

Self Care Guide

For Performance Artists

Written by Lauren Barri Holstein and FK Alexander

Introduction

This document is intended as both a personal rider and as a guiding document to other artists and arts workers on self-care.

This guide is based on self-reflection by artists Lauren Barri Holstein and FK Alexander through years of making work in various contexts with various personal challenges and pleasures. In particular, this document offers reflections on creating and performing work dealing with trauma, illness and/or disability, and healing, but is in no way limited to artists making work in these areas.

This is a fluid and ever-changing document which, we hope, will evolve as we evolve; will fill with further wisdom as we become more self-aware.

This guide articulates our needs from ourselves and from others, along with personal and professional boundaries necessary in order to safeguard our wellbeing.

While the current landscape is allowing for more open and clear communication around access and wellbeing, we believe this guide can contribute to increased understanding between artists and facilitators, between artists and their team/collaborators, and for artists' own personal journey of self-awareness and acceptance.

When we increase communication between artists and facilitators, and better our understanding of, and compassion for, each other and ourselves, we can grow a

community – a community that recognises that the way we engage is not monolithic. There are infinite ways of relating to one another in a space – performance, and the process of creating performance, can never be one thing. There are so many ways of being which are informed by culture, experience, trauma, disability, circumstance, etc. The more we are able to accept this of ourselves and others, our industry will find more moments of community, and of care. The more we create work under safe, caring, and nourishing environments, the more grounded and powerful our work will be, and the more powerful and grounded we will be in ourselves.

The more we assert our own needs, the more we can trust our own instincts. This in turn creates a more harmonious, clearer working environment.

Collaboration, creating art work, creating spaces for healing, for transformation, takes our whole beings. It is a gift. We bravely step out before others, raw and real and human.

We want to make work where we can be free; free in the creation and performing of art, of life. Free in our bodies and hearts, to be able to feel the gratitude and joy of being human, in all its glory and blood.

Body

What I offer myself:

Listen to Body

Always.

Take time to check-in with body, throughout each day.

Meditate.

Move

Honour body with daily movement, depending on its needs in that moment.

Bring my small pieces of equipment that help me maintain my physical health, i.e. Pilates balls, vitamins and herbs, painkillers, noise-cancelling headphones, downloaded guided meditations and music.

Trust

Trust the waves, the ups and downs, that they will always roll on and on. Take whatever challenge meets me by the hand, and say thank you. Its wisdom will reveal itself. It will process, will shift, will move, through me.

Trust in myself. Take the time to be still and listen. What do I need in this moment? Move from mind to body, and listen. Trust your voice, trust your body, and honour its requests.

Gratitude

Always, to everyone, to myself.

Take the applause. Feel it.

My needs from Others:

Transportation and Accommodation

I will often require public or private transportation in order to avoid long periods of walking, in order to retain my energy and care for my body's needs.

I require accommodation that is private, quiet, and fulfils basic comforts, unless otherwise agreed (e.g. if camping is part of the workshop I am leading.)

Pre- and Post- Performance Needs

A private space to meditate, warm up and take care of my nervous system.

A private space to rest and recover, and allow my nervous system to reset.

Access to shower.

Access to constant drinkable water.

Understanding

My body has specific requirements of care, which I am responsible for. I ask for understanding, in that my body might need more time, more space, more rest, and potential requirements specific to a location, which will be communicated as soon as they are known.

Time

What I offer myself:

Taking Time

One thing at a time. One piece of a project at a time.

E.g. R&D for these weeks or months. BREAK. Workshops for these weeks or months. BREAK. Admin for these weeks or months. BREAK

Learning and Honouring My Rhythms

Listening to and learning my rhythm of energetic output and going inward. Activity vs Rest.

Build this rhythm into the structure and scheduling of my projects. Really honour how much time it takes to recover and rebuild energy, and how much time it takes to switch gears, mentally, emotionally and physically, from one aspect of a project to another.

Take more time than I think I'll need.

Non-Project Time is Part of your Project

Consider and even schedule the days, weeks, or even sessions, of work, rest, and play that are not "productive" to the project. They are part of my life and my wellbeing, so they are crucial to the "success" of the project.

E.g. swimming, teaching my dance class, meditation with Prancer, my own meditation practice, socialising, gardening, sitting in the garden doing nothing.

My needs from Others:

Scheduling:

I will need to know my schedule in advance.

I will need to be made known of any changes to the schedule in advance.

I cannot maintain energy through an entire day or day into evening without regular breaks and rest time at my accommodation, so please bear this in mind.

I don't do post-show talks, but I will schedule other talks and/or workshops around the show, with adequate rest time between activities.

Safeguarding

What I offer myself:

Do not block or avoid uncomfortable feelings. Allow myself to feel it, and go through the processing of difficult emotions in order to return to safety.

I will remember that abuse from others belongs to them, and is a result of their own conditioning and energy. This does not belong to me. I choose to hand it back to them.

My needs from Others:

I don't like social media and I won't accept any agreement that requires me to use it.

I don't read reviews.

Therefore:

I will, when available and necessary, hire someone to takeover my social media, as both a way to relieve myself of the burden but also to protect myself from abuse.

With current team, put a system in place to screen communication to me on both social media and email, regarding abuse, reviews, and PR requests.

For larger scale projects, I aim to hire PR/Marketing person to take the burden off of myself and my team.

Community and Team

What I offer myself:

Embody Communal Care

Offer love, support and gratitude to my team, the venue, the festival, the other artists. We were all in this together. No matter anyone's perceptions of anyone's work, choose kindness. We are vulnerable human beings, and I see you, and I care. This is how community arises.

Trust

Trust in others – that they are always doing the best they can in each moment. Find my compassion for their own challenges and limits, and allow them to be where they are.

My needs from Others:

Team

FK and LBH:

During projects, I aim to hire a producer who will manage administration and organisation. Their main task will be to take-over communication with venues/festivals on

non-artistic information, including: scheduling, deadlines, marketing information, travel, accommodation, finances, risk assessments, etc. This may include handing over management of my inbox, where necessary.

I will often require an assistant, especially when travelling outside of SE England/ London, or Edinburgh, respectively, depending on the size of our paid touring team for each project.

LBH:

Ideally, there is a producer, an administrator, and a fundraiser for each project period.

I am hopeful to turn The Famous OMG into a functioning non-for-profit company, so that we can have paid team members outside of ACE project time, that can do the above jobs year-round.

As mentioned above: social media personnel; and PR personnel.

FK:

I will make sure there is someone to accompany me while traveling, including plane and train journeys, until I feel comfortable traveling on my own.

Communication

What I offer myself:

Knowing my Limits and Communicating Them

I am in charge of my work and of myself in it.

However – if I don't express a need, a want, a boundary, then others will not know.

Therefore – I am aware, as much as possible in this moment, of my physical and emotional needs and boundaries, and I share those with relevant parties.

I do not owe anyone an explanation or my life story as to why I have needs or preferences. I do not need to justify my needs. These needs just need to be communicated.

FK:

I will create an email sign off that clearly communicates my boundaries.

Managing Expectations

I am aware that each venue, festival, team, or team member, will have their own ways of doing things that don't necessarily match my own.

This might be to do with: formatting copy; the culture of social time, (e.g. drinking after work); styles of communication; expected rate of responses; work hours; access needs, etc.

I practice noticing my expectations of others.

When they are not met, I choose to respond with self-awareness first.

If I am able to, I practice letting go of my expectations of others and allow the situation to unfold organically.

If someone's way of doing something makes things unclear or uncomfortable for me, I communicate my needs.

My needs from Others:

I will need the expectations of a venue/collaborator clearly detailed.

I require a contract with most venues/festivals or partnerships, unless otherwise agreed, in order to clearly lay out our agreement, and to account for what happens if they or I are/ am not able to meet their/my side of the agreement (e.g. show cancellation.)

As mentioned above, logistical communication will ideally be done with a producer or administrator, when I am able to hire someone.

FK:

I might need something explained a number of times.

While in conversation, I might need to doodle, walk around, or avoid making eye contact.

Questions to Consider

Is my body being taken care of? Is my mind being taken care of? Are my emotions being taken care of?

Do I need more time?

Do I need someone to help me with this?

Do I feel supported? If not, what can I ask for in order to change this?

What am I willing to negotiate on, and what am I not?

What feels risky and what feels ok to not have access too?

Am I comfortable with the space/place?

Can I communicate more clearly?

Do I need to request clearer communication?

Are my expectations being met? If not, can I adjust my expectations? If not, how can I compassionately communicate this?

Emergency Contacts

LBH:

[REDACTED] partner
[REDACTED] healer/therapist
[REDACTED] producer

FK:

[REDACTED] husband
[REDACTED] support