will indicate what kinds of behaviour / attitudes are acceptable / unacceptable.

Youth theatres may decide to give over a workshop session to creating a contract or this may involve an extra session. It is worth the time as it will help ensure the smooth functioning of the group. The session could also be a good opportunity to explain the aims of the youth theatre to the group and maybe introduce the adults involved in the youth theatre to new members. The completed contract should be given to primary carers to inform them of the terms and conditions of membership or participation in an event. It is a good idea for members to sign copy of it.

### **Role of the Leader / Facilitator**

The leader who facilitates the drafting of a group contract has an important role. They must achieve a balance between allowing the members to have as much input as possible while ensuring that the policies and procedures of the youth theatre are followed. This may mean raising issues that members don't find important or necessary (or in some cases embarrassing!) and making a case for their inclusion. For example, you may have to talk about how couples should behave during youth theatre activities which may cause a few blushes!

### **Why use... a group contract?**

A group contract allows the youth theatre to:

- Reduce the possibility of any situation of bullying /conflict /abuse arising.
- Clearly define rules of behaviour among the young people.
- Provide its members with a clear sense of their responsibility.
- Gain a greater understanding of the expectations of the members.
- Discuss roles and responsibilities with young people.
- Inform parents /guardians of the terms and conditions of membership or participation in an event.
- Improve the service they provide to their members.

The young person can:

- Contribute to how the youth theatre operates and have their opinions heard.
- Get a sense of what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and what the penalties are for disruptive behaviour.
- Voice what they expect from the youth theatre.

- Voice any concerns they may have.
- Increase their understanding of what the youth theatre is about and how it works. This is especially important for new members.

The Parent/Guardian can:

- See what is expected of their young person
- Understand the rationale behind any disciplinary action taken.
- Increase their understanding of the youth theatre's ethos and how it operates.

## Drafting the Group Contract

It is a good idea to find ways of animating the discussions around the contract. Exercises such as the continuum of opinion\* (also known as a walking debate) are useful ways of getting participants on their feet and engaging them in a way that may not happen in a sit-down discussion. It also means that everyone has a chance to express an opinion rather than the few who have the strongest opinions or feel most confident about expressing them.

As a next step, the facilitator could divide the group and ask the smaller groups to come up with their own contract. You could give them headings or move around the groups giving them things to think about as you go and steering them towards elements they haven't considered.

The kind of questions/points you could raise with them include:

- How can the group make new people feel welcome?
- How do members contribute to a successful youth theatre?
- What are the ingredients of a good youth theatre?
- What would make you feel uncomfortable during a youth theatre workshop?
- What should the role of the youth theatre leader be?
- How should members behave so that everything runs smoothly?
- If a member does not behave in this way, what should happen?
- How can good behaviour be rewarded?
- How can parents get involved?
- How should we deal with bullying?

When the group comes back together, you can begin to bring all the points together to create the contract. This is where you should raise points that haven't come up yet but you feel are important. Such points could include bullying, who to talk to if they have an issue and dealing with disruptive behaviour.

## Using Group Contracts

- Any contract for young people should be clearly displayed whenever the group meets.
- Signed contracts can be used to support discussions regarding disciplinary actions and conflict.
- The youth theatre may decide to keep the same group contract for a number of years but it is important that each new intake of members are not only made aware of it but also have a forum to discuss it.
- Have a mechanism and stated time-frame for reviewing /updating the contract.

## While you have their attention...

This session can also be used as an opportunity to introduce policies such as the Welfare /Child Protection Policy and procedures such as how to make a complaint. You can also inform them about the best person to approach should they have a concern or feel the need to talk to someone. You could also inform the group of the youth theatre's policy on informing and involving parents. It would be a good idea to have the youth theatre's Designated Welfare Person present so they can make themselves known to the group.

### \* **Continuum of opinion**

Allocate one side of the room to 'strongly agree', the opposite corner to 'strongly disagree' and the middle of the room to 'not sure'. Tell the group you will be reading out statements and they will place themselves in the room according to whether they agree, disagree or aren't sure about the statement read out. Once they have placed themselves, seek volunteers from a range of opinions to explain their decision. Tell participants they are free to move should they change their opinion during the discussion.

Taken from Youth Theatre Ireland's Welfare and Child Protection Guidelines for Youth Theatres (2014)