



Tutti pom pom

Facilitating Art Programs
For Learning Disabled and
Neurodivergent Young People



This resource was developed by Tutti Arts alongside Carclew as part of the "Tutti Pom Pom" project, funded by an Arts SA Arts Recovery Collaboration Grant.

These resources are intended for use by arts organisations and youth arts workers who facilitate workshops with young people who are neurodivergent or learning disabled. They are designed to be an entry point in understanding a wide range of concepts. The best way to engage with these resources is to use them as a reflective tool to look at how you think and work. All facilitators and arts organisations will work differently so it is key to highlight what areas will be relevant to your practice and to explore how you can put these ideas into practice.

These resources were created with input from a range of industry professionals listed below. These include youth arts facilitators, disability arts facilitators, educators, occupational therapists, artists, facilitation experts, child psychologists, and, importantly, disabled people.

As these resources are a compilation of a wide range of sources, the contents do not definitively reflect the views of any individual or organisation listed below. Likewise, Tutti Arts does not expressly support all views put forward by contributors or those listed in the additional readings. We encourage readers to read our resources and our references with a critical eye. In time, more knowledge may come out that better reflects what is best practice in working with disabled people, prioritising the views of disabled people.

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Suggested Additional Readings:

- The Relationship Is The Project - Working With Communities, edited by Jade Lillie, with Kate Larsen, Cara Kirkwood and Jax Jacki Brown
- The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog, by Bruce Perry with Maia Szalavitz
- Parent Effectiveness Training, by Thomas Gordon
- Box Of Provocations for Early Childhood Educators, by Anne Stonehouse
- Belonging, Being & Becoming - Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
- Protective Practices for Staff in their Interactions with Children and Young People, Department for Education South Australia
- Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration
- Children's Voices - A principled framework for children and young people's participation as valued citizens and learners
- National Quality Standard - Supporting Agency: Involving Children in Decision-making
- Intune Pathways Blog - Kristy Forbes
- National Principles - Child Safe Organisations
- Australia Council for the Arts - Protocols For Working With Children In Art
- Sonny Jane - www.livedexperienceeducator.com

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the place now called South Australia, and all First Peoples living and working on this land. We celebrate the history and contemporary creativity of the world's oldest living culture and pay respect to Elders – past and present.

We acknowledge the Kaurna people on whose land this resource was imagined, planned and created.

This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

About Tutti Arts

Tutti Arts is a South Australian multi-arts organisation where learning disabled and neurodivergent artists create visual art, theatre, music, screen and dance, and experiment with art and technology.

About Carclew

Carclew is Australia's largest multi-artform cultural institution dedicated to children and young people. The heart of Carclew is our historic house in North Adelaide, which the government of South Australia gifted in 1971 as a promise that all children and young people have access to art, culture, and creativity. Pom Pom is supported by AnglicareSA Playford Communities for Children. Communities for Children is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

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Why We Do What We Do

“States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.” - **The Convention on Rights of a Child Article 31.2**

Introduction

When we work in disability arts or youth arts, there are unique challenges to face. One is that there isn't enough money to fund these types of programs, and many artists who work in this field don't get enough support or training.

These resources are here to support arts workers and facilitators by outlining some important ideas and giving them tools to work with young people who are learning disabled or neurodivergent. As you read these resources, you will be asked some questions, so it's a good idea to write down your answers before moving on. This will help you work through your thoughts and ideas. So, get ready with a pen and notepad!

Activity

First, define for yourself in what ways you work with young people and disabled people in the arts. Do you find this work important? Why? What does disability mean to you? What does access mean to you? What does play mean to you?

Our Goal At Tutti

Tutti Arts' Kids and Youth program has worked to develop a clear goal that highlights why we do what we do and has refined a set of Guiding Principles that underpin our work. It is valuable for any arts organisation to have a clear vision and mission that explores how they work with young people. Artists, facilitators and arts workers in that organisation should all have a good understanding of these principles and how they apply to their work.

We want learning disabled and neurodivergent young people to feel empowered and proud of who they are. We support them to discover their unique creative talents. We believe that everyone has something valuable to contribute.

We know that art is about the journey, not just the end result. Young people are all different, with their own individual access requirements. They are important members of their community. We create a place where they feel like they belong.

We want young people to become strong and independent decision makers. We encourage them to explore and play, so they can discover new things.

When we use these ideas in our art activities, young people learn skills they can use their whole life. By encouraging inquiry-based learning and creative problem solving skills, young people see themselves as capable, creative and confident human beings.



Guiding Principles Behind What We Do (adapted from ActNow Theatre)

ActNow Theatre is a socially conscious theatre company. They have a series of principles that outline how they work. This helps to frame all their practice. At Tutti, in our youth program, we have developed our own principles based on theirs.

Activity

Read the below principles and think about:

What do each of these principles mean in practice?

Why are they valuable considerations?

Are these principles relevant to your own practice?

What else may be a core principle for you to consider and embed in your own practice?

We Focus On The Participants

We believe that the most important thing is to focus on the people who are taking part in our workshops. We want to make sure that everyone's ideas and needs are heard and supported. We make sure that everyone has a chance to share their ideas and participate in the group.

We Are Time-Keepers And Space Makers

We help keep things organised. We keep track of the time so everyone has a chance to share their ideas. We also make sure that the space we are using is set up for everyone to feel comfortable and safe.

We Are In Control

We want everyone to feel like they belong in our workshops. We try to make things fun and engaging so that everyone can learn and have a good time. Sometimes things are peaceful and focused and sometimes they are chaotic. We must maintain responsibility for the space and be able to take control when we need to. This means explaining and enforcing clear boundaries to keep everyone safe.

Recognise and Normalise Feelings And Thinking

It's okay to have feelings and to take time to think things through. We create a safe space for people to share their ideas and feelings. Participants come along with their own lives and history and we must make space for that. Feelings like anger and sadness are not wrong or bad, they need to be acknowledged, and given the proper support.

We think that the best way to learn is by having fun and trying new things. We don't know everything, and we make mistakes sometimes, but that's okay because we can learn from them. We encourage people to take creative risks and share their ideas, even if it feels scary. If we make mistakes or look silly, it can help participants feel safe to do the same.

We Listen

We listen to what people have to say and encourage them to find their own answers. We pay attention when people talk to us, and we try to understand what they mean. We are not teachers, telling people what to do. We're here to guide them and support their learning.

We Want Everyone To Feel Comfortable

Some people might find it harder to join in, but we want everyone to feel comfortable and have a chance to learn and explore. We make things easier for people who might have a harder time, so that they can still have fun and take part.

We Have Fun

We want everyone to have a good time and enjoy themselves while they make art. We use play-based learning approaches and have fun while we work.

The Arts Are Important

We believe that everyone should have the chance to be creative and explore the arts. We want to help young people have a positive experience with the arts.

Activity

Work on creating your own Guiding Principles.

This is a challenging activity that is valuable for any individual or organisation. We encourage you to return to this task over an extended period of time.

Over the course of reading these resources, think about why you do what you do and what values are important to you. Keep notes as you go through these resources and add to them along the way. After completing these resources, return to this task and try to write down a statement that explains why you do what you do. This doesn't have to be a final statement, just a way to express your goals and motivations.

If you work in a team, have every individual try to write WHY they do what they do. Later, have everyone share their thoughts to the group. In the end you should aim to have a simple statement that clearly highlights some collective values.

You might consider:

- Accessibility
- Authenticity
- Recognising intersectionality
- Creating meaningful connections
- Making room to relax and be silly
- Fostering welcoming and safe spaces
- Equity, equality and diversity
- Recognising art as important to our humanity
- Supporting access to artistic processes
- Creating space where people belong
- Be individualised and considered in our approach, thinking about the needs of participants
- Rethink outcomes as being about experiences and engagement in space
- Recognise the importance of process

Understanding clearly why you do what you do can help ensure that all your decision making aligns with your values. If you work in a team and don't all share an understanding of your motivations and values, this can lead to ongoing issues.

A common understanding of WHY we work helps us all to understand HOW we should go about achieving our goals.



Why This Work Matters

The youth arts sector supports young people to explore their creativity and develop their skills. It gives young people access to creative exploration and crucial self-development.

Artists usually lead these programs, which can be great for participants, but it also can present some challenges.

One of the challenges is that practising artists often lack support or training in how to work with young people. They have to figure it out themselves over time, which can lead to inconsistent practices between facilitators. This can make it difficult for some young people, especially those who are learning disabled or neurodivergent, to engage in these programs.

To address this problem, experts from disability arts, performing arts, and youth arts sectors, as well as the education system, have contributed to these resources to provide practical education and support for artists who work with learning disabled and neurodivergent young people. The goal is to compile the best practices and strategies that work for these young people, so that more young people can benefit from arts programs.

Understanding Disability

"People with disability have the same right to take part in cultural life as other people do. Children with disability are to have access to play, recreation, leisure and sporting activities in the same way as other children."

- **The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 30**

What This Resource Is About

There is so much to learn about disability. This resource is focused on challenging how we view and talk about disability. It looks at the social justice aspect of the disability rights movement and seeks to explain the Social Model of Disability. Understanding this model, and the language around it, underpins a lot of the other concepts in these resources. When it comes to understanding what disability means, the best source of information is listening to disabled people share their own experiences.

A Note On Language

Both person-first and identity-first language are used in Australia. Many disabled people prefer identity language, and that is what this document uses. It is important that when we are talking to or about a disabled person that we use the language that they prefer.

Some parts of these resources may use person-first language to reflect the sources of that information.

Examples:

Person-first: "I am a person with disability"

Identity-first: "I am a disabled person"

Facts About Disability

UN statistics say about 15% of people globally are disabled.

- In Australia, 1 in 5 people (20% of the population, or 4.4 million people) are disabled.
- An estimated 1 in 10 (10% or 380,000) school students in Australia are disabled, and almost 1 in 18 (5.4% or 206,000) identify as having severe or profound disability.
- 88% of disability is hidden, meaning the disability is not immediately apparent.
- On average Australians will spend 7-8 years of their life with an impairment.
- There are 1.2 billion disabled people in the world. That is the biggest minority in the world!
- If people with disability constitute 20% of the population, then they represent a huge talent pool and potential audience that is simply too large to ignore.

Activity

Answer these questions:

Are we all equal?

Is the goal to make all Deaf and disabled people "normal" or not?

Do you have disabled friends? Not a work colleague or family member, but a friend.

If you don't have a disabled friend, think about why.



Access Benefits Everyone

Accessibility should be at the forefront of your mind with everything you do. Making what you do accessible to disabled people has benefits for everyone.

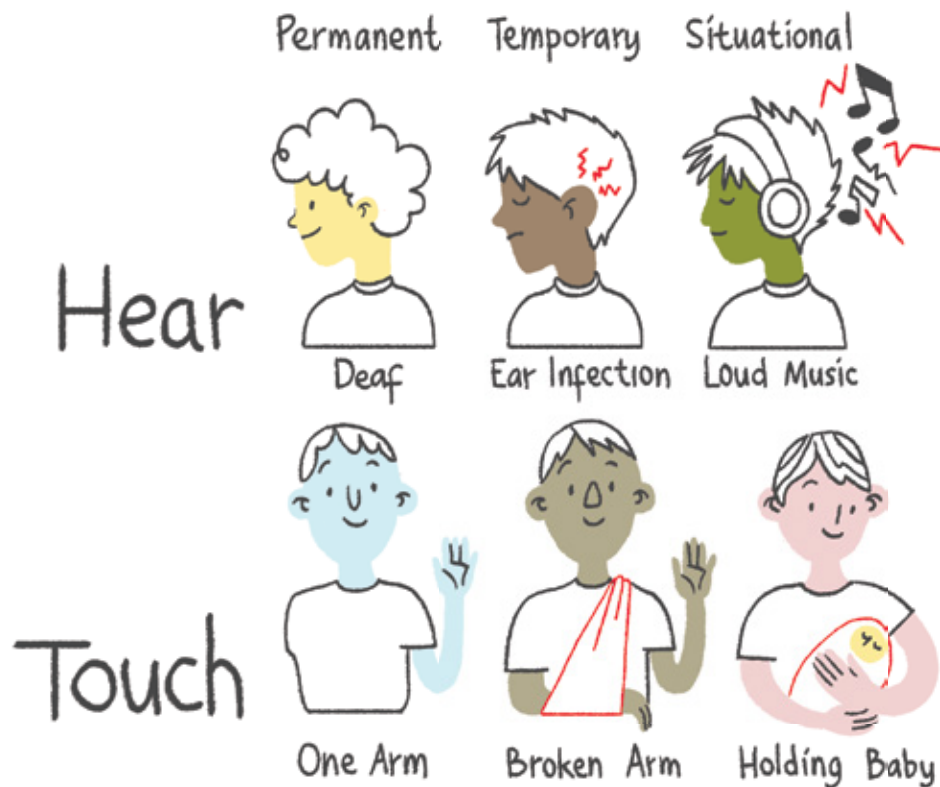


Image adapted from Microsoft Inclusive Design

Understanding The Models Of Disability

Models of Disability are frameworks developed to understand the way society works and interacts with disability. It is important to note that these have changed over time and continue to evolve.

The Charity Model

The Charity Model is based on pity and fear, not rights. The model assumes disabled people can't contribute to society or support themselves. It centres non-disabled people needing to step in and be charitable. Its underlying assumptions are negative for disabled people.

Disabled people:

- are dependent and need help
- are seen as the eternal child
- should be pitied
- need charity
- are a burden to society

The Medical Model

The Medical Model says people are disabled by their impairments. It focuses on what is 'wrong' with the person. It creates low expectations and leads to loss of independence, choice and control. It sees disability as a deficit that makes someone abnormal. Its underlying assumptions are negative for disabled people.

Disabled people:

- need to be 'cured'
- can't make decisions about their lives
- can never be equal with non-disabled people
- need to change and adapt - not society

Activity

Think about these models, why they exist, and how they impact disabled people. Can you recognise systems or messaging in society that are informed by these models?

Thinking Differently About Disability

One of the most useful ways to understand disability is to make a clear distinction between disability and impairment. Impairment and disability are defined in the following ways:

Impairment: a medical condition, illness or injury which does or is likely to impact on the way the body or mind works.

Disability: the limitation and exclusion of someone with an impairment to access opportunities and take part in society on an equal basis, as the result of barriers.

Understanding the difference between impairment and disability allows us to talk separately and clearly about:

a named individual = the person
impairment = their functioning
disability = society's barriers

The Social Model

"In our view it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society."

Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) 1975

The framework that aids us to understand disability and the best solutions to disability is the Social Model of Disability.

Disabled people developed the Social Model to challenge the view that they are in a constant state of illness and that it is their impairments / bodies / minds and senses that are the problem.

Discrimination & Barriers = Disability
People = Citizens
Access = Equal

The Social Model says:
We do not use the word disability to mean impairment. Disability is re-defined as a social (not individual) issue. Furthermore, barriers are not the inevitable outcome of impairment but are socially created through society not taking into consideration the requirements of people with impairments.

The world should be changed so that disabled people can be independent and included.

In summary, the Social Model of Disability says:

- The problem is **not** the individual
- Involves **everyone** in identifying solutions
- Acknowledges people's rights to full participation as **citizens**

The Social Model is about seeing that disability is created by society's barriers. These can be:

- **Organisational**
- **Environmental**
- **Attitudinal**

The Social Model of Disability is about making sure everyone can participate equally in life.

Summary

When things are not accessible, we need to figure out why and make changes so that everyone can participate. It's important to use words that show that society is responsible for making these changes. It involves everyone in identifying solutions.

Example

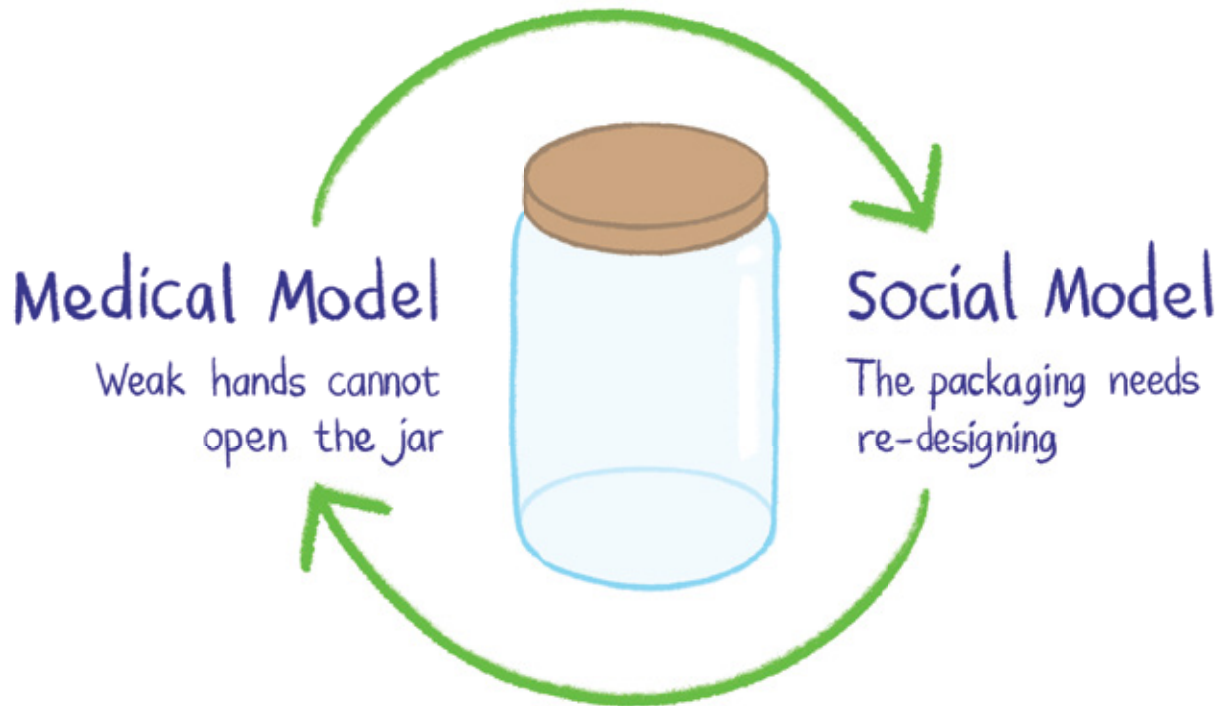
Charlie is a wheelchair user who is wanting to attend an event, but it is being held in a building that is only accessible via a staircase.

What is preventing Charlie from attending?

Is it because Charlie is unable to make it up the stairs, or because the event and venue is inaccessible?

The language we use can frame who is responsible.

The Social Model In Action



Medical Model Problems, Social Model Solutions

What social, economic, political and/or environmental conditions need to be changed to facilitate the full enjoyment of all rights by all disabled people? The Medical Model asks 'What is wrong with you?'. The Social Model asks 'What is wrong with society?'.

Medical Model asks...

Are your difficulties in understanding people mainly due to a hearing problem?

Medical Model asks...

Does your health problem/disability prevent you from going out as often as you would like?

The Social Model asks:

Are your difficulties in understanding people mainly a result of their inability to communicate with you?

The Social Model asks:

Are there any transport or financial problems preventing you from going out as often or as far as you would like?

Activity

Change these statements from Medical Model problems into Social Model solutions.

I can't go to the same school as my friends because I can't get up the steps in my wheelchair.

I can't read books, magazines or newspapers because I can't see.

I can't be on the youth club committee because I can't hear.

Because I can't speak clearly, I can't make friends.

Note the way the speaker in these examples frames themselves as "the problem".

How can we change society so that young disabled people don't see themselves in this way?

Disability Justice and Intersectionality

The Disability Justice Movement's first principle is that of intersectionality - "We do not live single issue lives".

Disability Justice is a social justice movement which focuses on examining disability and ableism (discrimination in favour of non-disabled people) as they relate to other forms of oppression and identity. It was developed in 2005 by the Disability Justice Collective, a group of disabled black, brown and queer people.

Disability Justice builds on the Disability Rights movement, taking a more comprehensive approach to help secure rights for disabled people by recognising the intersectionality of disabled people who belong to additional marginalised communities.

The Disability Justice movement seeks to spread awareness on how ableism is much more complex for people whose identities are intersectional. These disabled people include:

- People of Colour
- Immigrants
- LGBTIQ+ people
- Homeless people
- Incarcerated people
- People who have had their ancestral lands stolen

Equality

Equality is based on our human right to participate in our own society. Equality is ensuring individuals and groups of individuals are treated fairly and equally and no less favourably than other individuals or groups.

Equality does not always mean treating everyone the same. Equality is about having access to the necessary resources or supports so that individuals can have equal opportunities to make the most of their lives and talents.

Summary

Disabled people are never just disabled people. They are diverse. Disabled people cross all demographics and participate in the world in many different ways. Disability is not a problem to be cured but a part of identity and diversity. Best practice means working within an intersectional framework.

Activity

Think about what impairments you may have (permanent or temporary).

What barriers may exist for you?

Are there ways in which these barriers could be removed?

Think again about what disability means. Has it changed since learning about the Social Model of Disability?



What is Neurodiversity?

"Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?" - **Harvey Blume - Journalist and Advocate**

The Movement

The Neurodiversity movement started in the 1990s and is a social justice movement that seeks civil rights, equality, respect and full social inclusion for neurodivergent people.

Neurodiversity is the idea that differences in the way people's brains work are a natural part of human diversity. The movement wants to change the way people perceive others who may think, feel or act differently.

The movement believes it is not fair to say someone is disordered or wrong for thinking, feeling, or acting differently from others. The aim is for people to recognise that there is a wide range of ways that people's minds can work, and that this is okay. The goal is to create a more inclusive society that values and celebrates the diversity of human minds.

The Neurodiversity movement is aligned with the Disability Rights Movement.



Key Words

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is a biological fact. Neurodiversity is the infinite diversity of human minds, and the ways that people experience and interact with the world. It describes groups of people that can include both neurodivergent and neurotypical people. It is not a word that can describe an individual person.

Neurodivergent

Neurodivergent means having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal." Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ADHD, and Tourette's are forms of neurodivergence.

Neurotypical

Neurotypical describes someone whose brain functions, behaviours and processing falls within the dominant societal standards of 'normal'. It is any person who is not neurodivergent. In fact, neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergent.

The Pathology Paradigm

This is a way of thinking that says there's something wrong with people who have different kinds of brains. It puts them in boxes and labels them as disordered. The Neurodiversity movement wants to change this way of thinking.

The Neurodiversity Paradigm

This is a way of thinking that recognises that everyone's brain works differently and that it's okay to be different. It says that we should respect and support people with all kinds of brains. Rather than see neurodivergent people as disordered and in need of a cure, it sees diversity in neurotypes as natural and valuable forms of human diversity.

Access Requirements

Access requirements are anything that a disabled person needs for full participation. Meeting access requirements should be an integral part of what to do.

It is important when working with a young person for the first time to find out their access requirements. This shows that you are ready and willing to talk about access and can be reassuring. This will inform how you apply the strategies and ideas in this resource.

Communicate directly with the young person and their family member, support staff or advocate. A standard Access form may help to gather basic information quickly. Some of this information might need to be followed up in person to get more detail. Remember to treat all the information you receive confidentially.

Create an Access Form

Explain why you are asking access questions and how the information will be used. For example, that their access requirements will only be shared with the team delivering the program so that their requirements can be met in the program. Sample access requirement questions:

- Written information. Standard is a 12 point Sans Serif font. Alternative formats include Large Print, Easy Read, Audio or Braille.
- Do you require a sign language interpreter?
- Do you require other communication support?
- Do you require wheelchair access?
- Do you have a mobility impairment that would restrict the use of steps?
- Do you require an accessible bathroom?
- Do you require orientation to the venue?
- Do you require a quiet space at the venue?
- Will a support worker accompany you?
- Do you require any other support?

Additional questions you might ask neurodivergent young people:

- If sensory reactions from light, noise, touch, smell, and taste are under sensitive, average or oversensitive.
- If balance, speed of conversation, coordination, concentration, sense of direction, short-term memory, following instructions are average or difficult.
- What other things might be an obstacle such as: not easily switching between tasks; feeling anxious with strangers; get confused by too much information; can't read body

language or changes of plans making them anxious.

- It is also important to ask about how best to support the young person if they become upset.

Investing time in understanding each young person's access requirements will benefit everyone when it comes time to deliver the program.

Activity

What can you do to work well with others who may be different from you?

What's the best way to do this without making assumptions?

How does your organisation find out someone's access requirements?



The Role Of Play

"The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity." - Carl Jung - Psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst

It's valuable to look at the way young people engage with art and explore the role of play. To begin we will look at how the education system can impact how young people learn and how we teach. Understanding the philosophies behind the education system can help us get a deeper understanding of why we do what we do, and to make decisions around how we want to work.

Examining School Structures

The school system focuses a lot on preparing students for work and measuring how successful they are. Teachers in the education system often do their very best to support young people in using curiosity, courage and critical thinking. The education system is often very outcome focused and this can make some students feel pressure to think about where they should be academically and how they will get there.

Activity

Write your answers to the following questions, or discuss them as a group:

- How does the education system impact how students view the importance of art?
- What barriers does school create for some learners?
- How does outcome focused teaching impact students who have trouble learning or think differently?

Have a discussion around how your own workshops/programs are structured and address the following questions:

- Do your workshops present similar barriers?
- In what ways do you measure success in participants?
- In what ways could you change your teaching methods?

Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

The Early Years Learning Framework is the system that underpins education in kindergartens. It is built on three principles, Belonging, Being and Becoming.

Belonging

Acknowledges how important it is for young people to feel like they belong and are part of a group.

Being

The importance of the here and now. Recognising how important it is for young people to enjoy their lives, have fun, and deal with how complex life is.

Becoming

Realising that people grow and change a lot when they're young. Recognising how they learn to be a part of their community and participate actively in society.



How Can The EYLF Be Applicable In Our Field?

We must recognise the importance of agency in young people's lives. Young people and disabled people are both groups that have agency removed from them. We can do the important job of giving young people control and power in their lives.

The philosophies of Belonging, Being and Becoming are applicable to all ages as they support the development of adults who:

- Feel comfortable in their identities
- Are capable of communicating and exploring ideas from multiple perspectives
- Aren't afraid to have fun

EYLF theory more closely relates to the motivations of youth arts work. It focuses on viewing young people as capable and competent human beings.

What Is Play?

What does it mean to provide play-based learning? We can define play as providing:

- Freedom to act independent of worry
- A sense of exploration
- A representation of things real or imagined
- An opportunity to explore different realities alone or with others
- Movement, whether physical or imaginary

Play-based learning requires:

- An atmosphere that gives permission to take creative risks
- Participants having full control to make decisions (with support and leadership from the facilitators)
- Freedom to think outside the box of limitations and freedom to explore
- A focus on experience not outcome

Inquiry-based Learning

Inquiry-based learning is a model of learning that encourages creativity and curiosity. It involves repeated exposure to the learning material and allows for exploring ideas in different ways.

There's no single way to succeed or fail, and there's room to think in different directions.

Inquiry-based learning is:

- Curiosity led
- Based on repeated exposure
- Allows branching exploration of an idea
- Open-ended development
- Rethinking definitions of success and failure

What Is A Facilitator's Role In A Play Or Inquiry-based Learning Environment?

- Setting the space and establishing safe boundaries
- Being an active participant in creative play
- Asking lots of "wonder" questions (eg. I wonder how? ...why? ...if?)
- Giving freedom in space and time to explore at their own pace
- Having meaningful conversations about the young person's interests
- Providing new toolsets and options (not just direct solutions)
- Seeking out and sharing diverse experiences (sharing artwork and stories to inspire their own creativity to think in new ways)

What Does Agency Mean?

Agency is the power to make decisions for yourself!



So What Do We Bring As Artists?

In a play-based setting we need to rethink our role as artists and what that means. We often define ourselves as artists by WHAT we do (painter, sculptor, dancer, actor, etc). As facilitators we should expand how we define ourselves beyond just our craft and recognise all the things we have to offer. In addition to our practical skills, we also bring:

- Creative problem-solving skills
- Experience and influence as learners
- Observation skills
- Ability to encourage difference
- Skills on how to think about making art
- Skills in exploration and experimentation
- The power to inspire and reframe thinking in young people

In a play based learning environment it is important to be aware of and challenge the “boxes” we put ourselves in.

In a traditional teaching environment, we pass down our expertise from our experiences and knowledge.

In a play environment we can explore outside our experiences and knowledge alongside young people.

We can give space to uncertainty and possibility.

Models Of Play

Let’s look at the different Models of Play and the different roles (or hats) we wear as educators and facilitators. By giving these things names it can help us talk and think about our processes and thinking.

What Is Metacognition?

When we are thinking about our thinking, this is called metacognition!

Spontaneous Play

Completely initiated by the young person

Guided Play

Initiated by the young person, but supported by the educator

Directed Play

Initiated by the educator, but shaped by the child

Planned Experiences

Structured activities with limited agency for the young people

Daily Life Experience

Washing hands, lunch routines, packing up, etc

All these are useful structures that can facilitate play in a workshop setting. There are different roles we can take to support the play. These roles include:

Stage Manager

Provides resources, makes time, creates space and/or helps “set the scene” for the play activity

Mediator

Supports participants to resolve conflicts and solve problems that might prevent them from playing

Assessor And Communicator

Assesses what is happening in play and communicates this to other participants, families and staff

Guardian Of The Gate

Supports less confident young people to enter play through observation and suggestions

Spectator

Observes and comments on what is happening from outside the play

Parallel Player

Plays alongside the participant in a similar way, but not necessarily interacting directly with them

Planner

Plans for play to continue in order for development to more mature forms of play

Player

Becomes an active participant, adopting a role within the play, extending the play with participant direction

Scribe

Leads activities by giving instructions, reading stories, etc. As well as note-taker and record-keeper of activities.

Activity

Think about what activities you facilitate and how they can allow these models of play.

When and how do we wear these different hats?

Have a look at each of these roles and consider how you may fill these roles in your own workshop.

Are there roles you use more? Are there any that you rarely or never fill?



Setting Frameworks For Creative Play

Now we understand what is meant by play-based learning, and the roles we take as facilitators, let's look at ways of applying this in a workshop.

4 Key Considerations:

- Designing flexible structures through focus
- Providing options for meaningful choice
- Focusing on process
- Framing how we talk

Designing Flexible Structures Through Focus

Recognise that structure is not the enemy of play. An open sandbox can be overwhelming and uninspiring. It needs boundaries to help young people focus on their play, and tools like buckets and spades to empower them to play. Likewise, if we see our role as being 'boundary makers' and 'tool providers' instead of just as 'teachers' we can facilitate exploration and not just outcome.

Structures and Focus

- Look at how much agency participants have in what they do, and how we can balance freedom of choice with useful structures. It is our role as facilitators to create fences, rules, and frameworks that help guide the play.
- A lack of structure can be a big source of anxiety, so we devise programs that provide clear structures, but that also give room for exploration and discovery.
- Designing a focus can be a great way to help provide structure and encourage curiosity-led play and exploration. By providing participants a central question or theme to explore, we can then provide pathways for them to explore it, while also being open to their own inputs and ideas.

Example

Instead of a dance activity where they simply move their body to music, provide a task to give them a framework. They start on one side of the room and have to come up with a character and dance their way across the room as that character. This still gives freedom to play, but provides an entry point into the activity.

Providing Options For Meaningful Choice

Choices exist on a wide scale, from small to large impacts. We should scale choices based on participants' needs to avoid overwhelming them. This may mean providing only two options for them to choose from, instead of many options.

It is crucial that we both facilitate ways for participants to make choices, as well as pay attention to the decisions they make and respond to them. It's important to ensure participants can have meaningful input through their choices, so consider how we can make room for choices that have a tangible impact. Consider what this could look like.

Focusing On Process

We can deconstruct the idea that all art-making is precious and a reflection of the artist's 'value'. By playing art games, sharing rough sketches, and focusing on reflection and observation, we can relieve the anxiety formed by perfectionism that many young artists deal with. By inquiring into why participants are creating, we can better support them to identify and work towards their own goals.

Process over outcomes

- Focus on the process and the thought behind art-making, instead of just what the final artwork looks like. It's all about metacognition and supporting young people to think about their thinking.
- Practical technical skills are often given too much focus and draw away from the core elements of artistic process: observation and reflection. We should encourage participants to step back and think about what they do.

Example

You are teaching portrait drawing and one participant is consistently destroying every drawing that they create. They tell you it is because they "can't draw well". To address this, you introduce an activity where everyone draws their own face with their eyes closed and using one hand to touch their own faces. This puts focus on thinking about shapes and the process of making marks instead of focusing on the outcome.

When they go to destroy another drawing you gently encourage them to first look at their works and answer four things: What were they trying to do? What didn't work for them and why? What is something that did work? And how would they change it next time they tried?

Then give them full permission to destroy their work if they want to. This supports the participant to exercise their ability to observe and reflect, validates their ability to critique work, reinforces that it is a judgement free space, and puts the focus on the process instead of the outcome.



Framing How We Talk

It's important to communicate effectively with participants, using clear language and open-ended questions to allow them to come to their own conclusions. Instead of offering praise, we should make observations and offer encouragement to help participants set their own goals.

Communication is key

How we communicate with participants is key as it establishes the way they, in turn, see themselves and think about their work

- Use clear wording, reinforced by body language (and other communication like Key Word Sign and/or Communication Boards)
- When giving directions, limit the number of steps we give at a time
- When having conversations, use open-ended questions and give space for participants to come to their own conclusions
- Frame our communication based on the individual we are speaking with
- Ask "What are you trying to achieve?" (to let the participant set their own goals), then "What have you tried?", then offer pathways and tools

Praise vs Encouragement

It is so easy to offer praise, but it is important we think about the impact of what we say to young people. Praise is an assessment of quality, while encouragement is about making observations.

Receiving praise can feel good, but it leads to a dependency on approval from others and a sense of competition, while encouragement is about letting the participant set their own goalposts. Praise focuses on outcomes and not the process.

Example

Praise:

"What a beautiful drawing!"

Encouragement:

"The way you blended the green and blue colours is very unique. What do you like most about this drawing?"



Activity

What role do play-based learning and inquiry-based learning have in your own workshops or programs?

How do you offer both structure and creative freedom for the young people you work with?

What agency and power of choice do young people have in your workshop?

What kind of impact do those choices have?

How much focus do you put on creative outcomes, and why?

How much focus do you put on the creative process for young people, and why?

In what situations do you offer praise to young people? Could you offer encouragement instead?

How do you plan to encourage creative problem solving in your workshop?



Positive Interactions With Young People

"Teaching is essentially theatrics... if you bring the energy then it's on!"

- Sam Howie - Youth Arts Facilitator

Our Connections

When we work with young people, it's not just about WHAT we do but also about HOW we act around them. Our attitude, body language, attention, and perception of young people all impact the way they learn and grow.

We need to see young people as capable and competent individuals and support them in their learning. To do this, we must give them our honest attention and patience and show them that they are valued and cared for.

Unconscious Bias

When we think about HOW we act, it is good to recognise that sometimes we make judgements of people that can be biased. We live in a world filled with input from news, movies, social media, and personal experience, and each can impact our view of others. Noticing the ways in which these inputs impact our views on race, sex, gender, disability, age, or other variables, allows us to control our inputs, not our inputs to control us.

We each have our own experiences, identities and history that impact how we see the world and the decisions we make. It's important to recognise the different histories, identities and experiences that others have that impact their world views and decision-making processes.

What Is Bodily Autonomy?

It is the ability to make decisions about your own body, what you do, and how others interact with your body. Remember: My body is for me! My body is my own!

Personal Boundaries

When working with young people regularly, we build meaningful connections with them. It's important to recognise these connections, but we must also be conscious of our impact and maintain healthy professional boundaries. We need to navigate the lines of what is appropriate when it comes to physical touch, sharing personal stories, pet names, being emotionally vulnerable, and telling jokes.

We must be aware of both legal and organisational rules around boundaries and have a thorough understanding of consent and bodily autonomy (see below for further readings). Disabled people and young people often have their agency and bodily autonomy removed, so we need to be conscious of our interactions and assumptions. We should not be over-familiar with young people and we should always seek their consent around all interactions.

Further readings:

National Principles - Child Safe Organisations

Australia Council for the Arts - Protocols For Working With Children In Art - 2010

Activity

How do you navigate the lines of what is appropriate when it comes to:

- Physical touch
- Sharing personal stories
- Pet names or nicknames
- Being emotionally vulnerable
- Telling jokes

When considering boundaries, remember:

- Safety of young people is always the priority
- Young people have power of consent which should be reinforced and respected
- Sometimes communication barriers can make humour and sarcasm hard to interpret
- Young people may have sensory issues around touch, sound and light
- Eye contact can be interpreted differently by different people

We need to remember that participants may have different boundaries, not only around touch and language but also around eye contact, volume, and positioning. We must learn these boundaries and work to respect them.

The Power Of Words

Words have power and how we use them to communicate matters. Anything a young person communicates is a gift, and it is our role to not just hear them, but to listen beneath the words they speak to hear the needs they have.

We should be playful and honest in how we communicate. Try to meet young people where they're at and build relationships with them. This relationship building underpins all of our work.

Often young people communicate in ways besides words and this can sometimes be seen as attention-seeking behaviour. Instead we should recognise it as connection-seeking behaviour.

Young people want to feel seen, heard and understood, and we have the ability to give them that.



Activity

What assumptions do you make about participants you may work with?

Can you remember a time when there was a boundary that you or someone else pushed/broke/disrespected or misunderstood?

How did you manage that situation? Could you have managed it better?

Identifying And Solving Problems

When working with young people, we often want to quickly step in and fix problems. However, this may not always be the best approach, as it can prevent young people from learning how to solve problems themselves. The first step is to identify who owns the problem and then act accordingly through either active listening or using "I" statements.

We can identify who owns the problem by determining who takes an issue with the behaviour, not who caused it. This helps us know the best strategy for communicating and solving the problem.

Behaviour to me is	Behaviour to other person is	Who owns the problem?	What strategy to use?
Acceptable	Acceptable	There's no problem!	Affirm the behaviour!
	Unacceptable	Other owns the problem	Use Active Listening
Unacceptable	Acceptable	I own the problem	Use "I" Statements
	Unacceptable	The relationship owns the problem	Use both Active Listening and "I" Statements to problem solve

Example

A participant is angry after having a fight with a sibling before arriving at a workshop. (The participant owns the problem, so use active listening.)

A participant keeps tapping their pen loudly on the table while they draw, and it's distracting you. (You own the problem and should use "I" statements.)

When facing a difficult interaction, understand that beneath a person's behaviours are feelings, and beneath their feelings are needs, and until we understand (or maybe even meet) those needs, we cannot effectively respond to the behaviour.

When we understand that the need is almost always to be understood (meaning to be seen or heard), we can respond to just about anything in a helpful way.



Example

A young person may want to start climbing on you. If you only see the behaviour, you might call them hyperactive and tell them to sit down. But if you see they have a need to move, or to feel close to you, then you can name it and help them to meet their need.

Our initial response may be to tell them off for "bad behaviour" but telling them off makes it harder for them to adapt their behaviour. Helping them identify their needs and find acceptable ways to meet them supports them to make those decisions for themselves.

Active Listening

Active listening is more than just hearing what the other person has to say. It's about paying attention to the meaning behind all the ways the person is communicating (words, body language, etc.) making the other person feel truly seen, heard, and understood. It's not an opportunity to project our thoughts, advice, or opinions but to support young people in developing their problem-solving skills and ability to name and identify their own feelings.

To use active listening properly we must be able to give the other person our full attention and have a willingness to be helpful and accept their feelings. Focus on the feelings that we hear and relay those feelings to the person.

It may also help to focus on the emotions we are feeling while listening, because this can provide a clue to understanding the other person. This is because in conversations we often can begin to feel what the other person is feeling. Therefore, if we are feeling powerless, it may indicate that they are feeling powerless and this gives us an open door to hearing their underlying need (in this case, some agency or choice).

We **observe** their communication, then **reflect** it back to them (using different words to them, this is not parroting). In basic terms, it is about saying what we see!

Try saying, 'Let me see if I have this right' then re-state their general idea, then say, 'Did i get that right?' The feeling of being heard and understood that results from that simple formula, often meets the very need that was underlying the problem.

Avoid offering direct solutions, as young people often need to feel understood before working towards solutions. Offer direct suggestions or support only when asked for it.

Be earnest and try to better understand and empathise with the person sharing their feelings. We do not use active listening if we own the problem. Be patient and practice with this method; it may take a while to get used to, but don't give up.

Try using language like:

"I can see that you are feeling upset/angry/happy/excited. Can you tell me why?"

NOTE: If the young person is in immediate distress, or has gone into a meltdown or shutdown, then this may not be a good time to try to use active listening to start conversation. Instead try to first meet whatever they need in order to regulate themselves and feel safe. See page 23 for information about meltdowns and shutdowns.

"I" Statements

"I" statements are a form of communication that can help us effectively express our feelings and thoughts to others without causing defensiveness or misunderstandings. It involves taking ownership of our own problems and creating an opportunity for the other person to understand us better.

When we use "you" statements, such as "you never listen to me" or "you should have told me that," it can create a barrier to communication. These types of statements often come across as blaming or accusatory, and they don't fully identify the problem. Instead, "I" statements involve identifying the problem within ourselves and then highlighting the cause and tangible outcome. For example, "I feel frustrated when you interrupt me because it means we won't be able to finish the activity today." This type of communication helps us to clearly and honestly highlight the impacts of other people's behaviours and support genuine change in their behaviour.

It's important to note that using "I" statements is not about softening boundaries or avoiding enforcing rules in a workshop or other setting where safety is a concern. It's about supporting positive change in behaviour by clearly and honestly communicating the tangible outcomes of negative behaviour.

The effectiveness of this type of communication depends on the quality of the relationship and the willingness of the other person to help. While there may be times where "I" statements are not effective, in most situations, they are an effective approach to communication.

What Are Meltdowns And Shutdowns

Many autistic people experience meltdowns and/or shutdowns, so it is important to be aware of what they are and how to manage them. Meltdowns and shutdowns are different kinds of reactions to sensory, emotional or informational overload.

Meltdowns consist of outward behaviour such as screaming, hitting, throwing objects or acting violently. It is important to remember that autistic meltdowns are not temper tantrums, and that the person is in a state of distress and is not able to calm or control themselves.

Shutdowns are an internal response to an overload. These can be harder to notice. They consist of a change where the participant may go silent, stare off into space, have an inability or difficulty to communicate or an inability or difficulty to move. The person experiencing this may be fully aware of what is going on, but unable to stop the shutdown process until their body recovers.

Help Prevent Meltdowns And Shutdowns

We can help prevent sensory overload by being aware of a participant's sensory needs. Some people are sensory-seeking, which means they may need things like touch or pressure to help regulate themselves. Providing things such as weighted blankets, fidget toys and having space for them to move around can help with this. Some people are sensory-avoidant, meaning that too much sensory input can dis-regulate them. Being aware of lighting, sounds and textures in our space, as well as providing things such as headphones can help. Some people can be both sensory-seeking and sensory-avoidant, so it is important to understand our participant's individual needs.

Emotional and informational overload can be more difficult for us to prevent. We can help by being observant when there's a lot of big emotions and by being aware of how we communicate. It is important that we do not overwhelm a participant with too much information, or provide instructions with too many steps at once.

Many autistic people have their own ways of helping regulate themselves and it's important that we create an environment where they can do this. This may involve repetitive movements or sounds. This is called stimming.

How To Support A Meltdown Or Shutdown

The first step is to remain calm when trying to support a participant experiencing a meltdown or shutdown. Meltdowns can be quite difficult and distressing, so it's important to seek help when needed and to look after ourselves afterwards.

When someone is experiencing a meltdown we should make sure that we prioritise safety of ourselves, the person experiencing the meltdown, and everyone else. This may involve moving people or objects away. If we can identify what caused their meltdown we should try to remove it if we can. If we are able to, we could try to direct them to a safe and calm space that is quiet and has dim lighting. Do not try to touch or grab the person, or try to talk to them too much.

If they are showing that they feel the need to be violent, then safe objects such as beanbags or pillows may be useful outlets for those feelings. Stay calm and give them time to work through their meltdown and calm themselves.

When someone is experiencing a shutdown it's best to establish a calm environment and give the person time to rest and recuperate. If we can identify what was causing their shutdown we should remove it if we can. We shouldn't add any demands onto the person while they are taking the time to recover.

It's important that we recognise that these responses are largely uncontrollable by the person experiencing them and we do not create shame for those experiencing them.

Notes On Power Of Words

- If what we are saying is not a question, then make it a statement. For example, don't ask "do we want to clean up now?" just say "it's time to clean up". False questions are not useful in communicating, especially not with young people who are learning disabled or neurodivergent.
- Stop before reacting, take a moment, think and then respond. Using communication in new ways takes a lot of time and patience.
- Use participants' names when talking to or about them. We can use name tags or keep notes to help remember names, but don't be afraid to ask for their name if we have forgotten. Don't give them nicknames and respect their ownership over their own identity. This includes using their preferred pronouns and their preferred language around any conditions they live with. For example a participant may prefer person-first language around their autism, so we should respect that and when talking about them would say that they have autism rather than that they are autistic.
- If we give a "can't do" then also give a "can do". Where possible, choose a positive wording instead of a negative. For example, rather than say, "No we can't paint now" try "Yes, we can paint tomorrow."
- Some young people have demand avoidance, which means that direct demands will not be constructive. In these cases, use of active listening and I statements is even more necessary as a tool.
- Pick our battles - some things take time and are not within our scope. It is fine to acknowledge that and seek support if we need.
- Recognise that the bigger goal is to build relationships with the participants where they feel seen, heard and honoured, and that these are just tools to help make these relationships and conversations easier and more successful.
- Put energy and focus equally onto positive behaviour! Affirmation, validation and encouragement are all important to use. Thank participants for sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Example

A participant told you about their weekend trip away. Take the time to respond and react to their story and thank them for telling you. While some communications may seem to you like meaningless small talk, they may be genuine attempts from the young person to connect. They provide you an opportunity to make them feel seen, heard and appreciated.



Maintaining Safety And Managing Disputes

Maintaining safety is the most important aspect of facilitating any group. To ensure everyone's safety, having clear boundaries and agreed-upon behaviours, as well as conflict resolution skills, are essential tools.

One way to establish general rules for a workshop space is to set group norms or agreed behaviours. Although many spaces may already have pre-existing rules, allowing the group to write their own norms can be more powerful and effective. The facilitator should guide the process to ensure all necessary areas are considered. For example, some norms might include no hitting, being kind to each other, no rude language, and letting an adult know if you need to leave the room.

When a dispute or conflict arises between participants, it is important to manage everyone's safety first. The facilitator's first role is to de-escalate the situation.

De-escalation is about stepping in and stopping a situation from getting worse. It is vital that we remain calm in our approach and how we use our voice and body language. We may need to reposition people away from each other and into separate spaces.

The most important step is always observation. If we are familiar with our participants we can sometimes predict a conflict before it happens and take immediate action to stop it taking place. The sooner we can defuse and de-escalate a conflict, the better.

What To Do If A Dispute Occurs Between Participants

- **Check staff roles**

We should absolutely never be alone when working with young people. When incidents demand attention, we need to quickly delegate who is focusing on the incident, and who is supervising the rest of the group.

- **Manage everyone's safety**

Do what is needed to de-escalate the immediate incident and ensure everyone is safe. Decide if participants need to be separated and assess if there is an incident that requires first aid.

- **Address the impact of the incident**

Did the conflict cause hurt (physical or emotional) to one party that needs to be immediately addressed? Do any of the parties need time to calm down and settle before we address what happened?

- **Investigate the cause**

It is vital to investigate the cause of what happened. Did one person lash out because of an ongoing agitation from someone? Was there a lack of communication? Was the incident due to environmental factors that could have been changed?

- **Give involved parties an opportunity to understand the full situation**

Help those involved to understand what happened and why. Use prompting questions and not direct orders to get them to decide for themselves to apologise if it is needed. Use the established group norms as a tool for getting them to understand if they crossed any boundaries.

- **Stay calm in our approach**

While addressing the situation we can use our voice and body language as needed to immediately de-escalate and reduce the risk of harm. When talking directly to participants we should not speak to them angrily or yell. Perceived aggression can lead to defensive responses that won't help the situation. We can, however, still be firm and direct.

- **Facilitate a conversation**

Remind participants of the boundaries and encourage them to think through why things happened and work their way towards making an apology. Have them try to think through why they did what they did and consider how it may have made others feel. Thank the participants for working through it and try to then support them in re-engaging in the workshop when they are ready.

- **Take notes and make adjustments**

Share what happened with other relevant staff, write it down and keep records as needed. Decide what adjustments we could make to prevent this from happening again. Do people need to be separated and seated differently? Was the incident serious and are further steps needed?

- **Get support**

Sometimes situations and behaviours can be overwhelming and confusing for us as facilitators. If we are not sure how to handle a situation then seek support, be honest and ask questions. Identify who to turn to if extra support is needed.

Remember

- Some situations can and do resolve themselves, and it's good to give participants the time and space to resolve issues for themselves.
- It may be best to handle some situations away from the group, either in a separate area, or after the session, or in an email or a follow up conversation.
- Be aware that we need to make space for behaviours that need to happen. Some participants may do self-regulating behaviour that is important for them, even if it may be seen as disruptive. Consider this and make space for it, and for the other participants to accept it too. These behaviours may involve jumping around, touching objects, vocal or physical stims, as well as actions such as tics.
- Remember what we are here for - we are artists who are trying to facilitate and make space for multiple young people. It is not our responsibility to try and manage behaviours constantly and it is totally reasonable to set boundaries for when we need to step away and call in the parent/guardian.



Communication

"Children live up or down to the expectations of people who are important to them. They pretty much become who they are through the images others have of them. The greatest gift you can give a child is to contribute to them seeing themselves as capable, powerful, compassionate, caring human beings" - Anne Stonehouse AM - Early Childhood Education Expert

The Communication Bill Of Rights

Communication is a universal human right. It's how we interact, so as facilitators, it's our job to support that right by facilitating the functions of healthy communication



Activity

Think about all the ways you communicate beyond simply speech. How many methods of communication can you name that you use?

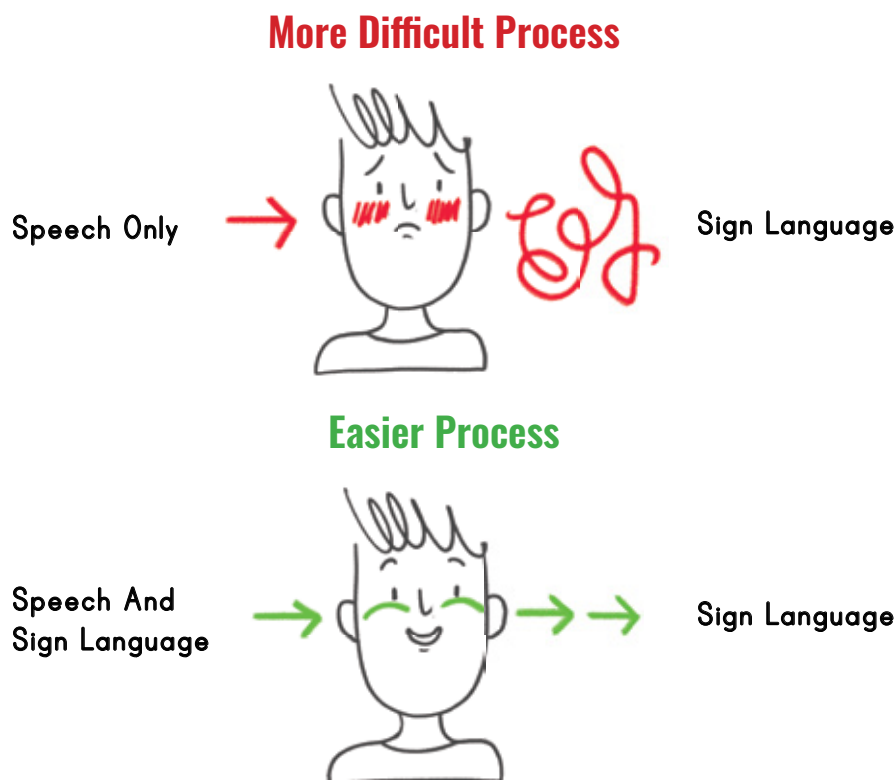
Communication works in two directions.

- **Sending:** Expressing and creating messages
- **Receiving:** listening, observing, comprehending and understanding

When working with non-verbal or partially verbal participants, it can be very difficult for them if others only communicate through speech. We can support them to understand and participate by using different ways to communicate.

Input And Output

It is always best to match the ways that participants communicate. For instance, if a participant communicates outwardly mainly through sign language, but they are only being communicated to with speech it makes it a lot harder for them.



Communication can come in many forms such as:

- Eye gaze
- Facial expressions
- Vocalisations
- Speech
- Tone of voice
- Body posture
- Body language
- Use of space
- Gestures
- Key Word Sign
- Sign language
- Phone / Video call
- Text / text messages
- Pictures / images
- Symbols
- Social media
- Email, typing, graphic design
- Clothes and image

Activity

Have you ever felt that someone hasn't really understood you?

Do you remember what that felt like?

Did that impact how you engaged with that person at a later time?

Our Goal With Communication

When we work with young people, there are often barriers to communication that we need to overcome. It can be hard to figure out the best way to communicate with each person, but it's important to take the time to do so.

Building pathways for communication and understanding takes time, but it's always worth it in the end!

Our goal is to help young people feel like they are being heard and understood, no matter how they communicate. We want everyone to have access to communication, which means making sure that there are no barriers preventing people from getting their message across.

Everyone has a role to play in achieving communication access. We need to be patient and listen carefully to all forms of communication from participants. This means paying attention and understanding different ways of communicating.

Giving up when communication doesn't work can be really discouraging and make it hard to keep trying. Misunderstandings and difficulties in communication are normal and happen to everyone, but we shouldn't give up. We should keep trying and learning so that we can communicate better in the future.

Communication and "Bad Behaviour"

It is important to understand the link between communication and what can be seen as "bad behaviour". When someone isn't given a chance to communicate or their attempts to communicate are ignored or misunderstood, they may become frustrated and try to communicate in more direct ways. These actions might be seen as "bad behaviour" and lead to punishment, which can make the person feel even more isolated and unable to communicate. Rather than seeing them as a bad person doing a bad thing, view them as a good person having a hard time. This allows you to look past their visible behaviour and respond to their deeper or less visible need.

Different Forms Of Communication

We want to try to use what is called Total Communication. This means finding the right mix of tools and methods for our participants to communicate. Using a variety of methods, not just speech, makes communication more accessible for everyone.

To achieve this, we need to understand the different ways our participants communicate and adapt our own communication style to fit their needs.

Different methods of communication include:

- **Non-verbal:**
Think about all the ways we communicate outside of using words! Body movements, gestures, breathing patterns, eye pointing. Even textures, smells, temperature, and more.
- **Language-based communication:**
Speech, lip reading, Auslan, giving and receiving information in large print, braille and more. These systems all require some form of language comprehension.
- **Symbol systems:**
Street signs, exit lights, other real objects and symbols, Bliss, Widgit, Mayer-Johnson, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), line drawings, pictures and photographs.

Establishing routines is an important communication tool because it creates predictable patterns for participants to follow.

It's also important to consistently model the use of any communication system. This helps participants develop habits and learn how to use the same methods effectively.

In practice, this might mean that before giving an instruction to the group, we:

- Slow down
- Give clear verbal instruction
- Use Key Word Sign as we speak
- Use visual communication cards that match ones that participants have

Key Word Sign

Key Word Signing, previously known as Makaton, is a type of manual signing that uses signs from Auslan (a language used by the Deaf community). It's designed to be an easy-to-use communication system that can be used alongside spoken words. Learning and using Key Word Signs can help participants communicate more effectively by giving them new tools to express themselves.

Understanding AAC

AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) is a term used to describe a variety of communication tools and methods that are used instead of, or alongside, speech. There are two main categories: Aided and Unaided.

Unaided:

- Body movements
- Facial expression
- Gesture
- Finger Spelling
- Key Word Sign
- Any other system that only requires the body to use

Aided:

- Object Symbols
- Photos
- Written text
- PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)
- Digital AAC
- Any system that requires a tool to use

AAC devices can take many forms, such as picture-based tools or digital devices. Some participants may have their own devices that they prefer to use to communicate. It's important to create a safe and comfortable environment where participants can use whatever devices or tools they want to communicate.

Key Tips

1. To make sure we are understood clearly, speak slowly and use short sentences with words that are easy to understand. Keep in mind that people process information at different speeds. One tip is to give yourself time to say "ten elephants" ten times in your head after asking a question before expecting a response.
2. When giving directions, it's important to limit the number of steps we give. For example, instead of saying "Go to the drawer and get a tub and paintbrush, then go to the sink and fill it up with water then come back to the table," it's better to break it down into shorter, individual statements.

Activity

How could you more clearly communicate the above directions?

3. Make space for ourselves. In a busy workshop setting, we are often too busy to have long conversations with each participant, or to immediately stop what we are doing to answer a question. Instead of dismissing any participants' requests to communicate, it's important that we take a moment to acknowledge them and let them know that we'll get back to them as soon as we can. We then need to make sure that we get back to them. It's important that we balance our time with all our participants.

Activity

Could you use any tools to allow participants to signal that they want to talk to you without them calling out?



4. Hand-over-Hand teaching is a way to help participants learn how to do things that involve physical movements, such as using a paintbrush or playing a drum. It involves a teacher or guardian holding the participant's hand and guiding them through the motions. It's important to always ask for permission before doing this and to make sure the participant is comfortable with it.

Activity

Think of when this may be relevant in your work. How would you consider the artist's bodily autonomy and consent?

5. Adding different communication tools to our interaction with participants can be very helpful. For example, if we know Key Word Signing, try to use it along with our speech. We can also use gestures and clear facial expressions while we talk to help convey our messages. Consider using picture communication cards or mood indicators to help participants communicate their needs and wants.

Activity

What ways could you make it easier to communicate with participants?



Activity

Could you create visual timelines somewhere in your space to help show participants when things will be happening?

Could you offer some take-home images for participants with pictures of the space and the people to help them build familiarity?

What other ways can you adapt your communication to make your workshop more accessible? Set yourself some goals and deadlines for when you want to achieve them.

Who can keep you accountable to these goals?

Making Adjustments

When we talk to each other, it's important to be patient and give everyone enough time to think about what they want to say. Sometimes we might need to plan things ahead of time or give people extra notice if we need to change something. If someone doesn't understand what we're trying to say, we should take the time to find a better way to explain it.

Signs with pictures or words can be really helpful to show people where things are or what they need to do. It's important to think about what kind of signs we might need in a space and what information is important to share. We can use signs to answer questions like who's in charge or where the bathrooms are.

Take a look at how we talk to participants and think how we can change things. They might have a communication device that they like to use but don't bring along. Or maybe they've learned some signs that we could start to use in our workshops. Talk to their approved contacts to find out more information.

It's important to remember that changing the way we communicate is hard and takes time. It won't happen all at once. But if we take small steps, we can make things better and more accessible for everyone.

Putting It Into Action

"A Disability Justice framework understands that all bodies are unique and essential, that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met." - **Patricia Berne - Disability Justice Advocate**

Thinking Ahead Of Time

Making our workshops accessible to our participants takes a lot of planning, reflecting, and patience. When planning our workshops, prepare by thinking about the different ways participants can approach working in the space.

- Will they work as individuals or collaborators? Is there space to allow both?
- What senses do they engage? Touch, smell, sight, hearing?
- What choices do they get to make?
- Are they exploring any themes or topics in the work?
- How is it playful?
- Are there clear steps for the participants to take?
- Do you have the ability to communicate these steps effectively?
- Are there specific things the participants need to know before the session?

Knowing the answers to these questions can help us prepare for the workshop and manage the different ways that participants can engage. Be flexible and observe how the participants are engaging, then adapt our approaches as needed.

It's helpful to plan for multiple ways that participants can engage in the space. Every participant is an individual with their own interests and skills, and they may come with their own ideas about what they want to do. It's important to listen to and adapt to these ideas within the scope of what we can do. It's also important to properly communicate to the participants before the workshop so that they know what to expect. Empowering young disabled people to see themselves as capable and confident individuals whose voices and opinions matter is key to what we do.

Considering Your Environment

Thinking about the physical space you are in is crucial in making it accessible. Here are some key questions to consider:

- Is the place fully accessible to wheelchair or mobility device users? (Including access to toilets)
- Does the space have good lighting?
- Is there a lot of noise? Is the room echoey?
- Is access in and around the space well signed?

Some of these things we will not be able to change, however if there are factors that may make our workspace inaccessible to some people it is important that these are communicated to participants before they arrive.





Access to quiet spaces is really valuable, particularly for participants who experience sensory overload, dysregulation, or just need breaks. Ensure we have a suitable quiet space available that can be adequately supervised.

Some additions to our space to help participants manage sensory needs may be:

- Bean bags or floor cushions as alternatives to chairs
- Fidget toys that they can freely access and use as they need
- Noise cancelling headphones
- A small tent (to use as a retreat to get away from too much audio/visual input)
- Access to art equipment so they can continue working in a way that suits them

Planning Phase

Here are some practical strategies to prepare for the different ways that participants engage: Create projects that can continue over multiple sessions. These can be collaborative or individual and can support inquiry-based learning by encouraging repeated engagement with an activity. Planning these bigger tasks in advance can take the pressure off having to devise new activities each session and can give a framework to plan around.

Think in terms of theme and concepts

Themes can make planning multiple programs easier by giving the program a core focus. This theme can help connect participants working on a wide range of projects and can open up deeper discussion about the topics. Having the participants decide on things they want to explore can embed their creative voices in the project, ranging from animals or superheroes to more abstract concepts such as emotions or identity.

Embed structure into our workshop

Clear timelines of how the workshop runs can help in multiple ways. It can clarify expectations for participants and ease anxiety, manage a range of attention spans, and add variety to the workshop. Find the right balance between check-in activities, group games, and other tasks depending on the group and their objectives. Allocate enough time for each task, including packing up time.

Make space for self-led activities

Allow participants to continue working on a previous session's project if that's what they want to do. If a participant wants to try something new and different from the plan, see if there's space and capacity to support them. If not, discuss how their ideas could be explored in a later workshop, allowing them to take agency over the programming.

Remember that plans can fall apart

No matter how well prepared we may be, it's good to know that things will likely change as we work. Prepare to adapt as we go and learn from what happens. Communication is crucial. The preparation stage of a project is where accessibility begins. Give participants adequate time to be aware of the project/workshop and gain a clear understanding of it. Recognise that participants will come along with preconceived notions of what to expect, based on how clearly we first communicated about the activity.

Checking In

Before any workshop, it's important to touch base with facilitators, support staff, and volunteers. This ensures that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, shares a vision for the session, and knows how everyone else is feeling that day. This helps create a healthy and supportive team dynamic.

Some good activities to consider are:

- Have everyone state their names and preferred pronouns (name tags are good).
- An easy mood-based check in (to get a sense of how everyone is feeling on the day). For example: "Based on how you feel today, what item of clothing would you be?" Allow people to give as much or little detail as they wish.
- Quickly establish what the goals are for the session in order to get everyone on the same page
- Have individuals describe their roles and what they think they'll be doing. This shouldn't be a pressured test, but a chance to allow self-setting of goals and perhaps to see where roles and responsibilities need to be clarified.
- Allow everyone space to share their support needs or anything they want others to be aware of.

Welcoming People Into The Space

When participants arrive, greet them and consider their energy. Try to meet them where they are and don't overwhelm shy participants. Ensure that they know their way around the space and have all the important information they need, such as where to sit and where the toilets are.



Acknowledgement Of Country

It's important to always begin sessions with an Acknowledgement of Country. Keep it simple so that participants can understand the language. Using words like "Acknowledge" and "unceded" can be confusing, so speak in plain English and explain any new words.

This could involve using a simplified version and following it up with questions, such as "We thank the Kurna people whose lands we live on. Who knows what Kurna means?" Small bits of language can also be implemented into the class, such as saying good morning in language.



Check-In Activity

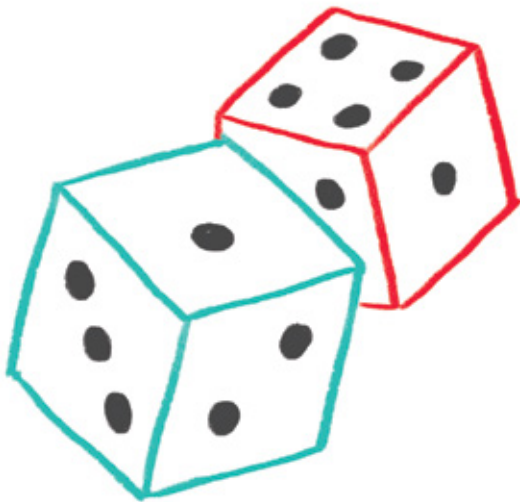
A check-in activity is an important ritual to have at the start of a workshop. It's a chance to set the tone, sense the mood and energy of the participants, and encourage engagement. It brings the group together and helps to focus them before the activities begin. A check-in should include the following:

- Names and pronouns
- A fun, easy mood-based check-in
- Quickly establish what the overall goal of the session is (if relevant) to get everyone on the same page



Keep It Relevant

When returning to the same activities with the same group doing a full check-in may not be relevant. Take note of what is important to check-in on with your groups!



Games

Games are great tools to bring to a workshop because they encourage learning through play.

They serve a range of purposes, including:

- Changing the energy of a group
- Introducing new ideas
- Encouraging sharing and bravery
- Being fun!

Use knowledge of the participants' access needs and the energy of the group to choose games that are suitable for everyone.

Some game ideas include:

Art Game Example

Creating Monsters:

Participants sit in a circle around a table with paper and drawing tools. Each participant starts drawing a creature, then after a set amount of time, they stop and pass their paper clockwise around the circle and add to the drawing they've received. Continue until the pages are full of new and interesting artworks!

Benefits:

- Encourages quick art making without too much thought
- Supports the idea that artists don't need to be protective and possessive over all their work
- Encourages collaboration

Drama Game Example

Have You Ever (A game from ActNow Theatre)

Participants sit in a circle while one stands in the middle. The person in the middle shares the phrase "have you ever [says an activity/thing they have done]" All the participants who have also done the same thing must then also stand up. All the standing participants must then move across the circle to find another seat and sit down. There should be one less chair than participants, meaning that each round will end with someone left standing.

Benefits:

Encourage brave sharing (gently encourage participants to try to move all the way across the circle and not to a seat next to them)

Promote openness

Encourage patience and acceptance (if participants need time to think of a statement, then give them as much time as they need)

Activity

Think about what games may be relevant to your workshop.

In what ways may they be inaccessible for some participants? Could they be modified?

How does the game align with the rest of the workshop? What does it work to achieve?



Working With Participants

When we work with people face-to-face, it's important to think about how we talk to them and support them. Our approach should be consistent with the overall goal or purpose we're trying to achieve. Some key considerations are:

• Use Simple Direct Language

Use simple language that is easy to understand. We can also use different ways to communicate, like using our body language and expressions. Make our messaging easy to understand.

• Use Vocalisation and Physical Presence

Our voice and body language are important tools for communicating. We can use a loud voice to get attention, or a soft voice to create a calm environment. Think about the situation and what would work best. Would it work best to stand up with a loud voice, or sit alongside them? Where we put our body and how we control our voices is just as important as what we say. This can clearly establish the tone and energy of the room.

Activity

How could you use your voice/body to help:

- Control a room that has become too chaotic and needs calming
- Support a hesitant participant sitting alone
- Re-energise a room after a relaxation activity

• Parrot Back

When having a group discussion and someone speaks, try repeating what they said back to them in different words. This allows the rest of the group to better hear what was said. By rephrasing what they said it shows that we understood their meaning and it offers them an opportunity to correct us if there was miscommunication.

Consistency and Context

While using parroting back with different wording in this scenario may be useful, it is important to consistently use the same wording when giving instructions to prevent confusion.

• Take A Deep Breath

Don't get overwhelmed by what we have to do. Try to focus on what is happening in the moment and be present. Often young people, neurodivergent people, and learning disabled people need additional time to process information. It's important for us to take our time and not rush through activities. We don't need to pack a workshop full of things to do, we mostly just need to be there and present with the participants.

• Be Question Led, Not Statement Led

Ask open-ended questions instead of making statements. This gives participants a chance to think for themselves and make their own creative decisions. Remember to not ask false questions where we are actually making a request and are not intending to give the young person a choice.

Activity

In what situations do you make statements that may be better rephrased as questions?

In what situations do you ask false questions that would be better rephrased as statements?

• Thank Participants For Any Input

Any time a participant offers anything to the group, thank them for sharing. It is important to do this consistently and throughout the workshop.

• Support Self Regulation

Participants will have a range of different needs that must be managed through a session. Having free and open access to fidget toys, headphones and alternative seating can help with this, along with having a well-designed quiet space. We can also support participants by including breathing exercises in our routine.

Most importantly we need to learn, accept and normalise the actions that participants need to take to regulate themselves.

Some participants may use stimming as a common regulation tool that may include rocking, hand flapping, making noises, or other actions.

Some participants may need to regularly get up and jump around and do big actions.

Some participants may have tics that could include all sorts of actions, movements, sounds or words.

All of these actions should be allowed and supported in a way that keeps everyone in the room safe.

Activity

What could you do to manage a situation where one young person has loud barking tics, while another has sensory issues where loud noises upset them?

• Give Encouragement Not Praise

Knowing the difference between praise and encouragement is really important in how to give feedback.

Praise often revolves around opinions and "I like" statements and reflects on the outcomes of what participants made. While praise can feel good to receive and to give, it builds dependency on external feedback and others' opinions. It connects a reward with the creation of "good" work, and is inherently focused on outcomes and not process.

Encouragement is about observation and recognition of process and progress. For example: "I can see on your face that you enjoy playing drums", "I noticed you're working really hard on that artwork".

We can also offer encouragement through questions by showing we value the participants' own opinions and support their own self evaluation. This puts the focus on effort and process, instead of adult approval.

Examples Of Encouragement

"You did it", "You're learning how to mix colours, last week you were having trouble, but now you are doing it without a problem", "Tell me how you did this?", "I see you're working hard on this"

Activity

In what situations would praise statements be appropriate?

What is the value of internal/external validation?

• Identify Participants' Goals

Asking what individual participants want to achieve can help us know how to best support them. It can also encourage them to identify their own goals. These goals can be small, like what someone wants to accomplish in one task, or big, like setting goals for the long term that they want to work towards over several sessions.

• Support Participants' Power

Empowering young people to be active community members and decision makers is important. It's empowering to involve them in making decisions that have real-world consequences. By giving them these opportunities, they can feel more confident and capable. This could involve working together on a project and discussing how to showcase it to the wider community, such as through a performance, exhibition or online display. It could also mean listening to their opinions and ideas to shape a group project.

Activity

What ways could you support participants to make meaningful decisions?

• Present Tools To Break Down Barriers

Sometimes when creating art, we might feel tempted to give participants solutions or methods to overcome problems or challenges. However, it's more beneficial to encourage them to identify and acknowledge their own challenges and explore what tools they already have to overcome them. This can be achieved by asking specific questions.

Example

- "What are you trying to do?" (name the challenge)
- "What have you tried?" (encourage self assessment)
- "What do you think we/you could try to do?" (support them in finding ways to overcome their challenge)

- "How about we try this_____ or this_____?" (offer a choice in possible solutions if they can't identify one for themselves)

• Support Observation And Reflection

Often, as artists, we get so caught up in our own processes that we don't take time to reflect on our work. It's great if we can support young artists to build these skills of self-reflection. We can encourage moments of self-reflection by asking the artist to observe their work and what they are doing. Self-critique can be difficult and lead to negative criticism so participants need a framework for how they look at their work. If they have spoken about what they want to achieve, then have them see if they have been successful or unsuccessful in achieving that. Then move on to look at how they could achieve that and what changes to make. Keep the focus away from things being "good" or "bad", but on simply observing their work. This process can be facilitated in a few ways both in individual work, and in a group setting.

Example

You run a class on drawing sea animals for young children. You begin by showing images of animals. The participants sit and you talk with them about the shapes of the animals as you slowly draw them. You occasionally draw the wrong shapes or add too many legs and give the participants the chance to correct and guide you as you draw. While in most settings, the children draw and you correct them, this reverses those roles and allows the children to be critical observers. This task could be facilitated with a very young group to show the processes of observation and reflection during art-making.

Activity

What tasks or activities could you do that support and encourage observation and reflection on practice?

• Above All, Get To Know Them!

Nothing can supersede the value of knowing our participants. Repeated connection and conversation (not just about making art) can strengthen a participant's feeling of belonging. Addressing participants by name, checking in on how they're going and their interests are all important steps. We should build our programs based on our participants' interests and needs.

Checking Out

It is important to have a routine to end sessions, keeping participants aware of the time so they know when to expect the session to end. Participants should be encouraged to help pack up in whatever capacity they can.

Similar to checking in, a check-out is an important ritual. It allows an opportunity for reflection on the workshop, for re-grounding participants, and for forward thinking. A check out should be a simple and easy task, not strenuous for participants. The focus should be on re-grounding the energy of the room and creating a calm space. Some ideas for check-out activities are:

- Ask what they enjoyed and learned today.
- Check back to how they're feeling.
- Give a chance to "throw something in the bin" (an activity where participants can metaphorically ball up and throw away one thing from the day, whether a thought, feeling, mistake, or anything they want to get rid of from the session).
- Are there things they need to complete, take home, or leave with us? Give time to check in on this.
- Touch base with the group on any key topics (perhaps there was a conflict or discussion on some heavy themes) and reflect on those things.
- Thank all the participants for their work before they leave.

Debriefing

Checking in with other facilitators, support staff, and volunteers is essential for the development of good practice.

After a workshop, there can often be a panicked flurry of packing up and completing tasks. It is important to break this energy and bring everyone together for a check-out. This can be facilitated in a number of different ways, but some key points to explore are:

- An emotional check-in activity
- A grounding exercise
- Opportunity to reflect on successes and challenges
- Sharing any key actions that need to be undertaken before the next session
- Storytelling of any key moments in the session
- A sharing of something outside the session that everyone is looking forward to

If there is important feedback or complaints, a private conversation may be needed. Write it down on a dated record.

Having someone keep notes of the key points in these debrief sessions is also vital, both for a record of any needed future actions and to

maintain an ongoing record of the program.

As we are not working in a formal education setting, it might not be necessary to document and keep a record of the participants' progress. However, keeping a record of the stories throughout the class is valuable for other reasons:

- To continually strive to improve our practice through critical reflection and sharing
- To create records for future reflection and learning
- For use in reports, acquittals and marketing
- To advocate and raise awareness in the broader community about the importance of the sector
- So the participants can see and reflect on their own progress

These notes do not need to be extensive but simply key moments or thoughts and reflections. Incorporating a range of voices, including facilitators, participants, and parents/guardians is essential.

Through these debriefs and reflections, it is vital that the privacy of all parties is respected, keeping names anonymous when possible and seeking further support as needed.

Activity

Go back over your notes and highlight what parts have really stood out to you. Make a note of:

- Where you feel validated that the way you work is having a positive impact
- What areas you feel you need to do more research and learning
- How you feel you could improve and what actions you could take

Revisit the activity on creating your own Guiding Principles using what you have learnt to expound on it.

If you work in a team, have a deeper conversation about what you have learnt and explore what strategies you could implement in your work.

What changes do you want to make to how you work?

How will you track your progress in meeting these goals?

Identify what additional training or resources you will need.

In Conclusion

The success of one participant is worth celebrating and sharing! As facilitators, we want to make a positive impact on the world. We see this impact in the confidence, joy, and growth of the young people we work with. Sharing our stories can help us learn from each other and create a strong community that supports learning disabled and neurodivergent young people.

As a small industry, the youth arts sector needs to come together when we can to share, to learn and to collaborate. Together we can make a future that can support all young people to have access to excellent artistic experiences!





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