Theatrical Intimacy and Instructional Touch Policy

The University of New Hampshire Department of Theatre and Dance is dedicated to integrating consent-based practices into all classroom and production environments. In all Department related activities, all participants are expected to abide by the Instructional Touch and Theatrical Intimacy Best Practices. All participants in UNH THDA activities are expected to communicate their boundaries, ask before they touch, and maintain a professional working environment. The UNH Department of Theatre and Dance adopts the following Best Practices in alignment with evolving industry best practices and standards for theatre training. In situations where more detailed intimacy direction is needed and the director does NOT feel comfortable leading, the department will endeavor to bring in an intimacy director who is more qualified to oversee that level of intimacy.

Instructional Touch is any physical contact made between instructor and student. Instructional Touch best practices are also to be encouraged between students. Examples of Instructional Touch include but are not limited to:

- Adjusting alignment/positioning
- Bringing awareness to physical use of the body, including breath support and diaphragm engagement
- Partnering for demonstrations
- Correcting performer placement in space
- Demonstrating choreography for dance and stage combat
- Adjusting Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Costume Fittings

Instructional Touch Best Practices

- Ask before you touch
  - Be specific about the contact
    - Where
    - For what purpose
  - Ask before you touch
    - “Does that work for you?”
    - “How would you feel about ______?”
    - “Would you be open to ______?”
  - Be prepared for “no”
    - Offer alternatives
      - Visualization
      - Demonstrating on yourself
      - Using their own hands
      - Using Props
      - Careful Observation and Note-taking
• Establish Boundaries  
  o Use a physical boundary establishment method such as The Boundary Practice (see p. 5)  
  o Integrate the Button  
    • In any exercise, a participant says “Button” if they need to briefly hold to clarify a boundary.  
    • When a participant calls “Button”, the participant offers a way to continue working that works for their boundaries.  
  o Use Placeholders (such as palm-to-palm or high-five, etc.) when someone needs more time

Please note: Instructional Touch is different from touch made in situations where the touch is made in an attempt to prevent or minimize injury in an emergency. In those situations, all participants should act immediately to reduce harm or risk in accordance with their safety training. Check-in afterward regarding touch if necessary.

Theatrical Intimacy is the simulation of intimate physical acts for theatrical purposes. Examples of Theatrical Intimacy include but are not limited to:  
• Kissing  
• Embraces  
• Sexual innuendo  
• Revealing Clothing  
• Nudity or partial nudity (including on-stage costume changes)  
• Simulated intercourse

Theatrical Intimacy Best Practices  
In addition to the Instructional Touch Best Practices, Theatrical Intimacy requires the following:  
• Practice a consent-based process  
  o Use an Audition Disclosure form to allow actors to opt in or out of theatrical intimacy.  
  o Use the Button.  
  o Use a Place-holder in classroom work where necessary.

• Establish Boundaries  
  o Use the Boundary Practice exercise.  
  o A third party such as Stage Management or Teaching Assistant must always be present for the staging of intimacy.  
  o All productions have a no-cell phone policy in rehearsal and backstage for all members of the production. This is vital to intimacy work.  
  o Directors, choreographers, and instructors should never “step in” to stage intimate moments or have any physical contact with the actors during the staging or rehearsal process of intimacy.

• Desexualize the Process  
  o Use non-sexual language for staging the intimacy or discussing it with the actors.
If you need to talk about the character’s actions, use character names.
Refrain from making sexual jokes, innuendo, or comments.
Offer De-Roleing: differentiating oneself from the character (see p. 6).

Choreography
- No elements of intimacy will ever be improvised. All theatrical intimacy, for productions and classwork, regardless of how simple or straight-forward it might be, must be choreographed.
- Intimacy choreography will not be run until an intimacy rehearsal takes place.
- Choreography must be notated by actors and either stage management or Teaching Assistant.

Notation will be written, but additional notation can be taken in the form of an audio recording. For actor privacy, video recordings of intimacy should not be created.
- Actors must not deviate from choreography.

Additional Notes
- If an actor deviates, the choreographer (if the mistake occurs during rehearsals or in class) or the stage manager (if the mistake occurs during performances or when the choreographer is not present) will speak with the actor and review the choreography.
- The actor will apologize to their intimacy scene partner(s).
- If the actor continues to deviate from the choreography, it may be used as grounds for removal from the production.
- If a performer’s boundaries change which results in altering the choreography, they should notify the instructor and/or choreographer as soon as possible so modifications can be made.
- In production, directors must discuss any changes to choreography with the choreographer and may not make changes themselves. If the director is serving as the intimacy choreographer, changes must be discussed with the performers, stage manager, and intimacy liaison and consented to by all parties, with documentation (updated consent form and note-taking).
- Placeholders should be used until choreography is set.
  - Placeholders may also be used in classwork where the intimacy is not of vital importance to the student’s academic development.
- Placeholders may be used any time after choreography is set except during performances.
- In the event of a production in which a student consents to the choreography but then proves unable to perform the choreography, and no alternative choreography will serve the story, the student may be asked to leave the production and the role re-cast.

Costume Shop Best Practices
When an actor is cast in a department production, they should come to their scheduled fitting prepared to participate in the fitting process at that time. If you miss a fitting, you will be asked to work 30 minutes in the shop. If you are late for a fitting, you will be asked to spend the
**Amount of time late in the shop helping with labeling or setting up dressing rooms.** PLEASE DON’T BE LATE OR MISS FITTINGS!

Fittings involve:
- Removal of street clothes down to undergarments (Actors are responsible for wearing opaque, neutral-tone, full-coverage undergarments to all fittings).
- The fitting of garments close to the body.
- Physical touch to adjust fit to designer specification.
- Interaction, including physical touch, by various personnel including the draper, designer, and assistant designer.

Students and Shop Personnel have the following tools in a fitting:
- Speak up to clarify/reiterate/change boundaries.
- Request two-minute break.
- Request a reduction in the number of people in the room.
- Request help or additional privacy for dressing or undressing.
- Request that the appropriate faculty or staff member makes the adjustments, rather than a student designer or draper.
- Ask questions for clarification.

The measuring process for costume fittings requires accuracy. This process involves physical contact with the measuring tape and minimal touch from the measurer. Students and Shop Personnel have the same tools available during measurements as above.

**Communication Best Practices**

Inappropriate touch or commentary should be reported immediately, and sexual harassment will not be tolerated.
- In production, if you have a concern regarding theatrical intimacy or instructional touch, you are encouraged to speak with your director, a faculty or staff member associated with the production (including but not limited to: Choreographer, Intimacy Liaison, Stage Manager, Assistant Production Manager/Stage Management Coordinator, Costume Shop Supervisor, Technical Director), or with an outside faculty member or the Department Chair.
- In non-production coursework, address your concerns to the instructor, teaching assistant, or to the Department Chair.

**The Button**

Calling “Button” mimics pressing Pause on a remote. Any participant can call “Button” at any point during intimacy practice, except in performance. When “Button” is called, the action stops and the intimacy choreographer, stage manager, and/or intimacy liaison will check in with everyone.
- This is not a time for group therapy. If a participant needs emotional or mental health aid, the director/instructor will help facilitate obtaining it.
• The goal is to determine what needs to change to maintain everyone’s personal boundaries. The participant who called “Button” should have a suggestion to keep creativity moving forward.

**The Boundary Practice**

Invite participants to divide into pairs. Ask them to stand facing each other and select a Partner A and Partner B. Partner A goes first, with Partner B observing.

- With their own hands on their own body, using smooth, swiping motions, Partner A will demonstrate everywhere they are willing to be touched today.
- They should go slow and be specific. Cue them if it seems they forgot areas such as the neck, ears, underarms, sides, etc.
- Partner B observes.
- Partner A asks Partner B, “May I take your hands?”
- If Partner B answers “No,” then Partner B can:
  - mimic Partner A’s movements on their own body
  - can trail along behind Partner A’s hands on Partner A’s body
  - or can hover two inches above Partner A’s hands as they repeat the movement.
- Partner A retraces the same pattern with Partner B’s hands on Partner A’s body.
- If at any time Partner B does not want to touch a spot, they say “Button” and Partner A will skip that spot.
- Go slow and be specific. Cue them if they change their pattern or skip areas.
  - Partner A may discover new boundaries during this phase; that’s okay.
- Partner B verbally reinforces the boundaries, saying everywhere they see a “fence” on Partner A’s body (i.e. “There’s a fence around your chest, underarms, ears, and the front and back of the pelvis to the upper thigh.”).
- Use clinical language and correct terminology (i.e. chest or breasts, not boobs).
- Partner A clarifies any boundaries.
- Switch partners and repeat.

**Notes:**

- This exercise should be practiced initially with guidance from the director, choreographer, or instructor. Once participants are familiar with it, they are invited to check in with each other daily, using the Boundary Practice, with a neutral third party present.
  - They will likely arrive at a place where they only need to verbally reinforce “same boundaries today.” This is acceptable as long as both parties consent to it.
- This exercise can easily be multiplied to include more participants; everyone can take turns in various pairs, or there can be Partners A, B, C and have Partner A take Partners B’s & C’s hands. Alternatively, everyone can stand in a circle and take turns demonstrating on themselves with the whole group watching, then tracing the patterns on their own bodies, then reinforcing verbally.

**De-Roleing**
Actors take turns using the following format:

- “As the character, I was feeling...” (for example, “As Blanche, I was scared of Stanley, drunk, out of control, fantasizing about a different life, I was trying to seduce my sister’s husband, and was a little turned on by how manly and domineering he was.”)
- “As the actor, I was doing...” (for example, “As the actor, I was making sure to hit my targets, I was counting the beats, I felt in control of my body, I appreciated that you made the adjustment on this move because of my sore shoulder, and I felt safe with all of our choreography.”)
- If anything deviated from the agreed-upon choreography, the actor will take this opportunity to apologize and clarify.