

# HTI Best Practices Guideline: Intimacy and Physical Touch on Stage

|                                                         |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction.....                                       | 2  |
| Scope.....                                              | 2  |
| Purpose.....                                            | 2  |
| Definitions.....                                        | 2  |
| Inclusivity.....                                        | 3  |
| Reporting Structure.....                                | 4  |
| Consent.....                                            | 4  |
| Best Practices for Intimacy.....                        | 5  |
| Auditions.....                                          | 5  |
| Rehearsals.....                                         | 5  |
| Tech Week.....                                          | 6  |
| Dress Rehearsal & Performances.....                     | 7  |
| Intimacy Calls.....                                     | 7  |
| Best Practices for Stage Fighting/    Stage Combat..... | 7  |
| Additional Considerations.....                          | 9  |
| Minors and Vulnerable Persons.....                      | 9  |
| Photography.....                                        | 9  |
| Language.....                                           | 10 |
| Content Warnings.....                                   | 10 |
| References.....                                         | 10 |
| Appendix A: For Performers.....                         | 12 |
| Best Practices.....                                     | 12 |
| Appendix B: Costuming/Wardrobe.....                     | 14 |
| Expectations of Actors.....                             | 14 |
| Best Practices during Costuming.....                    | 14 |

# Introduction

Hamilton Theatre Inc. (HTI) is committed to providing a place where performers and crew members have the opportunity to put on shows in our space while feeling safe and respected by everyone involved in a production. HTI does not tolerate the violation of people's individual boundaries in the course of any mainstage productions or other events held by HTI.

## Scope

This guideline applies to all productions and members of productions, including cast members, crew members, Board members, and all other members to HTI. HTI will, where appropriate, share this guideline with external stakeholders who are hosting events at the HTI venue space, including participants in Hamilton Fringe Festival and other events held at HTI.

## Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to provide a set of best practices for all productions at HTI to ensure the safety and comfort of all production members of the HTI community when participating in an event put on by HTI. The objectives of this guideline are to:

1. To prioritize the safety, comfort, and well-being of all participants in HTI productions.
2. To put protocols in place to safeguard participants from potential harassment, misconduct, or abuse (whether intentional or unintentional) when dealing with intimacy or physical touch on stage.
3. To encourage a clear reporting structure for all HTI members and production participants.
4. To enrich and diversify thoughtful conversations about consent, intimacy, gender, and sexuality on stage.
5. To promote consideration at HTI of alternate possibilities regarding the use of physical touch and intimacy on stage, where appropriate.
6. To prepare community members who are acting, directing, producing, stage managing and taking technical roles to approach intimate work with knowledge, confidence, and empowerment.
7. To equip cast and crew members with professional language and tools for open communication when working on productions, including the use of non-exclusionary terms.
8. To educate HTI community members about consent, and uplift clear processes of consent when working with sensitive material.

## Definitions

| Term | Definition |
|------|------------|
|------|------------|

|                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Physical touch</b>                   | Any physical contact between performers in the context of performing a scene or musical number. Physical touch can be spontaneous or staged/choreographed. Physical touch can include non-romantic and non-sexual forms of touch, including hugging, leaning on someone, high-fiving, or shaking hands.                                          |
| <b>Intimacy</b>                         | Physical contact between performers that is more romantic or sexual in nature. Intimacy should only be planned or choreographed. Examples of intimacy can include holding hands, kissing on the lips, face, hands, or other body parts, groping, or simulated sexual acts.                                                                       |
| <b>Stage Combat/<br/>Stage Fighting</b> | Simulated physical violence of any kind. This can include fist fighting, slapping/hitting/kicking, sword-fighting, or grabbing.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Production members</b>               | Any person working on a production at HTI including, but not limited to, cast members, directors, choreographers, music directors, producers, stage managers, assistant stage managers, lighting and sound operators, and other crew members or volunteers.                                                                                      |
| <b>Performers</b>                       | Anyone performing on stage during a production. This includes lead roles, ensemble members, and featured roles. This does not include members of the crew, such as directors, choreographers, producers, music directors, or stage managers, unless otherwise specified.                                                                         |
| <b>Minors or vulnerable persons</b>     | Any person who is under the age of 18 and/or a person who, because of his or her age, a disability or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, is in a position of dependency on others; or is otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by a person in a position of trust or authority towards them. |

## Inclusivity

HTI is an affirming, safe, and welcoming space for all community members, and expects that all production teams and members will uphold this while working on productions at the theatre. When working on intimate material as part of a production, be mindful of making assumptions over someone's experiences, comfort levels, knowledge, gender, sexuality, or body. It is not appropriate to ask or require performers to disclose any of these details. **Do not assume that:**

- You accurately know someone's gender identity, sexuality, or physical ability based on appearances.
- Everyone has experience of any intimate behaviours or attractions in their personal life.
- Someone's comfort levels, based on their general personality, previous behaviours, performing history, or any other factors besides their explicit consent.
- Everyone has knowledge about certain sex acts or parts of the body.

Anyone who does not abide by the values of HTI, as they pertain to inclusivity and safety, will not be permitted to continue working on the production.

## Reporting Structure

Any cast or crew members of a production being held by HTI should report any instances of discomfort regarding physical touch or intimacy directly to the [Board of Directors, via the Second Vice Chair of the Board](#) or any member of the Board that they are comfortable disclosing concerns to. If they feel comfortable doing so, HTI encourages direct communication between cast members and directors as it pertains to personal comfort and boundaries in stage direction so that alternate directions can be given.

## Consent

For the purposes of standardizing the understanding of consent upheld by HTI, this document defines consent using the FRIES acronym (originating from Planned Parenthood):

Consent must be:

- **Freely Given:** Performing intimacy with someone is a decision that should be made without pressure, force, or manipulation. Examples where consent is not being freely given include:
  - “If you don’t do the kiss, we might have to cast someone else.”
  - “The scene isn’t working, really get close to one another to sell it.”
  - “The costume with the long pants looks weird, everyone else is just doing it in the shorts and they’re fine, can’t you just wear them?”
- **Reversible:** Anyone can change their mind about what they want to do, at any time. Even if they’ve done it before or are in the middle of performing intimacy. Saying yes to one thing doesn’t mean they’ve said yes to others.
  - Just because a performer is open to physical touch by another cast member in the first scene doesn’t mean they’re happy to be touched in every scene.
  - Just because a performer engaged in staged intimacy in a previous production doesn’t mean they’ll be happy to engage in this in all productions.
  - A performer may say they are happy to perform a kiss and then change their mind when it comes to trying it.
- **Informed:** Be honest and communicate what is going to happen. Let performers know beforehand when a rehearsal is going to include intimacy. Try to give performers as much notice as possible when they will be involved in scene that has planned physical touch. Let performers know whether a run-through will include the intimacy/physical touch or not. Perhaps a quick run which is mainly for lines would not require having intimacy/physical contact and the performers may be unclear whether they should be performing the intimacy/touch.

- **Enthusiastic/Engaged/Embodied:** Enthusiastic consent is the notion that performers should be completely happy with performing an action for it to be true consent. Be prepared to hear “no” as a response to a request, as it pertains to physical touch and intimacy, as it is an equally valid response to “yes”.
- **Specific:** There should be no uncertainties over the physical choreography or stage direction. Just because a performer has agreed to engage in certain forms of physical touch does not mean that they are open to all forms of physical touch or intimacy. Saying “those two characters should go and be intimate with each other on the sofa” or “on that line, touch them” is not clear enough, and can mean different things to different people, therefore someone may not be able to consent because they don’t know what they’re consenting to.

## Best Practices for Intimacy

### Auditions

**There should not be any intimacy or physical touch in an audition.** If there are going to be callback auditions, which may contain an element of checking “chemistry” between performers, it should be made explicit that **this will not include intimacy or physical touch** (e.g. kissing, intense physical touch). If there is intimacy required of a role, that should be made apparent when performers audition. Directors should ensure performers are aware of both “essential” requirements of the role (e.g. kissing is explicitly directed in the script) and “preferable” factors (i.e. the director’s vision and preference but isn’t needed). Where possible, the Board of Directors will include any known physical touch or intimacy from a script when posting roles for auditions.

Performers can then be asked if there are any roles that they are not interested in playing, allowing them to opt out. They can also specify if they are interested but wouldn’t be comfortable with specific content. This could be done via a short form to fill out and give in to the audition panel, to avoid students having to discuss this if they don’t want to or verbally in auditions or callbacks where it is known that a character will engage in physical touch or intimacy. This information should be confidential to the audition panel.

Those who are casting should be clear, honest, direct and upfront about any intimacy in the show, ready to provide all the information that they can, respectful of the performers, and very aware of the power dynamics that come from them deciding who gets a role and who doesn’t.

### Rehearsals

To help support directors and/or choreographers who have physical touch or intimacy blocked or choreographed into their production, below are some best practices for rehearsals.

- Give your performers the opportunity to speak to you about their personal boundaries and comfort levels as it relates to physical touch or intimacy. Consider bringing up your ideas for

physical touch in the show at an early rehearsal or read-through and offer to discuss individual needs with performers privately to avoid them feeling pressured not to say anything.

- Always ask before initiating or directing touch between cast or crew members, including members of the production team, such as the director or choreographer. Try to use open questions like “how would you feel about \_\_\_\_” or “would you be open to \_\_\_\_” to gauge comfort.
- Determine if the physical touch or intimacy, even when explicitly written in the stage directions, is necessary for conveying the message of that scene. Be open to exploring other options that better suit the comfort of your cast members.
- Decide whether you need to, or want to, perform the intimacy/physical touch during a rehearsal, and communicate this clearly with your cast members. Consider whether it is necessary for the end goal of having a productive rehearsal, as well as the relative comfort of the performers (e.g., if the performer is sick, they may not feel comfortable engaging in the touch that day).
- Be mindful of who is in the room. Check in with whoever is performing the intimacy or physical touch, and ensure they are comfortable performing this in front of the rest of the production members. Remind the company to be respectful and professional, to avoid whispering, and not to take photos or videos of the scene. On the other hand, try to ensure that a neutral third party (like a stage manager) is present when staging intimacy or more intense physical touch.
- Production teams can expect that a member of the Board of Directors could attend a rehearsal of any kind, and should attend any rehearsal where intimacy is being staged or choreographed.
- Aim to use character names when talking about intimate interactions between characters, as opposed to using the performers’ names. This can help to de-sexualize and take potential awkwardness out of the situation.
- Consider practicing de-rolling, which is a ritual/action/exercise that can aid the Performer to come out of character and acknowledge that the intimate situation performed on stage was not real.
- Refrain from making unnecessary jokes or innuendos about any intimate scenes onstage. Maintain professionalism whenever choreographing or staging scenes that include intimacy.
- Check in with performers’ emotional state that day and how they’re feeling. Check in about the performers’ physical boundaries that day and see if there are any changes.
- Ensure that everyone is clear and confident with that choreography and that they’re comfortable with performing it during the scene or run-through. Be prepared to provide alternatives if performers are not comfortable with the planned staging/choreography.

## Tech Week

To help support directors and/or choreographers who have physical touch or intimacy blocked or choreographed into their production, below are some best practices for tech week runs.

- Follow the above guidelines regarding working on intimacy and physical touch during rehearsals.
- Technical crew, including assistant stage managers, lighting and sound operators, and set building/design crew, must be made aware of what content they will be watching and when it is happening.
- Consider that performing intimacy may feel different for the performers with additional technical crew present, under the stage lights, on a complete set, in costume, etc. Ensure you are prepping and debriefing with cast members as appropriate during this time.
- Signage should be applied to doors to the stage and auditorium so that only essential personnel are present in the space. For example: Closed Rehearsal in progress, please do not enter.
- Unnecessary cast should not be in the wings during intimacy on stage or when the performer leaves the stage.

## **Dress Rehearsal & Performances**

All of the above best practices must be maintained throughout the dress rehearsal and performances. Any performer has the right to change their mind and refuse to perform any physical touch or intimacy at any point during the run. Even if this presents logistical and/or creative issues, all performers' boundaries must be respected.

## **Intimacy Calls**

For more intense or heightened intimacy (or anything requested by the performers) there should be an "intimacy call" before the performance. Here, as in rehearsals, there should be a check-in with performers about boundaries, and a review of how the intimacy felt during the previous performance, where applicable. Performers should go through the intimacy as basic physical beats, to ensure clarity ahead of the performance. The intimacy call does not need to include lip-to-lip contact, undress, or a full performance of the intimate content with emotion and character.

## **Best Practices for Stage Fighting/ Stage Combat**

Any blocking or choreographing of stage fighting or combat should be done with utmost consideration for the health, safety, and well-being of the performers involved. Best practices are included below:

- All performers should be informed when a production will include stage combat, stunts and weaponry, and which roles will require simulated combat or violence.
- The choreographer and/or director should always consider the skills, training and physical limitations of the performers when staging and coordinating all fights and stunts.



- A fight captain can be assigned to learn the fight staging and to lead fight calls prior to rehearsals, runthroughs, and performances. The dance captain can double as the fight captain depending on the needs of the production.
- Fights and stunts should be given adequate rehearsal time and training for performers to ensure that stunts or stage combat meets the needs of the production while also prioritizing the safety of the performers.
- All prop weapons should be identified and accounted for at all times, and should be properly and securely stored when not in use.
- The theatre maintains an inventory of all props, including any prop weaponry. Any weapon that is purchased, constructed, or modified should be added to the inventory.
- At no time should any prop weapon be accessible to members of the public.
- Rehearsal areas should be of a size to allow for the safe execution of a stunt or fight.
- The floor surface should allow for safe footing for the performers, considering the needs of the production.
- The Head of Scenic and Props and/or the Technical Director should be responsible for the choice and safety of all weapons. In the absence of the fight director during the production, the weapons handler should be responsible for maintaining the safety of all weapons.
- During fights and stunts a performer's vision should not be restricted. This should be considered for performances using masks, headgear, eyeglasses, changing lighting levels, and special effects such as strobe lights.
- All performers using and exposed to weapons must understand how to safely work with them and be familiar with their use. No one should ever be asked to work with a weapon in rehearsal for the first time without prior training.
- All weapons are dangerous. No one shall engage in horseplay while in possession of, or while using, any weapon.
- The fight director should be consulted about the risk assessment, design and possible modification of the relevant physical elements (scenery, props, costumes — including headgear and masks — and weapons) for the production.
- The fight director or weapons handler should test fire all firearms to determine the safe working distance.
- Any weapons being used in the production should be demonstrated by a member of the production team in front of cast and crew involved in the production to ensure an awareness of sound levels, safety considerations and potential dangers.
- A back-up plan should be in place in the event of a bladed weapon breaking during performance.
- Procedures should be put in place to maintain a safe, smooth-running environment for rehearsals and performances that include stunts and fights.
- There should be a fight/stunt run-through before each performance or run.
- All reasonable precautions should be taken to reduce the risk of repetitive strain and bruise injuries.



- Stunts and fights shall not be rehearsed or performed in an environment that could compromise the safety of any cast and crew members (for example temperature, weather, illumination, sound levels).
- The actual weapons, props, costumes, headgear, masks, make-up (prosthetics), footwear and stunt equipment used in the fight or stunt should be made available to the performers to allow for adequate rehearsal time and for any necessary modifications.
- All cast and crew members in the vicinity should be warned of any loud noises, stage fighting, fight calls, or any other acts that may be dangerous or alarming to others in the vicinity.
- Take care to avoid flying objects during rehearsals or performances, or ensure everyone is aware of and prepared for the possibility of a flying object.
- Each performer should use the same bladed weapon in all rehearsals, performances and fight run-throughs.
- Protocols should be established if a weapon does not function properly. All cast and crew handling or working near a weapon should be made aware of the procedure.
  - If a bladed weapon breaks during rehearsal or performance, do not continue the fight with that bladed weapon.
  - Additional weapons should be available as backup in case the original weapon malfunctions or breaks during rehearsal or performance. These backup weapons should be the same as the weapons they are replacing.
- At the end of each rehearsal or performance only the stage manager, scenic and props designer, or should remove the weapons from the props table for storage

## Additional Considerations

### Minors and Vulnerable Persons

Minors or other vulnerable persons must have given consent **and** have their primary guardian's consent to participate in onstage intimacy or stage fighting **of any kind**. They must also be informed by the production team that their primary guardian is permitted to attend any rehearsal – though their guardian will, respectfully, be asked to avoid participating in the rehearsal if they are not themselves in the cast or on the production team – and is **required** to attend any rehearsal where intimacy or stage fighting **of any kind** is being choreographed or blocked.

### Photography

If there are photos being taken in a rehearsal, dress rehearsal, or performance, there should be a conversation around the intimate content, so the photographer knows not to take pictures of certain moments, or to do so with discretion. There should never be photos of simulated sex or nudity. Performers should be made aware of and can decide how they feel about photos of being in a state of undress, kissing, and other types of intimacy.

## Language

Anyone in authority on a production (e.g., a director, choreographer, or Board member) should maintain anatomical, professional language when discussing intimacy (e.g. breasts, penis, vagina, genitals). It is expected that language will be adjusted as required or requested by the cast. For example, if a production includes teen or child cast or crew members, language suitable for that age group must be used by adult production members.

## Content Warnings

Consent-practice extends to the audience. Content warnings allow the audience to be informed about any intimate or explicit content contained in the production. The producer for a production is responsible for creating and posting signage that includes content warnings, in coordination with the Second Vice Chair of the Board.

## References

- Hunt, R. T. (2021, September 29). Intimacy Direction Guidelines: A guide produced specifically for theatre in Cambridge. Cambridge, England. Retrieved from <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.adctheatre.com/media/4545/intimacy-direction-guidelines.pdf>
- Intimacy for Stage and Screen. (2020, August 6). Advice for Performers. Retrieved from [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.intimacyforstageandscreen.com/uploads/1/3/1/5/131581092/advice\\_for\\_performers\\_v8.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.intimacyforstageandscreen.com/uploads/1/3/1/5/131581092/advice_for_performers_v8.pdf)
- Government of Ontario. (2022, April 27). Stage combat/stunts and weaponry | Safety guidelines for the live performance industry. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/document/safety-guidelines-live-performance-industry/stage-combatstunts-and-weaponry#fight-captain>
- University of Rochester International Theatre Program. (2022, August 23). Theatrical Intimacy and Instructional Touch Policy. Retrieved from <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.sas.rochester.edu/theatre/assets/downloads/admin-resources/theatrical-intimacy-and-instructional-touch-policy.f22.pdf>
- Equity UK's Intimacy Working Group. Intimacy for Stage and Screen: Advice for Performers - contributors include:
- Adam Burns - Stage Management Councillor
  - Yarit Dor - ISS Education Manager (2017-2020) ISS Course Tutor, IDC Certified Intimacy Director

- Nick Fletcher - General List Councillor
- Jennifer Greenwood - Equity Women's Committee
- Ian Manborde - Equalities & Diversity Organiser
- Lizzy Talbot - ISS Director & IDC Certified Intimacy Director

# Appendix A: For Performers

## Best Practices

- Performers have a responsibility to initiate discussions about their needs and requests with the Director, Choreographer, and Stage Manager/stage management team. Never assume they will guess what you need facilitated. You may:
  - Ask for 24 hours notice before Intimacy Rehearsal Sessions.
  - Request that a “nudity plan” is created in discussion with yourself, the Director, Choreographer, Stage Manager, and the Intimacy Director (if applicable) to outline your needs, when and how this should be carried out so everyone is informed, stage management team and the costume department can prepare accordingly etc.
- To ensure the comfort of all cast members engaging in physical touch or intimacy onstage, performers must not deviate from choreography (e.g., moving hands to a different position, lingering longer than necessary).
- Performers can take time to consider if choreography is something they are comfortable with, and do not have to commit to the choreography/staging in the moment.
- If a performer’s boundaries change in such a way that requires an alteration to the choreography, they should notify the director and/or choreographer as soon as possible so modifications can be made.
- In production and rehearsal, if a performer has a concern regarding intimacy or physical touch, they should speak with an appropriate member associated with the production (e.g., director, choreographer, costume department, or Board member).
- Any performer present for an intimate moment onstage (whether involved in the choreography or not) should have the opportunity to express their concerns or ask questions.
- Advocate for your physical boundaries and your “no contact areas”. You can always offer an alternative movement that feels right for your personal body and connects to your character’s needs.
- Use a placeholder when improvising/walking a scene if intimacy hasn’t been explicitly staged/choreographed yet. Intimate moments should not be improvised in the same way that simulated violent action requires specific choreography.
- Performers should always ask for and seek consent from scene partners before physical touch or intimacy is explored. Performers must not assume consent, even if they have worked with that performer before or are friends in their personal life.

- Performers should advocate for themselves and should never assume that a director or choreographer will guess what they need facilitated.

## Appendix B: Costuming/Wardrobe

### Expectations of Actors

In the course of assigning and fitting costumes, actors can expect the following:

- Removal of street clothes down to undergarments (performers are responsible for wearing opaque, full-coverage undergarments to all fittings).
- The measuring process for costume fittings requires accuracy. This process involves physical contact close to the body with the measuring tape and minimal touch from the measurer.
- Physical touch to adjust fit to costume team specification.
- Interaction, including physical touch, by the in-house costume team for fitting.

### Best Practices during Costuming

- Performers are encouraged to tell the costume team directly about any boundaries or non-negotiables when it comes to what they are comfortable wearing.
- Performers may request a reduction in the number of people in the room or additional privacy for fittings or changing, including request that the door be open or closed.
- Performers may request that a third-party accompanies them and the costumes personnel during any fittings or adjustments.
- Ask questions for clarification regarding elements of the costume, including fit and length. and Shop Personnel have the same tools available during measurements as above.