



# Big Fork Theatre Code of Conduct

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## Contents:

1. General information	2
2. Responsibilities & Rights of Performers & Students	4
3. What is and is not appropriate behaviour at BFT (a non-exhaustive list)	6
4. Theatre Safety	9
5. Complaints Process	9
6. Definitions	11



## **1. General information**

### **WHO WE ARE**

Big Fork Theatre (BFT) is a not-for-profit co-operative. The primary activities of BFT are:

- producing live comedy shows;
- providing improvisational and other training; and
- creating a community around improvisation, comedy and performance in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

BFT's Purpose: Big Fork Theatre is a welcoming Brisbane improv & comedy institution. We are bold doers who bring everyone with us. We provide space and opportunities for those united in our purpose: to create fun and funny shows, train, and collaborate, at our dedicated unique venue. We are inclusive, and strive for everyone to have a fun time: we offer a fun experience to audiences, and give every Brisbaneite a chance to be part of a comedy collective.

### **WHO YOU ARE**

Performers, students and other people participating in BFT activities.'

### **HOW THE CODE OF CONDUCT APPLIES**

BFT is a not-for-profit cooperative, and its Directors are empowered to develop and enforce policies that govern the operation of the theatre and the minimum standards of conduct expected of individuals.

You agree to abide by the Code of Conduct when you:

- accept the terms and conditions of enrolment in courses/training provided by Big Fork Theatre;
- participate in activities facilitated by BFT (e.g. performing in a show); and/or
- enter the premises of BFT, or any other hired/lease space or performance space wherein it is operating.

### **THE CODE OF CONDUCT: AT A GLANCE**

This document, comprising Sections 1 through 6 (including Definitions), in its totality represents Big Fork Theatre's Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct governs how we will treat each other, respect each other, and the process for dealing with conflicts or issues around behaviour or processes that may come up.

Respect for our community means respect for you as autonomous adult people who can navigate social situations, with the knowledge that our support is there if issues arise that need to be addressed.

### **REVIEWING AND GIVING FEEDBACK ABOUT THIS CODE OF CONDUCT**



BFT is covered by workplace health and safety laws and anti-discrimination laws in Queensland and Australia. There are therefore some sections of this document that are more legalistic or use particular language that is unavoidable. On the whole, it has been drafted with the goal of being easy to understand, so if you have suggestions for improvements please send them to [conduct@bigforktheatre.com](mailto:conduct@bigforktheatre.com).

## **CORE PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION**

The core principles of participation in the BFT community, as reflected in this Code of Conduct, are respect, community, fun and quality. Every person who is part of the BFT community commits to taking these values on board.

Inappropriate/unacceptable conduct will not be tolerated and may result in suspension and/or removal from participation in BFT activities. Criminal or violent behaviour at any BFT event will not be tolerated and will result in immediate removal from participation in BFT activities and will be reported to the relevant authorities.

- **Respect:** BFT believes in respect for others, our audiences and our players, and respect for our environment. BFT wants to ensure everyone is treated with respect - that is, not subject to discrimination or harassment or bullying, as well as being able to participate in activities.
- **Community:** BFT is a community-based organisation, and part of that is an obligation to ensure accessibility and accountability. BFT wants to encourage as many people from as many different backgrounds to be involved in improv and comedy in all facets, creative and organisational.
- **Fun:** BFT wants to ensure that fun - the core of improv and comedy - is centred in our community and work. This means we aim for a positive environment at all shows, jams, rehearsals and events.
- **Quality:** BFT is committed to producing quality improv and sketch comedy shows, and other content.



## **2. Rights & Responsibilities of BFT Performers & Students**

As a student and/or performer in Big Fork Theatre, BFT leadership is responsible for creating opportunities and an environment where you can grow, and you are responsible for helping BFT and our community grow. These rights and responsibilities help make sure that all performers and students in the BFT community can grow and help the theatre be a safe, sustainable place.

### **PERFORMER & STUDENT RIGHTS**

As a BFT Performer and/or Student I can expect BFT to honour and respect my commitment to BFT, and to...

1. Provide strong leadership through its Directors, and any group/individual to whom that leadership is delegated.
2. Operate with transparency in its management of BFT, including its structure, decisions and processes around casting, artistic and training direction, and general company direction, and be accountable to the BFT community on these areas through community engagement.
3. In its artistic and training direction, strive for continual improvement, including high quality performances, and training that extends performers' skills, including regular reviews of performance and training programs.
4. Provide me with training opportunities and skill development opportunities.
5. Consider me for casting where I meet the criteria and provide those criteria clearly when performance opportunities are offered.
6. Provide regular guidance and feedback to performers and students.
7. Clearly communicate expectations & obligations of students and performers, including but not limited to volunteering at the theatre, casts for shows, call times, rehearsal requirements and marketing tasks.
8. Aim to create a space for performers and students that is free of discrimination, harassment and bullying, which includes actively upholding this Code of Conduct
9. Provide a clear process for handling and resolving complaints in a timely manner.
10. Support access needs of performers and students, through maintaining a generally accessible space and supporting access needs as communicated by performers and students.

### **PERFORMER & STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

As a performer and/or student, I commit to the pursuit of BFT's purpose, and actively support this purpose, and I will...

1. Follow the Code of Conduct and other BFT policies.



2. Treat other people with respect, and behave in a way that supports a respectful and safe space for all people – including BFT students, performers, Directors, venue managers, volunteers, and audiences.
3. Be punctual, respecting others' time.
4. Not engage in any inappropriate/unacceptable conduct, including but not limited to discrimination, harassment, bullying, or anti-social behaviour at BFT or in connection to BFT activities.
5. Proactively and directly communicate with BFT leadership around availability, access needs, concerns and things that are going well - this includes not assuming that the Directors or other management would know already about an issue or concern.
6. Look after myself and others: ensure I am managing my own needs and speaking up where possible, while actively participating in improving our community by engaging with others respectfully, including addressing concerns in the moment where possible. I will use opportunities like check ins to ensure any specific needs I have are raised.
7. Treat the BFT space and any spaces BFT activities take place in with respect. I will follow health and safety rules and briefings, and the direction of venue managers, teachers and Directors on these matters.
8. Be appropriately attired and prepared for performances (enclosed shoes, i.e. no open toe shoes & no stilettos to avoid damage to the stage clean and intact clothing that is not overly casual - i.e. shorts or old leisure/workout gear and no "funny slogan" or otherwise non-compliant with Code of Conduct slogans or messages on clothing ), and classes, and ensure personal hygiene.
9. When engaging in training or performance, I will come with an open mind and co-operative attitude ready to work with others and learn new things
10. If performing in shows, actively participate in the BFT community, for example through volunteering, attending shows and supporting others.
11. Strive for continual improvement of my improv and comedy skills and performance, including hearing and taking on feedback and guidance.
12. Display a professional attitude when representing BFT, and be an ambassador for BFT when engaging with other improv and comedy companies locally, nationally, and internationally. (e.g. attending festivals).
13. Make genuine efforts to promote BFT's ticketed events, particularly those in which I am cast.



### 3. What is and is not appropriate behaviour at BFT

This is a non-exhaustive list, meaning that it does not list every type of behaviour that is not appropriate, but gives clear examples so as to better illustrate the Code of Conduct.

Before each show, jam and class there is a check in. This is a space to listen to your fellow players and express your needs. This includes listening to and respecting pronouns, injuries and physical (e.g. I do not like to be touched at all) or content boundaries (e.g. my dog died this morning, can we avoid dog death). In general, at BFT, in a BFT produced show, physical contact should be limited: for example tapping on a shoulder or a handshake, and there should always be agreement and consent for any other physical contact(see below for examples). Per examples, you may see a show where different contact is engaged in, but this should only be between performers who are experienced and very familiar with performing with one another, and where physical contact boundaries have been discussed between the performers.

Inappropriate/unacceptable conduct will not be tolerated and will result in suspension and/or removal from participation in BFT activities. Criminal or violent behaviour at any BFT event will not be tolerated and will result in immediate removal from participation in BFT activities.

While BFT will generally not interfere with artistic choices made on-stage or during a classroom exercise, we will intervene in the event of discrimination, bigotry or harassment and to ensure the class, jam, rehearsal or performance remains a welcoming space for all.

**Any performer or student who feels that the line has been crossed may excuse themselves from the performance or exercise, and should report the conduct to the Big Fork Theatre Grievance Officer/s, and the complaints process will be followed. Behaviour outside a BFT context can also be considered through the complaints process if appropriate.**

Underlined words are defined in Section 7 - Definitions

Appropriate	Not appropriate
<p>Comedy often exists in the grey areas of life, so exploration of uncomfortable or impolite content on stage and in rehearsal, jams or in class is inevitable. All students and performers should bring an open mind to performances, classes and jams, treating each other with tolerance and respect.</p> <p><b>Artistic and comedic freedom to explore uncomfortable or impolite content is important, however this is mediated by the requirement to respect others and not to harass or discriminate.</b></p> <p>Examples of this could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scenes from women players exploring sexism, while clearly having the characters displaying sexist behaviour as the butt of the joke.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Harassment (including sexual harassment and bullying), discrimination, and violence will not be tolerated.</u></b> Other behaviour that puts other people at risk will also not be tolerated.</p> <p><b>Physically intimidating, touching without consent, rough contact or injuring your fellow players in a scene is never acceptable.</b> Always get affirmative consent when you are on stage with another player before touching them. For example if in character you want to hug another player, saying “do you want a hug”and allowing them to respond yes or no, or offering your arms out to allow them to hug you (allowing them to decide if they are comfortable with the physical contact). It is never necessary to use force or grab or push another player - we are acting.</p>



- Playing with stereotypes of a marginalised group you belong to in order to poke fun at those stereotypes, e.g. a person from a particular cultural background exploring the tropes associated with that cultural background.
- A crime boss threatening someone with death in a scene with a gun
- Queer improvisers using language from their community in shows where there is an explicit understanding that that will be done
- Performers who have performed together for many years or have close personal relationships may engage in more close, physical contact or what might otherwise be seen as inappropriately sexual verbal exchanges in scenes - due to the trust and understanding they have with each other.
- **The best approach is that if you are not confident, comfortable and certain of your ability to handle certain content - do not do it.** Err on the side of caution.

**Engaging in physical contact with another player with their explicit consent.** For example if in character you want to hug another player, saying “do you want a hug” and allowing them to respond yes or no, or offering your arms out to allow them to hug you (allowing them to decide if they are comfortable with the physical contact - have no expectations that the player will agree).

**Engaging in physical contact with a player to tag them out** (gentle tap on upper arm or shoulder with a flat hand and no more) if they have not expressed a physical boundary about that.

**Violence or death** are also often explored on stage, however it is important that this remains in the realm of slapstick and mime. Think silly, ridiculous, absurd - we are generally not doing something gritty and real here. The line is not always crystal clear, but things that are always over the line are rape & sexual assault (including implied sexual assault), explicit and intentional suicide, paedophilia, bestiality and incest.

**Being intoxicated by drugs or alcohol** (as a guide, if you are unfit to drive, you are unfit to perform/play or attend class).

**Causing intentional damage to any space in which you are training**, performing or representing BFT, or engaging in reckless behaviour that could easily lead to damage.

**Bringing uninvited guests** to a class that is not “open” or bringing uninvited guests into areas specified as ‘performer only’.

**Inappropriate verbal, physical or sexual conduct towards other members of the community or audience**, or behaviour that is discriminatory. **This includes behaviour on stage** that is discriminatory, objectifying or makes another performer feel unsafe - being “in character” is no excuse for using language, actions or behaviour that makes another performer feel discriminated against, objectified or unsafe.

Examples of this could be:

- Asking someone out on a date at the theatre when they have said they are not interested
- Refusing repeatedly to use a person’s pronouns after being informed of them and corrected (a performer can be endowed as a character with different pronouns, and that would not be inappropriate within that scene to refer to them by those pronouns within that scene)
- Making comments or jokes, in and outside scenes, that are sexist, racist, homophobic, ableist, or otherwise discriminatory. Examples of this could be: calling women bitches, engaging in racial stereotyping by using an accent from outside your culture, making fun of a disability like deafness by doing mocking/pretend sign language or a “deaf voice”, endowing another character as a “prostitute” or “whore” and denigrating that character for their profession.
- In character or out of scene engaging in overtly sexual jokes or comments, or sexualising another person particularly if they are a younger or more inexperienced player or a woman or queer person.



**There will be shows that explore “inappropriate” content explicitly.** However, these shows will be deliberately cast and rehearsed and the performers prepared for the content, improvised or scripted. There is of course no content in the broader world that is “off limits”, but at BFT we have limits to ensure our community is as welcoming, consistent and pleasant for all audiences, performers and students as possible.

- Engaging in stereotyping of drug users or addicts, usually in conjunction with stereotyping of poor people - it’s not original to do a hack bit about Ipswich.

More specific stage examples:

- Touching a performer without their consent, including when they have explicitly stated in check in that they cannot or do not wish to be touched;
- Using slurs or hate speech or gestures, e.g. the Nazi salute.
- Removing any items of clothing if it has not been an explicit part of the rehearsal and process of the show (to be clear this is actual clothing, not miming taking off clothes in character).
- Incest, bestiality, paedophilia, and sexual assault as punchlines, character backstory, etc - to be avoided entirely. These are things that do happen in real life but they are not appropriate for 99% of comedy shows, particularly BFT’s improvised shows.
- Sexual harassment as a plot point in workplace or situation including unwanted touching, comments, stalking - this is not funny and sometimes is just you sexually harassing the other player on stage live.

**Repeatedly disrupting the enjoyment of other members of the community:** for example

- by unreasonably controlling or monopolising group conversations, performance or training time
- In a performance, not allowing other players to perform by cutting them off or talking over them

**Giving unsolicited criticism to fellow community members on their performances,** whether in or

outside of a classroom or performance environment. This includes providing what you might view as “constructive criticism” however, unless it is explicitly requested or part of an understanding it is best to leave criticism to the official channels. You are always welcome to raise concerns with play and improv or sketch content through the BFT Grievance Officer/s or Directors.





## 4. Theatre Safety

Being safe on our stage

- The curtain on stage covers plate glass. Do not strike, lean or run into this glass;
- Don't punch, bash or run into the walls or recklessly slam stage doors - if you wouldn't do it to your walls or doors at home, don't do it here;
- Don't stand on the chairs or stools, prat falls or stunt falls on stage, or other risky physical movements. Be careful when moving to the ground (protect your knees and head);
- Be careful lifting anything high or tall around the lighting and sound equipment (it's lower than you think);
- Don't bring an audience member on stage.

## 5. Complaints Process

The procedure for resolving a complaint regarding any part of this Code of Conduct is outlined below. The person with the complaint, will be referred to below as the "complainant", the incident or incidents will be referred to as "the incident/s", and the person/s whose behaviours or actions are the subject of the complaint or grievance will be referred to as the "subject".

A complaint can be made by a person subjected to a breach, or by a person who witnesses the breach - don't assume someone else will report it, as a community member you need to protect the safe space we are creating together.

The Code of Conduct Officer/s referred to below are volunteers from the Big Fork Theatre community who have been trained in the Code of Conduct, confidentiality and selected based on their experience and interest in the work.

Please note that BFT is a volunteer run organisation and participation in the BFT community is voluntary. This means that the processes around complaints will be managed as efficiently as possible, but that this should not be compared to a workplace process. Your participation in the BFT community should be seen as a privilege not a right: you do not have a right to access the community or opportunities if you do not respect the Code of Conduct and treat others with respect.

*Note on anonymous complaints: Anonymous complaints are provided for on the BFT website, but they must be necessarily different to the process below, as anonymous complaints are often harder to investigate and confirm (as the complainant is not identified), therefore they are taken more as a note, warning, or guidance on overall policy, rather than actionable in and of themselves (depending on the content). Therefore in the below procedure, where references are made to a complaint they refer to a non-anonymous complaint. Anonymous complaints will be reported to the BFT Directors and appropriate action (such as policy changes, noting, etc) will be taken.*



1. The complainant should write to the BFT Code of Conduct Officer/s via email to [conduct@bigforktheatre.com](mailto:conduct@bigforktheatre.com) outlining what their complaint is, who is responsible if anyone, when and where the incident/s occurred, and the effect this has had on the person or others. If it is not possible to communicate the complaint in writing, it can be done verbally in person or via an arranged conversation.
2. The BFT Code of Conduct Officer/s will respond within 7 days to the complaint. This complaint will also be reported to the BFT Directors in this timeframe.
3. The BFT Code of Conduct Officer/s will investigate the complaint.
  - a. The first step in investigation will be a discussion with the aggrieved about the complaint, including their expectations around outcomes sought, and level of concern and distress;
  - b. If BFT's Code of Conduct Officer/s following this conversation believe the situation requires immediate action or an interim resolution, they may bring it to the BFT Directors to determine this action at this stage
  - c. The complainant's complaint will then be provided in writing via email to the subject and their perspective sought. When the BFT Grievance Officer/s believe this would risk real harm to the complainant, the process may be altered appropriately with approval of the BFT Directors.
  - d. Any other additional investigation at this stage may be taken by the BFT Grievance Officer/s.
  - e. The BFT Code of Conduct Officer/s will aim, where appropriate to keep the complainant up to date with the process as it continues.
4. If, following the investigation, the BFT Grievance officers believe it is an interpersonal issue that is not related to an overt breach of the Code of Conduct, then the BFT Grievance Officer/s may attempt to resolve the conflict through a conversation between the parties mediated by the BFT Grievance Officer/s.
5. If, following the investigation, the complaint is determined to be a breach of the Code of Conduct or something of a similarly serious nature, the board of Directors will hear a report from the BFT Code of Conduct Officer/s and discuss the breach and appropriate consequences.
  - a. Consequences of a breach of the Code of Conduct can range from apology, warning, temporary or permanent performance bans, jam bans or other such restrictions on access to the BFT community.
6. The agreed actions from item 5 will then be undertaken, and the complainant will have the outcome reported back to them.
7. If the matter is of a criminal nature, the BFT Code of Conduct Officer/s and BFT board will support the complainant in going to the appropriate authorities.
8. If the complaint involves one or more of the BFT Code of Conduct Officer/s, the board must appoint another party to fulfil the role.
9. All complaints and investigations are strictly confidential.
10. All complaints are to be reported on, in general or in a de-identified manner, at the Co-Operative's AGM.



## 6. Definitions

*discrimination* means when a person discriminates against another person if they treat a person less favourably in similar circumstances because of the other person's:

- sex;
- relationship status;
- pregnancy;
- parental status;
- breastfeeding;
- age;
- race;
- disability or health status impairment;
- religious belief or religious activity;
- political belief or activity;
- trade union activity;
- lawful sexual activity;
- gender identity;
- sexuality;
- intersex status;
- family responsibilities; and/or
- association with, or relation to, a person identified on the basis of any of the above attributes.

*harassment* means a repeated unwanted or clearly unacceptable behaviour, or a pattern of unwanted or clearly unacceptable behaviour, directed at another person or persons

*marginalised group* means a group that in wider Australian society has been generally subject to discriminatory or poor treatment, in various ways. See the definition of discrimination above for a list of the attributes that have been used against marginalised groups. Examples of marginalised groups include First Nations peoples, people of colour, people who practise non-Christian religions, LGBTQIA+ people, women, sex workers.

*sexual harassment* means unwanted sexual advance or comment

*slurs* are offensive words used to denigrate members of a marginalised group. Examples can be found easily via a Google search, and if you are unsure if a word is a slur, check or just don't use it

*stereotypes* are fixed and oversimplified images or idea of a particular type of person or thing - while playing with stereotypes in comedy is common, when those stereotypes are discriminatory (e.g. they play into that stereotype while not at all subverting it - e.g. poor people are all lazy dole bludgers, women should be in the kitchen, etc) they are not acceptable.