

EXPANDING OUR TEACHING: COACHING FOR ALL STUDENTS

Why this document? Circus education has the potential to bring together children, youth, and adults from many different backgrounds. As a circus educator, you will likely coach people with a spectrum of perspectives and manners different from your own. The American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO) Social Circus Committee created this living guide to help us expand our teaching. Feedback from social circus youth who participated in previous AYCO festivals has informed this document, which was first shared with workshop leaders at the 2019 AYCO Festival. If you are a circus educator, or work in a related field, we invite you to take a moment to read and reflect on the ideas and suggestions presented here as a means of working towards an inclusive environment in which all students who participate feel fully welcomed and respected.

This is: the **beginning** of a conversation about cultural humility: “A life-long process of self-reflection, self-critique, continual assessment of power imbalances, and the development of mutually respectful relationships and partnerships” (*Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998*).

This is not: a comprehensive guide to cultural humility, cross-cultural communication, or inclusive/accessible circus programs. (Please check out the resources below!)

No matter who you are and how well-intentioned you are, if you are in a leadership position, it's likely that as a result of your own life experiences and background, you will misunderstand, misjudge, and cause harm to others. It's unavoidable, so relax, AND look out for when this might be happening. Stay open to feedback from a range of voices and when someone points it out, own it, apologize, and change the behavior for next time.

Here are some ways you can think about your own coaching, and practice looking at what happens from others' points of view:

1. Through what perspectives/identities do you see and interact with the world around you? *For example: female, male, trans, cisgender, nonbinary, queer, straight, person of color, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, white, immigrant, upper/middle/working class, able-bodied, disabled, neurodivergent, large-bodied, thin-bodied, college-educated, etc...*

2. What norms are you used to in your teaching? *For example: perhaps you expect students to dress a certain way, show up on time, take off their shoes and socks, and/or give you their full attention when you talk.* Whoever you are, you'll have your own list. Take a moment to think through or write down some of the expectations you have of your students.

3. Pause now, and consider that all the norms you listed in #2 are built from your past experiences, your cultural expectations, and your definitions of success. Can you accept that others might see these differently? Can you imagine that for some students in your class,



dressing differently or showing up late is not a mark of disrespect, or that their expression of “full attention” may look different based on past experiences or their own self-regulation?

4. Think about how you feel when one of your students behaves against your norms. What happens in your body? Do you bristle? Do you have an urge to turn away? Do you heave a sigh? These are all normal, human reactions; however, they can have a negative impact on the students in your workshop.

5. Now that you understand that your diverse group of students probably doesn't have the same expectations or norms, you can decide how you respond to the situation. Practice taking a moment to let your initial reaction subside, and then ask questions to help yourself understand. You can choose whether you need to change expectations (*maybe it's okay for some of your students to keep their shoes on*) or whether to teach why your norm is important (*“if you missed the safety talk at the start of class, you'll need to check in with me before getting on the apparatus”*).

Some simple suggestions:

- Be humble, ask questions, and embrace life-long learning. Don't be afraid to ask your students what feels normal and comfortable for them.
- Be open to feedback, and listen, even if it's uncomfortable. Catch yourself when you react emotionally, and check whether there's an alternative response you can give.
- Observe the assumptions you might make about people you don't know, and actively work to override assumptions with questions and listening.
- Respect gender pronouns.
- Avoid language that judges youth and/or skills based on gender norms, body size, or shape.
- If you carry privilege (whiteness, straightness, ableness, cis-genderedness, maleness) that your students don't, remember that they continually encounter obstacles to progress that you cannot see. Help even things out by insisting on your way a little less.

Content and resource compilation by Amy Christian, Kate Magram, and Zoe Brookes, with oversight and support from the Social Circus Committee members. Our gratitude to the youth of AYCO who have advocated for themselves and each other, to our colleagues, and to the many leaders and visionaries working on the front lines from whom we have learned, and will continue to learn. (Revised 10/14/19)

Do you have any questions, comments, concerns, or additional resource suggestions? Please feel free to reach out to us at socialcircus@americancircuseducators.org



RESOURCES (a brief selection):

- *Implicit Association Test* [free, online; invites you to give your name and email address but you can still take the test and get results without doing so:
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>]
- “*The Privilege of Being Able to Sit Still*,” by Steven Desanghere
<https://globalisehope.wordpress.com/2018/02/28/the-privilege-of-being-able-to-sit-still/>
- *How Microaggressions Are Like Mosquito Bites* video (2 mins)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDd3bzA7450>
- Interview with Christopher Emdin, author of *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/what-white-folks-who-teach-in-the-hood-get-wr-ong-about-education>*
- Interview with Ijeoma Oluo, author of *So You Want to Talk About Race?* (5 mins):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvxomaFJvww>
- Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (7 mins):
<https://www.facebook.com/100010873572832/videos/765365167169262/>
- Interview with Erin Ball of [Kingston Circus Arts](https://www.kingstoncircusarts.com/) (Erin offers workshops, training, and consultations addressing inclusion and accessibility in circus):
<https://circustalk.com/news/adaptive-circus-arts-at-camputee-2019-with-erin-ball>
- *Circus and Accessibility* article by Kate Magram in ACE Magazine:
<https://view.joomag.com/american-circus-educators-magazine-winter-2018-issue-3-volume-14/0899400001545076962>
- *Gender & Circus Coaching* by AYCO Youth Advisory Committee:
https://www.americancircuseducators.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ACE_2018gender-resource_8.5x5.5-bleeds.pdf
- Diet Culture Videos:
 - Poodle Science <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H89QQfXtc-k&t=1s>
 - Linda Bacon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8vOtVUduBQ>
- Code Switch Podcast
<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/04/19/604070231/a-lesson-in-how-to-overcome-implicit-bias>
- M. Tervalon, J. Murray-Garcia, “Cultural humility versus cultural competence”
https://melanietervalon.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/CulturalHumility_Tervalon-and-Murray-Garcia-Article.pdf



What is AYCO/ACE? The American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) whose mission is to promote the participation of youth in circus arts and support circus educators. The American Circus Educators Association (ACE) is dedicated to supporting circus educators and is the trusted authority when it comes to all things circus education and is the primary source for professional development, networking, and information about circus education for anyone identifying as a circus teacher, educator, coach, program director, parent, or administrator.

What is social circus? AYCO/ACE defines social circus as a social change intervention that uses the circus arts as a tool for fostering personal and social development of identified “at-risk” individuals. The primary goal of social circus is to help participants achieve personal and social development by nurturing their self-esteem and trust in others, teaching them social skills, inspiring them to become active citizens, and helping them to express their creativity and explore their potential.

How does AYCO/ACE support social circus? AYCO has created a national network of social circus programs that offer cost-effective, evidence-based approaches to help people overcome the barriers they face. The mission of the Social Circus Network is to provide pedagogical, capacity-building and professional development support to individuals and organizations pursuing and engaging in social circus work as well as to support the sustainable growth of social circus in the United States. More information about the Social Circus Network can be found at www.americancircuseducators.org/overview.

