

# Circus Safe

A Guide to Health and Safety within Aotearoa  
New Zealand's Circus Practice

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# Chapter 1 - Step Right Up

## 1.1 Introduction

You've picked up this book so let's assume you are part of the circus community in Aotearoa New Zealand; whether you are an event organiser looking to hire a circus artist, a seasoned professional street performer, or you sometimes have acro hang outs in a park with your mates. You might know exactly what a rosin sock is and what it's used for, you might have no idea whether a flash and gather is a costume change or a juggling drill. There are so many specifics in circus, that's kind of the fun of it all!

This guide was developed by a group of established circus practitioners in the hope that we can use some personal insight to grow circus practices in Aotearoa, keep everyone safe, and our community healthy.

We're not here to tell you what to do and haven't written this guide as a list of codes or standards. We're hoping that the thoughts in here, being out in the world will help us all continue to grow.

This guide is for all practitioners from entry level students to seasoned performers. It details what are considered the safest and most positive practices we can all use.

Each of the situations we encounter as circus practitioners will be totally unique and this guide cannot provide specific answers to every question or situation that we may be faced with. It is our hope that this guide begins to give practitioners some knowledge and tools to address a variety of encounters in a safe and thoughtful way. We also intend it to act as a supporting resource, for practitioners to communicate to others what is and isn't safe practice within this community and industry.

The reality is, circus is an activity where many of us put our bodies on the line and our own and others' lives in danger on a regular basis for our own or others entertainment.

The dangers are very real and even a small accident can have huge consequences for the people involved and the community as a whole. It is important that the dangers are understood and that practitioners and those around them are informed as to how to make our practices as safe as possible.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 has big impacts on activities across all industries within NZ. We see this guide as an opportunity to help grow our circus culture with awesome health & safety awareness and actions, and to support change from the inside out.

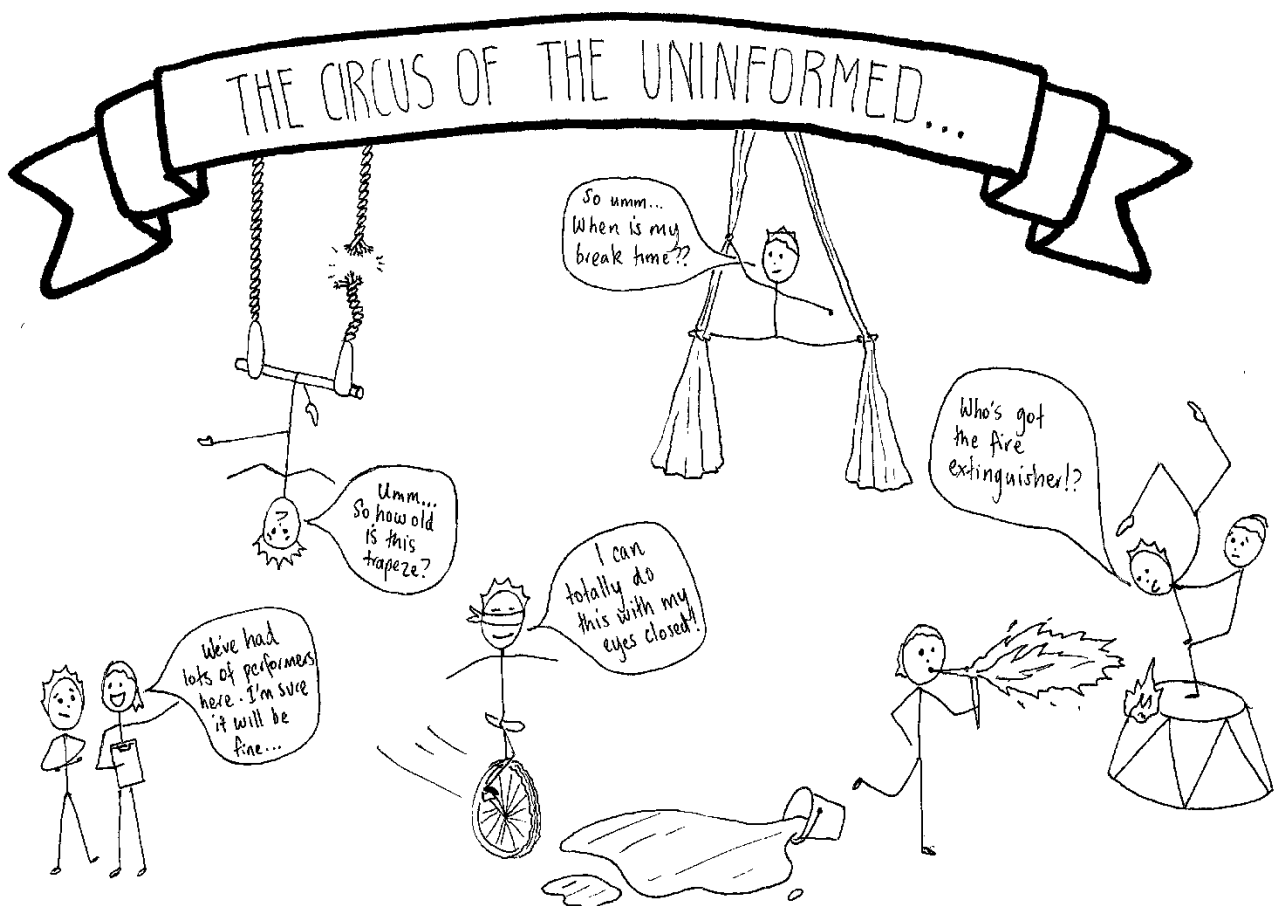
**Responsibility needs to be a collective goal.**

The responsibility for safety is shared between people and becomes apparent as we cross paths; it's what a student feels comfortable discussing with their tutor, it's what is communicated between two circus practitioners during a training session, it's how the relationship between client and performer is supported by its processes.

'We don't know what we don't know' but we must support each other's learning and together create a culture of safe thinking and care.

Safety is not about knowing everything, but we definitely need to know what we don't know...

We do not want to be the Circus of the Uninformed!



## 1.2 Aotearoa's Circus Community

Aotearoa's circus community is a tricky one to summarize - we are a mixed-up bunch of teachers, performers, students and recreational users who are constantly intersecting with others and each other. Some of us are masters of balance, some of us fly through the air, some of us throw other people through the air, and some of us are masters of throwing other objects in the air!

The physical possibilities in our industry are constantly evolving with new apparatus and techniques regularly being developed and trained.

Here is a snapshot look at those which currently exist;

***Manipulation*** - juggling, diabolo, contact juggling, hula hoops etc

***Aerials*** - trapeze, silks, lyra, hammock, corde lisse, spanish web, pole etc

***Fire*** - poi, staff, hoops, fans, breathing etc

***Equilibristics*** - balancing arts, chair stacking, hand balance etc

***Acrobatics*** – tumbling, trampoline, teeterboard, adagio, toss the girl, banquine, group acrobatics, contortion etc

Within this guide the term 'practitioner' refers to anyone performing, teaching, training or doing circus, for money or other gain or just for fun. The community is wider than just the practitioners and includes anyone who is employing or contracting a circus practitioner (whether for money, or other gain, or as a favour). It also includes anyone who's actions have a direct impact on circus performance or practice, including the audience!

Organizers, studio owners, students, students' parents, audience, other performers, employers, venue or event managers, directors, choreographers, designers, manufacturers, riggers and even your alter ego all have an impact on you, not just in the moment of action but in the moments preceding and following it also.

Our responsibility as the ones doing or leading the action is to keep ourselves and others safe in the moment and to set a precedent for safety in future occurrences.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Circus Association (ANZCA) was created in 2015 in order to bring unity and advocacy to circus in Aotearoa. It provides services for the industry as a whole, as well as its practitioners.

The following is the scope of circus activities in Aotearoa as defined by ANZCA. It is useful to have a clear and consistent sense of what is and isn't included under the umbrella term of 'Circus Arts'.

### Scope of Circus in Aotearoa

#### **Purpose**

The definitions below define the activities that are included in the scope of 'Circus Arts' that would fall within ANZCA's scope of care and advocacy. It is important to ANZCA that the scope of circus is as inclusive as is practicable to provide representation for all the art forms that are not currently represented.

#### **Scope and Definition**

Circus is a collection of diverse activities, many of which have high element of risk. As Circus can be practiced in a multitude of contexts (recreational, therapeutic, educational, competitive, performance) ANZCA has chosen to define the activity of Circus regardless of context. The only context which falls outside of this is sport, and Circus activities when engaged in a sporting context (for example; slackline use in rock climbing, tumbling and acrobatics within gymnastics, trampolining as a sport or long distance unicycling), as sports activities would generally be regulated by sporting governing bodies. How each practitioner defines their activities publicly is entirely up to their own discretion but unless the activity is being carried out within a sporting context, ANZCA considers it within the scope of circus.

Circus activities that are within the scope of ANZCA's definition of Circus in Aotearoa generally fall into the following broad categories:

**Acrobatics** (the control of a body or multiple bodies in space and in relation to each other)

**Aerial** (any activity where a person is or becomes airborne for a duration of time through the use of a piece of apparatus)

**Equilibratics** (people balancing on objects or apparatus)

**Object Manipulation** (people throwing, balancing or otherwise manipulating any object)

**Sideshow and Freakshow** (Working Acts) (all other human circus related activities which sit outside the above categories including physical manipulation, escapology, work with dangerous objects, and presentation of unique physical attributes)

**Clown and Mime** (the use of clowning and mime techniques)

There are some special considerations that exist across all categories; Fire can be incorporated within any of these categories as can working with vulnerable people. Both require extra consideration when circus activities are being engaged with.

ANZCA acknowledges the activities at the edges of the definitions of circus, including but not limited to: Stunt Performing and Theatrical Flying, Pole Dancing, Parkour, Dance Acrobatics, Physical Theatre, Acroyoga and Aerial Yoga. These activities fit both within ANZCA's scope and the scope of another discipline and therefore require more consideration and clear communication when being undertaken.

#### **Exclusions**

ANZCA exclusively deals only with human circus activities. ANZCA acknowledges that there are circus-related activities that fall outside this definition, such as circus acts involving animals. These activities are not within the scope of ANZCA's care.

### 1.3 The Idea of Community

The circus community in Aotearoa is a unique collection of people with a varied backgrounds, histories, cultures and ways of doing things. Circus has traditionally welcomed members of society who live a little differently than the majority and this continued positioning outside of the mainstream is an important part of our identity. The very nature of circus practice attracts people with certain personalities and ways of negotiating the world. The necessary hours of dedication, repeated failure sometimes for years, intense focus for long periods of time, mind/body control over innate danger responses, trust in self and others, and a passion to entertain, tell stories and explore otherness, joy, and play attracts a wonderful array of people.

As circus in Aotearoa develops, our community is widening and welcoming in people who have come from dance, gymnastics, fitness practices and other disciplines. We have young people who have taken circus classes since they could walk, performers who have decades of experiences travelling our country in a big top, and every day new people who drift in and out of our community.

Our communities' active valuing of itself is important.

Our passion and love for our own specific practices needs to be balanced with a sense of care for the overall community. As David Clark proposed in 1973, a sense of community does not just come from a group of people in the same geographic area or those connected by shared activities. It comes from members of the community feeling part of a wider whole (solidarity), that they each have something unique to offer (significance) and that their place in the community is safe (security).

As our community continues to grow it is so important for us all to continue its legacy of embracing diverse people and the valuing of expression and exploration. Part of this comes from ensuring that current and future generations are as well looked after as possible and in turn know how to keep themselves and others safe, well, and happy.



## Chapter 2 - Circus and/is Danger

## 2.1 Health and Safety

The term 'health and safety' can seem like a boring, unnecessary or confusing one but it is vitally important to us as circus practitioners. It refers to the thinking, processes, actions, and paperwork which best keep everyone (including the lighting technician, the parent spectator etc etc!) safe and healthy within our practice; a goal we should all appreciate!

**The words themselves are indicative of its focus on being pre-emptive – it is 'health and safety' not 'illness and accidents'!**

It's also not just our physical health or safety in the moment that needs our attention. Across time both our physical and/or psychological wellness can be put under threat in a number of ways specific to the practice of circus arts.

**And it is not just our own actions within circus that need to be considered but also how the environment and other people around us can affect the outcome of any given situation.**

Being able to consider these factors and act accordingly is the key to keeping everyone safe in all parts of our circus community. It is important that knowledge and action flows between all parts of the community and that communication happens with all the people we're working with. Worksafe New Zealand (the primary government agency concerned with regulating workplace health and safety) suggests three c-words that create the foundation for how we communicate with and operate with our peers to share this valuable knowledge: **cooperate, coordinate and consult.**

## 2.2 Awareness of Risks in Circus

Risks to health and safety come from people being exposed to hazards. A **hazard** is something that can cause harm, for example working at heights, electricity or fire, or a bully in the workplace. A **risk** is the likelihood that a hazard will actually result in harm to someone. A risk has two components – the likelihood that it will occur and the consequences (degree of harm) if it happens. Circus practice in Aotearoa comes with unique hazards and risks.

## Potential for Physical Harm

Any circus art is a physical activity and with any physical activity come hazards and risks.

Each circus discipline comes with its own set of physical hazards and risks and each practitioner's strengths, weaknesses and focuses will further diversify the possibilities of harm.

The risks involved with any circus activity will change based on who is carrying it out, where it is happening, what they are using to perform the task, the environment, what they are wearing and a huge number of other factors. All of these varying factors need to be considered in every unique circumstance.

Complacency (arrogance or overconfidence) is the enemy of safety!

The biggest dangers are not always the most obvious and it's not always the biggest accident that can have the most dire consequences. The fire breather may be harmed more from their fuel than the flames, or it may be a fall from a 1 metre height that kills an aerialist.

Most accidents are not a result of a single, isolated cause but can be traced back through a series of interacting factors which have come together in a way that leads to increased risk. For example, a performer may have performed a trick thousands of times with no problem but may fail to execute it safely when the combination of performing it with inadequate warmup time, a stage light shining right in their eyes and a last-minute request for their piece of music to be changed to a different song.

## Potential for Harm to General Wellbeing

Some of the inherent hazards and risks in circus are not only to our physical wellbeing but to the general wellbeing or holistic health of ourselves or others.

There is a change in how we view health and wellness and we can no longer ignore the direct correlation between body and mind. Mason Durie's concept of 'Te Whare Tapa Whā' describes a model of health in which our general wellbeing is supported by four pillars of health - taha tinana (physical health), taha wairua (spiritual health), taha whānau (family health) and taha hinengaro (mental health).

Likened to the structure of a whareniui (meeting house), if any of these four supporting pillars are weakened, the overall wellness of the whole will suffer.

Within our circus practice, the specific risks to our taha wairua (spiritual), taha whānau (family) and taha hinengaro (mental) need to also be considered alongside those to our tinana (physical body). Many of us will know the creative exhaustion that comes from teaching too many classes with not enough energy left for your own artform, or the unease that comes from performing a role or character that contradicts significantly with how you try to portray yourself in the rest of your practice.

There are aspects of practicing circus that amplify the risks to one or more of these pillars.

Amplified risks can include:

- Eating disorders and body dysmorphia (heightened by societal and industry expectations of a 'performer's body', the use of mirrors, the norms of tight clothing and the increasingly comparative world presented by social media)
- Changes in the body's composition that come with puberty (E.g. a changing shape, changes in strength to weight ratio)
- Over-sexualisation within performance expectations
- A strongly gendered culture with expectations around what characters, roles and disciplines people play that are informed by societies wider gender expectations
- Lack of financial security due to; seasonal performance opportunities, periods of training or development where you may not be receiving income, the effect of injuries on earning capacity
- Authentic artistic expression being limited by having to take corporate, commercial or safe jobs to earn sufficient money
- A limited longevity and life span of a performing body
- A disconnect between brain and body capabilities
- Maintaining relationships with non-circus people who may not fully understand the demands of the practice
- Expectations and pressures from family and other people about what is considered a valid career
- The continued nature of having to form deeply trusting relationships with people both emotionally and physically
- Heckling and audience harassment
- Bouncing back after an accident (yours or someone else's)

It is not only the wellbeing of those directly involved in circus practice that must be considered. Audiences, students and their family and friends need to feel safe and secure about the practitioners they encounter. A parent puts massive trust in a circus school or tutor when they let their young person pursue physically risky activities and an audience has trust that neither themselves nor the performers will actually get seriously hurt while they are watching a seemingly dangerous performance

## The Inherent and Cultural Need for Danger in Circus

Much of circus activity is centred around pushing the human body to new potentials and creating a sense of mastery over danger.

There is a cultural and historical expectation that circus activities must be impressive, and this is often translated to 'must be dangerous' - the juggled knife that could be sharp enough to cut or the aerial performer holding on with just one hand, ten metres in the air.

This essence of danger is what draws many to watch circus and is a core part of many acts. We can't always simply get rid of all the risks and hazards as they may be integral to the activity - even a highly trained sword swallower with a perfectly designed blunt sword must swallow it.

A member of the public, audience member, or practitioner may want the circus danger, but don't necessarily understand, or know how to deal with the risks and hazards that are part of that danger. They may not even be able to read which parts of the circus activity hold more risk than others.

There has always been much importance placed on the secrecy around how some circus activities are performed; E.g. magic illusions. Like any competitive industry, practitioners want to keep their methodologies close to remain unique. However, when combined with the inherent risks and hazards this secrecy can have the potential to create misunderstanding and cause more harm.

Often culturally we're not very good at talking about danger but because we're working in a space where some risks and hazards are inherent we need to be better at having open conversations.

### 2.3 So What Do We Do with These Risks?

Circus is unique in that the very actions we undertake are hazards and/or risks in themselves. Essentially want to get rid of as many of the hazards and risks as is possible. The training, preparation and safe practices we place around ourselves when we undertake circus activities are ways that we can reduce the likelihood of harm.

*E.g. a tall-stilts performer could fall from 2 metres onto the ground; to stop them being on stilts would eliminate the skill altogether so we can train them on stilts, train them to fall safely, give them knee and elbow pads, give them a minder to deal with public or environmental factors etc...*

As practitioners we have a bunch of methods we use to reduce the likelihood of harm in our practice; from deciding to use LED props in place of fire, to rosinning our hands to reduce slipping, to developing a keen awareness of how an audience member might react when brought onstage.

Whether these methods we employ eliminate a hazard completely or minimise the likelihood of something causing harm, these actions are all called 'controls'.

## The 'Hierarchy of Controls'

It's good to look at the types of controls we put in place around the hazards and risks we have in our practice. The most commonly used, most expensive or obvious control isn't necessarily the most effective way of reducing the likelihood of harm. The hierarchy of controls below describes the generally accepted categories of control and places them in order from most effective to least effective.

Can you **ELIMINATE** the danger?

Can you get rid of the hazard completely?

*(E.g. Getting rid of a bubble machine as it caused a very slippery floor surface)*

if you can't do that can you...

Can you **MINIMISE** the danger?

- Can you **substitute** or swap out the action or any part of the action with something else?

*(E.g. Using LED poi instead of fire poi)*

- Or **isolate** the action?

*(E.g. Putting a wide drop zone around a chair balancing act that audience can't enter)*

- Or use **engineering** to minimise the risk?

*(E.g. Using ventilation to avoid overheating in a character suit)*

If the risk remains...

Are there any **ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL MEASURES** you can put in place?

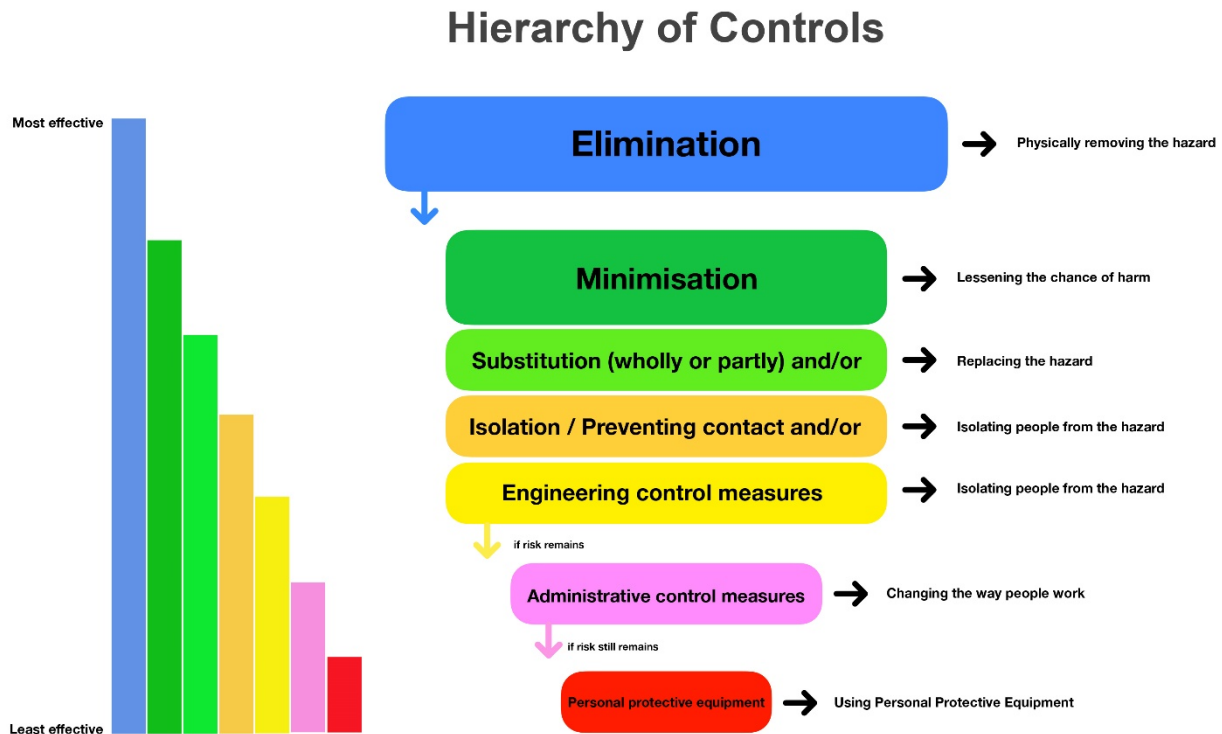
*(E.g. Making sure there is sufficient scheduled rehearsal time for a performance or enough breaks for the students in a workshop)*

and if the risk still remains...

What **PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT** (PPE) can you use to further minimise the risk of harm?

*(E.g. Is rosin available for the aerialists and knee pads for the acrobats?)*

Managing risks is about working through the possible controls until the risk to people's safety is removed or minimised as much as possible. The diagram below illustrates the effectiveness of the types of controls as supported by Worksafe NZ.



## A Cool Process

Controlling and managing risks is a natural part of circus practice. As you learn new tricks you'll innately be putting risk management processes in place for yourself and others.

It's not always obvious, even to ourselves, what controls we innately put in place or what we could easily tweak to be more effective. Writing down these processes is a great way to uncover the ways in which you automatically think about Health and Safety. It is important that we check to make sure the controls we are putting into place are doing their job, and that we change them if they are not working out well.

This can be a process as simple as;

- "This new hula hoop trick always flies off to the left"
- "I'll position myself so no one is in the area I tend to lose the hoop to"
- "Oh dear someone has entered my zone - this isn't really working out"
- "I'll move to the next room where I'm less likely to hit anyone"

Within this example the four main steps of a proper Risk Management Process are in place:

Identify and assess your hazards and risks then **PLAN** what needs to be addressed

*"This new hula hoop trick always flies off to the left"*



Decide on the best controls to use and **DO** these



*"I'll position myself so no one is in the area I tend to lose the hoop to"*

**CHECK** that those plans worked out ok

*"Oh dear someone has entered my zone - this isn't really working out"*



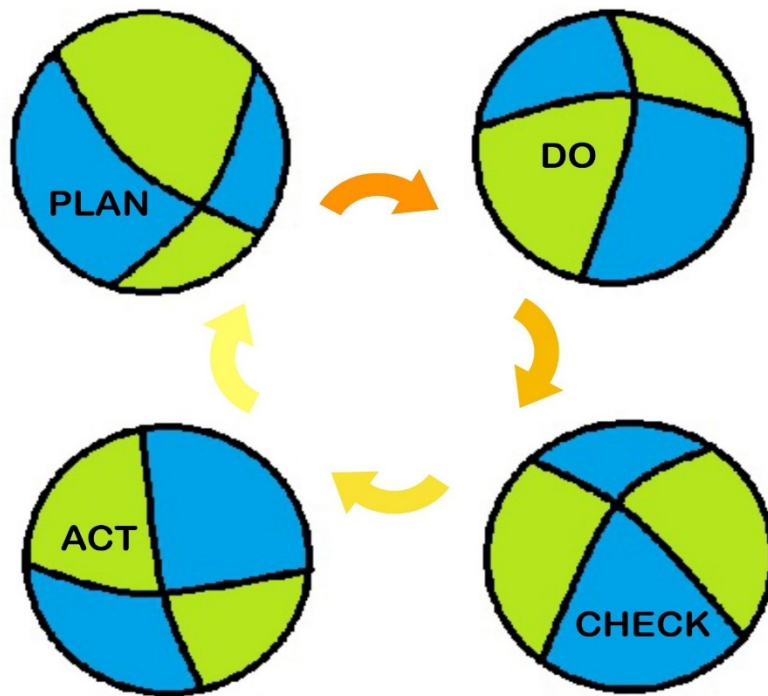
**ACT** on any plans that didn't do their job and adjust

*"I'll move to the next room where I'm less likely to hit anyone"*





And from here we keep the pattern going!



This is the risk management process that Worksafe NZ encourages the use of.

Writing down your processes into a document is not only a great way to make it clear in your own head, and to fulfil the on-going nature of risk management but it's also the best way to communicate between all the people within your community, section of the industry or workplace.

For more detailed information on Risk Management Processes visit Chapter 7



## Chapter 3 - Keeping Safe in Your Practice

## 3.1 Things to Consider

What really does risk management look like in our amazing, joyous, sparkly, sweaty circus world?

In our circus practice keeping safe relies on considering the effects of what you do, what other people do, what your equipment does and what the environment around you is and does.

**Hazards** are concrete, real world things; for example, a set of balancing chairs present a hazard. The **risk** is what might happen because of that hazard; for example, there is the risk that a fall from height might happen due to the chairs being used incorrectly.

Anything that can happen to interfere with your (or someone else's) health or safety is going to be due to things going wrong due to one or more of these categories of risk:

- Human Error - Yours
- Human Error - Someone Else's
- Equipment Failure
- Environmental Interference

The only other major factor here is you, or others, just not knowing what they should or shouldn't be doing. Ignorance unfortunately will be something we as circus practitioners will consistently have to battle. As the world gets more information-rich the excuse of ignorance becomes null and void. As a community member the responsibility to monitor yourself and your peers falls on you. It's not ok anymore to just not know.

To identify risks and find appropriate ways to control them, a range of questions should be able to be answered before anyone embarks on any circus activity;

- What are the ways I could get physically hurt doing this – short term and long term?
- Do I know how to prepare my body appropriately for this activity?
- Do I know how to prepare the environment around me for this activity?
- Could I hurt anyone else or anything around me by doing these things?
- Do I know how to prepare other people around me for this activity?
- Have I got a plan should something go wrong / someone get hurt?

## 3.2 You and the Activity

Because circus holds such a diverse range of physical activities (there is a significant difference between someone learning a new mini-hoops pattern and someone learning a new duo Cyr wheel move) it would be laborious to write down all the possible variants, stuck points, fail points and risks across the board. Even within one person's practice the risks presented will change significantly from situation to situation and across the development of their practice. It's important that each practitioner begins by deeply considering the limits of the activity they are undertaking (including their own) and that they can assess the risks in new situations.

In practicing any circus skill, you are going to be creating new neural and myofascial pathways throughout your body, developing muscles' awareness and strength, training ligaments to behave in new ways etc. This is pushing your body and mind into new territory and its par for the course to fail many times on a single item of vocabulary before achieving it, let alone mastering it. This failure is a vital part of circus; psychologically it gives us the hard yards to feel that amazing sense of achievement we get; interpersonally it gives us our skills which set us apart from the general public.

It is necessary repetition, but we don't want that to damage us, our body is our tool and we need to take care of it with expertise and informed knowledge.

As well as identifying the hazards and risks of developing or learning new skills; wherever possible seek counsel, advice and coaching. It's important to push forward into new territory but this is where the majority of danger lies. **Make sure you know enough about the activity** so that you can do it with the smallest risk to your body. Make sure you know what systems and support to put in place to keep yourself safe.

Our body's physical capacities change from moment to moment and day to day. Something that will be achievable two times in a row might not be possible the third time in a row that you try or if you are looking at a different place in the room. **Have things in place should your body fail you** - this is a super important part of being a circus practitioner.

**Be first aid trained.** Not just to help others but also to be able to help yourself should you need it. First Aid training will give you the confidence in knowing that you could deal with an emergency situation if that was required.

It is also important to **know the limits of your knowledge**. The old adage 'a little bit of knowledge can be dangerous' definitely applies to circus. At times in your practice you may experience things that require specialist knowledge about your body or the activity. Coaches, physiotherapists, sports physicians, osteopaths, chiropractors, psychologists, and acupuncturists all have specialist knowledge that may be useful for keeping yourself safe.

For any circus person in any situation **warming up is vital** and could be the difference between a long career or a short one. It is recommended that all warmups include a series of components in a specific order designed to prepare the body for physical activity and reduce the risk of strains, sprains and other injuries. These include:

- Actions which **increase the heart rate and core body temperature**. This should start gradually and reach the point where participants are lightly perspiring but are not out of breath
- Actions which promote **mobility** and get the joints of the body mobile and ready to stretch. This should be easy movement such as arm swings and leg swings.
- **Stretching** movements that prepare specific parts of the body for movements in the circus activity that require flexibility. It is not recommended that warmups include stretches which are meant to drastically increase the flexibility of participants – these are better suited once the body has been active for some time.
- Contracting movements that prepare specific parts of the body for movements in the circus activity that require **strength**. Again, it is not recommended that the intensity of these is too high as participants will be fatigued for the following circus activity.
- Any **other specific exercises** needed to prepare the body for the specific task E.g. integrating equipment, warming up balance, engaging the smaller stability muscles such as rotator cuffs, spatial awareness, focus, coordination or even interpersonal factors.

It is also just as important to **look after your mental and spiritual wellbeing** and to have systems in place to help you deal with the risks to your overall health. Systems like having supportive people around you that you can call on if necessary, healthy ways to relax and destress, creating positive environments and developing positive coping strategies for times of increased stress are all important. In the same way that we would call on a physio to help us deal with an injury or ongoing physical problem, we need to know that there are people out there that can help give us the tools and expertise to take care of our general wellbeing. This can help with a range of issues such as performance anxiety, body image and other things that may present risks to our overall wellness. Your GP or local mental health provider can help you access these kinds of services and there are a range of other resources out there if you need to talk to someone else including:

- Youthline: 0800 376 633 or free text 234 (Provides 24/7 support for young people)
- Kidsline: 0800 543 754 (Support available 24/7 for young people)
- Depression Helpline: 0800 111 757 or free text 4202 (Support available 24/7)
- Lifeline: 0800 543 354 (Support available 24/7)
- Suicide crisis helpline: 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO) (Support available 24/7)

For further support services visit [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/helplines](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/helplines)

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**Our relationship with ACC.** (The Accident Compensation Corporation - a New Zealand Crown entity) is a useful resource to all physical people. It is important as the industry grows to be honest and open with ACC and help them to categorise circus injuries as circus injuries. If you're being paid for any circus related activities you should be paying levies to ACC yearly. In return ACC will provide support towards treatment costs in the event of an injury. Their support can include; paying for procedures, supplying after injury care in the form of drivers, home help etc, treatments, medical supplies, and the list goes on. If an accident covered by ACC causes you to stop working, they may be able to contribute up to 80% of your income as weekly compensation while you recover.

**Hazardous Work.** Your work may come under Particular Hazardous Work and require notification to WorkSafe. Anyone performing an activity at or above five metres automatically requires a notification to be submitted. For more information see *CHAPTER 7*.

### 3.3 Other People and the Circus

As circus practitioners we are hopefully pretty good at looking after the people around us, for example jugglers ideally have lightning fast reactions to stray props when children or public are nearby.

If you were starting out as a street performer you would quickly **learn to look after your audience** and these steps of care are all actually risk management plans in themselves. These steps might be picking someone who looks confident and competent for the task, inviting them onstage or to participate making the process consensual, explaining the steps as you go and communicating any important safety procedures, giving them anything they might need at the end of their involvement (a towel or the like).

Basically, after any moment where we 'do our thing', wherever it takes place, we want the other people to leave healthy, safe and happy.

The reputation of circus in Aotearoa rests on this care and connection with the wider community and it's on all of us to uphold the values within it. Our actions and reactions to members of the wider community will in themselves enable our sector and community to grow from the inside and out.

A range of people connect with us in our circus practice as our audiences, students, fellow performers, technicians, event organisers and many more. It is our job to keep them safe and also to be aware of how they might affect our own safety.

We need to utilise the knowledge mentioned in the previous section to help others remain safe in the same way that we use these processes to care for ourselves. Making sure you know enough about the activity to do it safely for you and others, having systems in place should something go wrong, knowing the limits of your (and the other peoples') knowledge,

having First Aid training, appropriate warmup knowledge and taking care to look after mental and spiritual wellbeing as well as physical health are all also needed to keep other people involved in your activities safe.

People often want to have a try at circus and so there may be times you'll find others spontaneously under your care. **Take charge of the responsibility for the care of others** around your activity immediately and without hesitation. Taking into consideration the limitations of your knowledge you will be able to decide if you can assist the person in learning or simply recommend they stop the activity. Ideally it will have been previously coordinated but sometimes the boundaries of who is (or isn't) and in your care are grey and when you are responsible for others is unclear. Wherever circus is present, and you are party to the situation, you have the opportunity to be a forward thinking, safety conscious community member.

Even if it's not your direct responsibility, take a moment to become aware of the emergency response systems in place around you and **formulate an emergency response plan** should anything go down. It doesn't really matter who is around you and what their roles are as long as you know how to and where to get help, assistance, or first aid when anyone needs it.

When other people are definitively under your care; for example, students in a class you teach, trainers at a space you run or performers you've booked, this relationship is best to be formalised in written form to ensure expectations, and liabilities have been communicated and cooperated upon.

**Students need to be made aware of the risks involved in pursuing circus** training and the hazards of the space that they're to be training in. This is most commonly communicated in a participation agreement or waiver. If you are in charge of a circus space the tutors who you work with need to be made aware of the hazards of the space. They also need to accept the responsibility for the students' safety whilst teaching and align their risk management systems with yours. Performers, either professional or not need to clearly communicate with you the hazards and risks they generate with their performance and what they need from you as the presenter, producer or organiser. Chapter 7 will go into more detail about the recommended documents you'll be looking to generate.

These agreement or waiver documents also **gather emergency contacts** for the people under your care, something that must be accessible at all times.

Anyone working or operating around or with vulnerable persons needs to be fully aware of the added responsibility of this role in Aotearoa. **Police Vetting is required for anyone working with vulnerable people** and your risk management processes need to clearly take into account the added factors.

Some places in which you may be interacting with other people might require you to have a licence; for example, Auckland Council requires a busking licence and where any of the



following are present (fire, chainsaws, weapons, children, animals, or heights) a 'special street performance licence for dangerous street performance acts'. **Finding out your local governing body's requirements is your responsibility.**

It is highly recommended that you **hold insurance** if you're a person who works in the circus community in either a paid or voluntary capacity or if you are part of an organisation that operates within the circus community in either business or not-for-profit capacity. If you're doing circus with or near members of the public, you will need Public (General) Liability Insurance (PL or GL) and Statutory Liability Insurance (SL). PL/GL comes into play if you damage someone else or someone else's property. SL covers you if you or someone who works with you or reports to you should breach a law in any way.

Should something go wrong it is important that you have systems in place to **record information about an incident or near miss**. Collecting information about this at the time of the event is important for getting the necessary details from all involved. This is a key part of looking at things that might be causing harm and adjusting your practice to decrease the chances of it happening again. Examples of Worksafe's Incident Report Forms and First Aid Register forms can be found in Chapter 7.

### 3.4 The Stuff You Use

Much of the time circus activities will involve some equipment. In many cases, we rely on this equipment to behave in a predictable and reliable way and at times our very life depends on that happening. It is uncommon, but equipment does fail or break, and sometimes we fail or break because of the equipment. It is especially important to remember that if other people use your equipment you hold some responsibility for their safety.

In our daily lives, we take pre-emptive measures to keep ourselves safe in the world. Built into our cars are ways to keep us from harm; speedometers, seat belts, air bags etc. In circus we also have a bunch of recognised devices we use often; rosin, safety lines, crash mats etc. However, it won't always make sense of be possible for circus equipment to incorporate things like these.

But in keeping ourselves safe on the roads we also have processes we follow; - a shared understanding of the road code, undertaking defensive driving, making sure our cars have a Warrant of Fitness and that we have a licence. In our circus practice we can employ similar processes that can drastically reduce the risk of harm.

It is always best to **purchase equipment made specifically for the intended purpose** by a knowledgeable and reputable manufacturer. This means we can be more sure that the equipment will behave how we need it to. With some equipment (for example harnesses), there are legal standards that need to be complied with and this is a risk control within itself.

While some gear can seem simple enough to ask someone to make, there are many specific requirements that need to be understood and things that someone who doesn't know anything about circus will not be aware of.

With any equipment, **your gear is only as strong as its weakest part**. If you own your own gear you should be able to provide all the information below and if you are using someone else's gear, then they should be able to provide you with all of the information below. If this information is not possible to obtain then this gear cannot be guaranteed safe for you or others to be using until it has been tested and verified by someone qualified to do so.

## The Equipment

- Do you know the equipment you are using? (E.g. who made it, when, its specs and ratings etc)
- Do you know the limitations of the equipment you are using?
- Do you know how to maintain the equipment safely to prolong its lifetime?
- Do you know how to check the equipment you are using?
- Do you know where the equipment has been and how it has been looked after? (E.g. maintenance logging and regular testing)
- Do you know how the environment can affect the equipment? (E.g. humidity and silks)

If you are selling second-hand equipment it is important to be able to communicate this information to the buyer. If you are buying second-hand equipment you should request this information – if it cannot be provided or you do not trust the answers from the person selling, then it is advised that you not purchase the equipment. **It is better to save your life than to save a few dollars.**

## The Equipment Plus You

- Do you know your own limitations with the equipment you're using?
- Do you know how the equipment can affect your body (e.g. muscle bruising, friction burns etc.)?
- Do you know how the situation can affect you with the equipment? (E.g. adrenaline of performing, tiredness from late rehearsals etc)
- Do you know how the environment can affect you when using the equipment? (E.g. Costume, props, theatre lights, sun/humidity, stage surface etc)

## The Equipment Plus Other People

- Do you know how the equipment could be dangerous to other people?
- Do you know how to communicate best practice with the equipment to someone else who may be engaging with it (E.g. riggers, stage managers, students etc)

## Equipment Records and Logging

All equipment you own should have a unique identifier to help you keep track of what equipment belongs to you and how old it is. If for no other reason than to remind you where you got your gold hula hoops from again. It is necessary to **keep a log of all equipment** that poses or could pose any serious risk of harm.

All equipment information should be kept in the equipment log;

- Date of manufacture
- Manufacturer/supplier information
- Rating Specification(s)
- Date purchased by you
- Notes on historical use and incidents
- Notes on replacement of parts

All rigging gear (including hardware, softs and other equipment) should already come with a unique identifier placed on by the manufacturer. This information needs to be accessible at all times. You should not tamper with, remove or render this information inaccessible. If you're in a situation where your or someone else's gear has lost its markings or had its tag removed, it is not recommended you use this gear.

Do be careful of what you using to mark your gear as some methods may interfere with the integrity of the materials or the mechanisms of the equipment.

## Safety Equipment

For some activities, safety equipment will be required to keep participants safe. This can include things you know you will need; like a damp towel to extinguish lit fire props, and things you hope you won't have to use; like an emergency fire blanket if a performer's clothing catches fire. In the same way that we need to make informed and responsible decisions about what circus equipment we use and how we look after it, we need to **take responsibility in what and how we use associated safety equipment.**

For example, different types of safety mats are intended for different purposes, a thinner mat may be appropriate for beginner level activities such as forward rolls but will not offer the appropriate protection for falls from height. It is important to use the safety equipment that is going to offer the right level of protection for the specific activity.

There may be safety equipment used in other non-circus activities that may not be appropriate in a circus specific skill. Harnesses for example vary significantly depending on their intended use and expert knowledge should be consulted before using safety equipment designed for other purposes.

A high level of care needs to be given to the storage, transport and maintenance of safety equipment. It is often the last level of protection between you and potential serious harm - any time the equipment is used in your practice could be the one time it is required to save your life!

## Equipment Testing

All equipment needs to be inspected and tested at regular intervals to make sure it's fit for purpose.

The amount of use, the equipment's age, exposure to the elements (sun, heat, water etc) or chemicals, how it has been used and by whom, and how it has contacted with other objects or surfaces all play into the present and future safety of that piece of gear.

**Inspect your gear regularly and log any changes** or things to look out for in future. For example, *the pole on your unicycle may have begun to rust but doesn't require immediate replacement or action to remain safe until next inspected.*

- Mini checks with each use of your gear will help to identify any issues present in
- Bi-monthly or quarterly checks (depending on the heaviness of use) where you look closely at the mechanisms and connection points of your gear
- Six monthly 'take it apart and look at it' checks for all gear but especially gear under heavy use
- Yearly overhaul checks where you take everything down and/or apart to check its insides and pull everything not in common use out of the cupboard to see if it's still ok

On all equipment you're looking for; corrosion, discoloration, rust, cracking, deformation, evidence of chemical or other substances the gear might have come into contact with, ripping, fraying, removal of tags or unique identifiers.

The generally accepted rule for rigging gear is that softs (round slings, webbing items, climbing slings etc) can sustain up to 5% wear before they should be decommissioned and destroyed. Hardware or other metal objects can sustain 10% wear before they should be decommissioned and destroyed. If there is enough visual evidence for you to question it, it most likely needs to be checked by someone experienced or knowledgeable. If it looks like it's had a hard life it generally has. If you have any ounce of concern about an object it's

worth getting it checked. There are ways and tools to measure these margins and often manufacturers will also supply information on testing their gear. Unless you have significant experience it's worth getting a second opinion.

You must not let your decommissioned gear end up back into use in someone else's kit. Even if it's taken home and used for a swing in the backyard it is still unsafe. Cut your decommissioned softs, angle grind your hardware and ensure all your decommissioned gear is destroyed to a point where it can't be mistaken for safe.

## Transporting and Storing Equipment

The appropriate transportation and storage of circus equipment is necessary to preserve the reliability and lifespan of the equipment.

Exposure to dust, sunlight, extreme temperatures, moisture, other substances or interference from other people can affect the integrity of a range of materials and therefore their safety. **Equipment should be stored and transported safely** to protect from interference from these factors.

Similarly care needs to be taken with the transportation of equipment. The moving of equipment from A to B can present risks to your equipment and is often when damage occurs. Whilst you may know exactly how to handle your equipment to keep it safe, others may not and so care should be taken if the equipment is likely to come into the responsibility of others in the process.

When flying on a commercial airline often you cannot take your equipment as carry-on luggage and so it will pass through the hands of many others and many other systems. Equipment should be protected as best as possible with appropriate packaging, padding and coverings. Checking in your equipment as fragile and clearly marking as such is important in this instance. A complete inspection should be undertaken immediately after transportation, and before use, when shipping any equipment where it can be handled by other people.

Some equipment may present risks to others when being transported for example flammable liquids. It is important that the appropriate paperwork and communication has taken place between all parties in these instances. The transportation of dangerous or hazardous items requires these items to be marked or labelled to identify their hazardous properties, giving everyone the information, they need. Detailed information about these requirements can be obtained from the NZ Transport Agency.

## 3.5 Zero-Tolerance Risks

There are a few sectors of the circus community where the misuse of certain equipment can have a very real risk to the life of those partaking in the activity.

A risk matrix is a tool which enables you to figure out the balance between the consequence of an incident and the likelihood that the incident might happen. The combination of these two factors will determine seriousness of the risk. This will show you which risks or hazards are more important to deal with immediately, which need to be eliminated rather than worked around and which don't really pose much threat.

For more information and examples of a risk matrix see Chapter 7

Aerial circus performance and fire performance have been identified as extreme risk activities and because of this we've delved into and slightly expanded some specific considerations for aerial rigging and the use of fire in the following two sections.

## 3.6 Rigging

As previously mentioned, any piece of equipment is only as strong as its weakest point – this is especially true in rigging for aerial circus. Whether it is the roof, the beam, the rope, the carabiner or the type of knot used. No matter how strong every other part is, **your rigging is only as safe as its weakest point.**

Rigging for circus performance is a specialist job and requires a fair bit of knowledge to be safe. It should not be expected that aerialists can rig their own equipment any more than a dancer is expected to build their own stage or an astronaut their spaceship. As an industry, we need to value rigging expertise and ensure that it is present on all occasions. An aerialist should not be expected, neither themselves nor by anyone else, to be qualified to rig if they are not. Aerialists who are also riggers, or would like to be, must ensure they treat this role as a job unto itself, giving it separate value, time, research and training.

Currently in Aotearoa rigging for circus performance is controlled only by peer review and sign off however, if done incompetently, it can be an offense and carry serious fines. There is a need to ensure that the technical backup is present on every occasion and that, even if directly asked, nothing is compromised nor that any corners are cut. This demand for expertise and quality needs to come from within the industry itself – it is all of our lives, reputations and careers on the line.

There are many considerations to planning circus rigging and they will vary greatly between situations, venues, activities and participants. Setting up an aerial system (whether for ongoing use or a one-off situation) should take into account the specific demands of the activity being carried out in that instance and be an open discussion between all the parties involved; rigger, practitioner, venue and any other parties that are responsible for any part of the activity taking place.

One of the first considerations, is exactly how strong everything needs to be. When looking at what weight the methods, gear and structures need to be able to hold, the rule of thumb major international circus companies use is a safety factor of 10. This means the weight of the performer (and all equipment) plus their dynamic loading (the force generated by drops, swinging and sudden movements) should be multiplied by 10. This is the figure of what all equipment needs to be guaranteed to be able to hold.

*E.g. a 50kg performer on a 5kg piece of equipment with a dynamic loading of x2 will require all equipment to be rated to hold at least 1100kgs ((50kg+5kg) x 2 x 10).*

Load Cell testing is the most accurate way of calculating dynamic loads in any specific situation but there are some comprehensive aerial rigging resources out there which indicate load generated by various circus elements or vocabulary. If you are involved in setting up an aerial system in any way you should find out or figure out specifically what dynamic load is being placed on the system by the practitioner(s) using it.

A sister organisation to ANZCA, Entertainment Technicians New Zealand (ETNZ) have developed a basic rigging handbook which contains further detail about performance rigging.

In order to be safe with aerial rigging the following factors need to be considered.

What...

- What equipment needs to be hung? What specific requirements are needed for the specific activity and user?
- Does it need to be a certain height?
- What is the activity that will be happening on the equipment? The forces generated through your movement will determine the ratings of the rigging equipment needed so being able to identify drops or other sudden weight loadings in the choreography is important
- Whose equipment will you be using? - it may be a combination of your lyra, the riggers hardware and the venues softs
- Has it all been checked/ is it fit for the purpose?

- What is happening before & after the performance. E.g. Does the gear need to be flown in & out of the space before &/or after? Where are you flying it from? How are you flying it? Who will be in charge of flying it before/during/after the show? Are they competent?

## Where...

- What is the best place to rig both in terms of the structures above, the airspace around and the performance space below?
- If there are multiple pieces of equipment is there a specific configuration it needs to be in?
- Are there any obstacles that need to be considered eg speakers, walls, stage edges etc.
- Is there an appropriate rigging point already in the structure or will one need to be built into the space? A visual decision about this is not good enough – some beams that look structural may not take the force of aerial work. An engineer's report or other verified report from the venue or an experienced riggers assessment is required. Do not let someone unqualified tell you it has been used in the past for aerialists and therefore it should be fine
- Consideration should also be taken for other factors in the environment that may change the aerial setup if gear is rigged ahead of time; E.g. salt or condensation in the air

## Rigging from Trees

Trees may be strong but can break. Rigging from trees is **NOT RECOMMENDED** without both an arborist and rigger assessing the tree. Many branches rot from the inside and while they may look fine from the outside can drop suddenly. Hanging from a tree that has simply been chosen because it looked sturdy or may withstand a couple of tugs of the branches is no better than turning up at a studio and being ok with the equipment being hung from old weathered piece of wood someone found in the park.

Similar care should be taken with rigging from residential structures which are often not designed to withhold the forces generated even with slow-moving aerial vocabulary. Again, while ceiling beams, undersides of decks, garages and other structures around the home may look sturdy, basing decisions off this without trained rigging and engineering input and testing can have serious consequences.

Falls from even a small height can easily injure, paralyse and can be fatal. Damage to trees and other structures should also be considered and full permission obtained from the owner before testing or use.



## Who...

Rigging for staging and rigging of performers are **two different** sections of knowledge. Someone who is qualified to rig lights might not have the specific skills, knowledge, understanding or equipment necessary to rig circus performers. Your rigger should be someone you completely trust your life to and you need to be wholeheartedly confident that they are someone competent and experienced in rigging **humans** at height and know the impact **circus** performance has on a rigging system.

Even though you may feel like you trust them with your life, double check their work, this is not offensive and could pick up an easy mistake which might save your life. If you don't feel qualified to double check, you should have a second competent person double checking to identify any errors made, or potential risks that could have been overlooked.

If you do not know of a circus experienced rigger, ANZCA has a list or ask others for recommendations. Do reference check people you're new to, they may not know what they don't know.

## How and When...

- There needs to be adequate time allocated in a clear space with access to points for rigging to happen. This should never be a rushed process.
- It is essential that the rigging occur at the appropriate time in the process, for example; if circus rigging happens after lighting rigging it may mean little or no access to the desired point. Ensure clear communication and cooperation with the other parties involved.
- Once rigging has been completed clear communication should happen with all other people who may have access to the point (E.g. lighting crew) that it is not to be changed. If you have any suspicion that the rigging may have been touched after it has been rigged it should not be used until further checks have been carried out.
- In venues where there are permanent points (E.g. an aerial studio) all rigging changes should be logged and equipment should be chosen and rigged specifically to cope with long-term use.

## De-Rigging

De-rigging also requires attention and risk management. It is just as important to get the equipment down as safely as it was put up.

After an event the pack-out process can be chaotic with countless people all moving at once, all trying to complete their job in the fastest possible way. It is important that you plan your de-rigging and communicate that plan with everyone it will intersect with.

It is recommended you be present or have someone you really trust be present for the de-rigging. Others may not respect the equipment like you will or understand why this is important. Never let anybody drop equipment used in aerial work – it can seriously damage the equipment whilst leaving no visible mark.

Significantly more incidents have been known to happen during the pack out of events than at any other time – systems are not as clearly planned out and the people involved are often fatigued from the activity and keen to finish as quickly as possible. It is important to treat the de-rigging process with the same care and developed risk management processes as you would for the rigging and performance.

## 3.7 Fire Performance

It's not worth anyone getting burnt. Burns are extremely painful, can take a long time to heal and can result in permanent disfigurement to the victim.

Whenever you are performing with fire there should be a qualified fire safety warden to check the setup, monitor the performance, and assist with pack down.

It is highly recommended that all fire performers, practitioners have completed a national qualification in fire safety.

Before being taught fire breathing make sure you understand the risks and the damage you may do to your health short term and long term. Make sure you seek skilled coaching in this and never try to teach yourself fire breathing.

## Fire Safety Kit

Whenever you are training or performing fire you should have a comprehensive fire safety kit on hand and easily accessible. This should include:

- A fire extinguisher matched to the fuel you are using and large enough for the task
- One fire safety blanket per fire practitioner
- Bucket(s) filled with water
- Wet towels for dousing fire props

## Fuel

- Have the information sheet on the fuel you are using on hand at all times.
- Make sure you know your fuel and what it will do to you short term and long term.
- Make sure you know how your fuel operates in larger and smaller quantities.
- Make sure you know how your fuel operates in different environments, dryness, wind, etc.

## Drip Zone and Safety Zone

A space designated for prepping gear should be discussed and agreed upon. This should be outside in the open air, or very well ventilated, and be on a surface of either grass or concrete. If such a space is not available, the considerations in defining a space are:

- Is there anything highly flammable around?
- Are the fumes of my fuel going to affect anyone?
- Could the surface under the fuel ignite?
- Could I damage anything in the space around me or the floor surface by flicking or spilling fuel onto it?

There should be a fire safety zone between the practitioner and any people other than those choreographed within a performance. This is usually a 3-metre separation.

## Environmental Interference

Wind presents a massive hazard where fire is concerned. If the performance time is windy a decision will have to be made between the performer(s) and all other relevant parties as to whether to proceed.

If conditions change during a training session or performance, make sure you have the ability to douse your fire immediately.

Darkness can also be an issue, you need near darkness to make the fire most effective but therein lies the risk of spilling your fuel, bumping into others or things, tripping over with live fire or props in hand etc.

## Costuming

Special consideration needs to be made when costuming fire performance / practice. Cotton fabrics are less flammable and the addition of a fire retardant to the costume is always a possibility.

Hair should be pulled back, tied or covered well out of the way when using fire.

## Risk Management Plans of Flammable Substances

When working with substances that could ignite and burn you should have plans around their use, storage and transport from area to area.

This plan should include;

- labelling the substance
- ensuring ventilation
- isolating the substance from naked flame or other ways it could ignite
- isolating the substance from people not trained in its use
- ensuring all who are interacting with the substance know its safety information
- having an emergency response plan, dowsing kit and first aid on hand

Places in NZ that do fire safety courses include:

<https://www.fireprotection.net.nz/> and <http://www.safetynaction.co.nz/>

## 3.8 The Places We Circus

Any place that circus is happening is a venue; the park, your cousin's house, the local community space, a circus studio, a random warehouse, an event centre, a theatre, a bar with an open mic stage, a shop, a cafe, some street somewhere... etc. A venue is not just for performing, it's also a venue when you're training, participating in a class, stretching in the corner, teaching or rehearsing for a show. If there are circus activities happening, then there is a venue and there are things to think about outside of your own activity.

Sometimes the less formal spaces can present the most risk as they are not as closely monitored or controlled. Even when a space has more organised and documented systems, without conscientious communication can still fail.

All venues will have a person in charge: in an official space it will be a business, in a public space it will be the local council and in a residential space it will be whoever owns the property.

## Venue Communication

Communicating with a venue can be difficult due to all the various factors each party needs to know and work around. Often (especially in either larger spaces or community spaces) the relevant information is held by several people and can be a bit of a mission to obtain and connect the dots.

As previously mentioned, a straightforward way of getting all this information across and for legal purposes clearly communicated is by awesome, comprehensive Health and Safety Risk Management forms.

If you can't find out who the right person to talk to is or you can't find the right information, there is a gap in your knowledge of the situation which could present a risk or legal liability.

Most of the time any one venue will have a whole bunch of other things going on and people to attend: as the person with the potentially dangerous activity it is your responsibility to ensure that sufficient correct communication occurs.

## Process

Finding a suitable venue can be daunting but ask around as there are more spaces than you think that might be right for your undertaking. Ask friends, colleagues, other venues or use our awesome supportive community network!

## Site Visit

Even if you have all the info you should still go do a recce as there will be factors you haven't thought about and it can also bring up cool ideas you won't have thought of to make your show/workshop/training better.

## What We Need to Know from the Venue

- The venue's rules, processes and requirements; Health and Safety forms to complete (they may or may not have a template), permits, insurance/liability, induction
- The venue may have a Hazard register denoting the risk/hazards in each specific venue. Ask for a copy.
- Any venue restrictions; E.g. no water or fire or glitter or dogs

- The activity space; building plans; details on existing rigging, staging, ceiling height, floor type and space
- Support space/s; green room, bathrooms, warm up equipment, heating/cooling, access to water
- The venue's emergency response plan/s
- Time frames; Do you have long enough to safely set up / pack down your proposed activity?
- Contacts; the relevant person may change depending on the time of day, plus it's always better to meet people face to face to ensure communication is happening (don't always trust that the information in emails gets through 100% effectively)

## What the Venue Needs to Know from Us

- More than likely you'll need to present a complete layman's description of your activity, making sure the relevant people actually understand what you do.
- A comprehensive register of the risks associated with the activity, including any venue specific risks that might have become apparent at the recce
- Your processes and requirements; your rigging plan, health and safety plan, permits, insurance
- Your emergency response plan; this might be different to theirs in which case you'll need to form an amalgamated one to use during your use of the venue
- The qualifications of the members of your organisation or any subcontractors or other relevant parties you are working with
- Space requirements and specifications; ground space, air space, accessibility, heating/cooling, facilities
- Contacts; it may not be you performing/teaching the activity on the day

In communication with the venue you'll need to update or collectively develop a set of risk management plans and processes for your activity that satisfy all involved. This could include things like:

- An evacuation plan; including considerations for power / lighting failure
- Nominated first aid person and access to first aid equipment
- Nominated fire safety person / fire warden and access to a fire extinguisher/dousing gear
- Rigging plans, methodology and all information on gear being used.
- Security and crowd management personnel.
- A action plan agreement which sets responsibilities within the group of entities.
- A rescue plan
- Rules and accepted codes of behaviour (E.g. studio rules or participant controls)

## If You're Not in A Venue with Forms

Questions you should be asking before you begin any activity:

- Do I have permission to be doing what I'm doing?
- Do I need permission?
- Do I know the space specific risks; E.g. rigging or sun?
- Do I have an emergency response plan; E.g. do I know who to call if my friend gets hurt, know how to get emergency services there, do I have a phone that's charged? etc

Ultimately the decision to do or not do your activity at this venue is yours: if you don't feel safe there don't do your circus there.

Things you might hear which should start the warning bells:

- "I'm sure those tables won't be there on the day"
- "I'm not sure who's in charge, sorry"
- "These lighting beams can totally hold weight, I'm sure!"
- "We have lighting guys who do rigging here all the time"
- "My brother's an engineer and he thinks it should be sweet"
- "Just throw a rope over it and tie it around the bottom somewhere"
- "I'm not going that high, I'll just do low stuff"

## Wider Environmental Factors

There are some wider environmental factors that can also influence safety in our practice. The environment can be categorized into three planes of awareness - the physical environment, the interpersonal environment and the cultural environment.

The **physical environment** is things in the world around us such as temperature, humidity, air quality, hazers, lights or lack thereof, wind, fire / pyro, sound and noise, distractions.

The **interpersonal environment** involves factors that are present between people such as peer pressure, blasé attitudes, performer brain (see performance section), stress, time frames, interpersonal communication, expectations, difference in understanding of specific terminology

The **cultural environment** exists in the ways in which certain collectives operate and represent themselves such as venue specific systems and habits, community expectations, cultural sensitivity, community communication.

For any space you need to be aware of who has control over each of these environments. Some of these factors will need to be negotiated ahead of time, some can't be.

You may need to:

- **Coordinate** an amount of time in which the environments will be in your control  
*(contract in a designated rehearsal time where you are the only group operating in the venue to provide a safe physical environment for your performers to rehearse)*
- **Consult** with others to form an understanding of requirements of a certain group  
*(find out how much te reo maori a certain school uses when teaching their students to make the kids feel at home in the circus space to provide a safe cultural environment)*
- **Cooperate** with other people to negotiate the shared management of an environment  
*(working with stage management to make sure you have extra help on hand to negotiate one of more of the interpersonal environments for you while you're busy wrangling your own people).*

## Physical Environment

Physical environment is fairly self-explanatory; anything you can see, hear or feel. It is important not to oversimplify this and forget crucial factors that may affect your safety. Slight changes in what you hear, see or feel in a specific moment can change your ability to carry out your activity safely – the extra dangly bits on your costume, the difference in skin texture of your acro partner or the music being too loud to hear the 'hup'. It is impossible to make a comprehensive list of every factor that may change but it is important to consider the variables in what you can hear see and feel.

What can I **hear** in my physical environment that might affect my safety?

- Competing sound such as crowd noise making it difficult to hear your music cues
- Inadequate foldback making it difficult to hear music timings or other performers' cues
- Sudden unexpected noises distracting during a performance E.g. someone dropping something or loud noises from the audience

What can I **feel** in my physical environment that might affect my safety?

- Not having the set up right for the activity; E.g. rosin vs chalk
- Not being used to having a dangerous component there; sometimes an act needs to be rehearsed without a dangerous element, but you need to ensure that these elements are perfectly ready and in everyone's thinking, especially people who aren't accustomed to the performance.



- Costumes / appropriate attire
- Elements in the wider physical environment E.g. wind blowing in through an open door, spray from a nearby fountain blowing onto you, residue left on stage from a previous act

What can I **see** in my physical environment that might affect my safety?

- Having a technical rehearsal time (tech time) that happens at a different time of day from the actual performance can be difficult, your view of the space, the amount of ambient light and the gear etc can be significantly different
- Lighting states changing between rehearsal and the show; know what lighting you can and can't cope with, communicate this clearly and have back up plans for worst case scenarios.
- Low lighting can be a hazard too.
- Too many things trying to happen at once. E.g. trying to safety check a move while someone is plotting lights

A common process for rehearsing circus into a new performance space is scheduling: an allocated time for a safety rehearsal or spacing with full ambient light (E.g. fluro's on), then plotting of lights with performer chosen elements of the performance (E.g. 'I'm not doing the bendy section full out as I'm not fully warmed up' or 'I'm just going to mark the spinning section'), then a full dress-rehearsal with costumes and lights.

## Interpersonal and Psychological Environment

The interpersonal and psychological environment is both your own internal thinking and the relationships between you and the other people involved. This environment is much more difficult to see (unless you're a mind reader), to define or monitor either your or other's responses to it. These relationships may be important to you on a personal or professional level, but you cannot let this cloud your judgement on making safe decisions.

Some factors which may affect safety are:

- Someone telling you to just do it (happens in classes all the time and sometimes it's the right thing and sometimes it's not, know your comfort zones and be confident in yourself)
- Fellow students or trainers being too competitive.
- Knowing when to push students and when to not.
- Performance brain / safety brain of yourself and the people around you.
- Stressful environment; people being frazzled or stressing or being super nervous.
- Comments from people. Sometimes people just say dumb things because they think they're funny; 'Oooh don't fall', jokes or jibes or passer-by type comments.

- Not enough time or not enough rehearsal.
- Multiple things happening in the room at the same time.
- Can't hear / communicate with students / tech team / safety officer / other performers.
- Distractions
- Having the client / the public / parents (and their expectations) brought into a rehearsal or a class environment before the student or performer is ready.

## Cultural Environment

Best practice for us in the circus community in NZ is also about maintaining respect and sensitivity to all cultural spaces and communities. Consider the people whose environment you are performing or training your activity in and make that part of your practice. This works on two levels. New Zealand is a very multicultural society with many ways of operating. Likewise, our own circus community is just as diverse and there is no one right or superior way. It is simply a commitment to hearing, understanding and respecting the group you are working with and making sure safety is always prioritized.

In summary, there are things you need to know from others and things others need to know from you. Sometimes this will require coordinating face to face communication, sometimes the consulting will be done over emails and sometimes all the relevant people and organisations will need to cooperate to complete the forms and documents required.

## Chapter 4 -Training

## Our Varied Circus Practices

Throughout our circus lives we may take on a variety of roles and find ourselves in a number of different practices. Some of us may split our focus and time between learning and performing, others between teaching and performing, some of us may perform other people's choreography while others spend their career refining and re-refining their repertoire. There are specific types of practice that come with their own cultures, norms and risks to health and safety. Through the next three chapters we will address the special considerations that come with three of these practices – training, performing and teaching.

## Training Practices

Whether we are circus students, educators or performers it is likely that training is a part of our practice. Training is the time to prepare and condition our bodies for the actions we want them to do, recover and recondition from injuries, train our weaknesses and develop the other components that make up our art form. It is where we learn mastery over our skills. This does not always happen quickly or easily, in fact researcher and author Malcolm Gladwell suggests that it takes around ten thousand hours of practice to achieve mastery in any field.

What is trained, how often, where and with who else will vary greatly between disciplines, as will the risks that come with training. For an aerialist, the greatest risk may be performing a new trick at height, while for a juggler it may be the risk of injury from drilling repetitive movement.

### What?

Training is our opportunity not to simply increase our physical vocabulary and skill set but also to physically mitigate our weaknesses and make ourselves more fit to perform. This may involve drilling movements over and over to master them, conditioning the body to better execute the skills, training the weaker side and sequencing skills together.

Training should be the time that we can fail safely... a lot... until we have trained ourselves not to!

There is no point just doing something over and over again if you don't have the knowledge required to improve the skill. It is vital that circus practitioners can recognize for themselves the difference between when to train, and when they need to be taught something. If bad technique is repeated in training, it may become habitualized bad technique, which is often much harder, more time-consuming to undo and potentially more damaging to your body.

Particular caution should be taken when training physically risky skills learnt from online tutorials or other images/videos. There is increasing amounts of content online that is not taught or performed by experienced or qualified individuals and doesn't always include enough information to safely replicate the movement. Extreme caution should be taken in learning aerial or acrobatic moves from images or videos as the fail points of tricks and sequences cannot always be seen, and replicating the skill with another body, on slightly different equipment or with a very minor adaption can result in the trick failing.

Never replace a qualified teacher or instructor with Youtube or Instagram.

It is important to train at the right level – if you are training tricks that are too far beyond your level this can be both physically unsafe and also mentally frustrating. Training is a progression made of many, many small steps and achievements, accomplished through pushing the body and mind just enough to develop new skills safely.

Some questions to ask yourself about the safety of what you are training. You should be able to answer yes to all of them!

- Do I know the risks of what I am training both short-term and long-term?
- Do I know how to prepare myself physically and mentally for what I am training?
- Do I have adequate knowledge of how best to train this skill safely and with safe progressions?
- Do I have the appropriate attire and equipment for what I am training?
- Do I need a spotter, mats, harness or other safety gear in order to safely train the skill?
- Do I know how often I should be training this skill Eg. Hard straps conditioning should initially take place every 3/4 days
- Do I know how to make a rotating schedule in my training to have rest days for certain muscle groups or skills when required
- Do I know how to read my own body and properly gauge fatigue, good pain vs bad pain etc.
- Do I have basic knowledge of anatomy and common concerns of people in my discipline E.g. jugglers' wrists, aerialists' shoulders
- Do I train both sides? If not, do it, do it now! Start today!

## Where?

Training happens in a wide range of places in the world – it might be open training at a reputable venue, training in a park, in your garage, at the gym, in the theatre between shows and a vast array of other locations!

The specific needs of your discipline may dictate where an appropriate training space is. Some skills will require specialist equipment to train safely E.g. sprung floors for tumbling,

crash mats for aerial training etc. These are most likely to be found at reputable circus or acrobatic training facilities. Other skills may require less specialist gear but have their own physical requirements E.g. a clear space with no breakables or obstructions and a high ceiling for jugglers or a flat, even ground surface with appropriate handrails/walls etc for beginner unicycle training.

If you are training a high-risk activity outside of a specialised facility make sure you stringently monitor what you do. There is a point where you will become complacent in your training and stop paying as much attention to the safety of what you are doing. Many highly skilled circus performers have had an accident, fall or near miss at this point. You really need to consider whether it is worth exposing yourself to these increased risks for the extra time training.

Some training spaces will have their own rules around training and it is important that you follow the rules set by the venue you are training in. Shared training spaces can sometimes be busy, loud and with split focus – it is important to know how to cope with / control or work around these things to keep a safe focus on your own training.

## With Who?

Some circus activities require hours spent by yourself going over the basics before you can progress onto more difficult skills E.g. handstands. Others you can't begin training them safely by yourself E.g. aerial silks and there are some you can never train or even perform just by yourself E.g. flying trapeze. The potential risks of the activity may dictate who you train with. For high-risk activities your location should be one where there are other people present who can help you if necessary. You should never train high-risk activities alone. For example, it may be perfectly safe to practise poi spinning by yourself in your backyard but if you're spinning fire poi wait until a group fire night.

Best practice for circus performers worldwide says:  
If there is any element of danger...DON'T TRAIN BY YOURSELF

Considerations should also be made to the safety of other people in the space around you. There may be a risk to other people training or spectators in the space if you are training a trick you have not yet perfected and it is important to communicate this and take appropriate preventative actions. For example, if you are training a new hula hoop trick where hoops are likely to be flung off as you master the skills, ensure spectators and other people training are aware of the high chance of hoops flying towards them and formulate a plan of action that will keep everyone safe.

Some disciplines will require trained spotters to keep you safe as you train high-risk skills. Spotting is a specific skill and so it is important to have people who know what they are doing and have the expertise to act quickly if necessary. Having 'spotters' who do not have any spotting skills or knowledge can present significant physical risk to both you and them.

These questions should also have a yes response;

- Do I know enough about what my partner needs to be doing to complete the skill and stay safe?
- Do I know how my actions and movements can affect my partner or the people around me?
- Do my spotters understand what is required and are they capable of carrying out those actions?

Training with others who have shared training goals can be helpful for motivation and for keeping each other safe. However, it is important that training sessions do not have an unhealthy competitive culture and that all people present feel able to train at their own pace and with their own focus. No one should feel obligated or pressured to formally teach anyone else any physical skills during this time. Training with others is a wonderful way for our community to come together, to keep developing our skills in a safe and supportive environment and to develop connections and a sense of community with other circus practitioners. If we fully commit to a culture that values health and safety and we actively integrate these processes into all our training practices then we are not only training our skills, but also training our ability to keep ourselves safe!





## Chapter 5 - Performing

## Performing and Performance

There is nothing like performing, it's extreme, exhilarating, nerve wracking and can be very rewarding. For many circus practitioners, performance is the main reason they're pursuing circus skills and training. It is a whole world of its own however, and needs to be taught, understood, considered and given as much weight as the other aspects of being a circus practitioner.

For many performers the drive to perform will sometimes outweigh anything else that's going on. For many artists there is a passion and emotional attachment to performing that goes beyond any financial gain and other considerations. This can be taken advantage of and in the wrong context can be dangerous.

This is firstly dangerous for your own safety, by pushing yourself into a performance context before you are truly ready. Secondly this is also dangerous for the industry as a whole and the community it comes from. Sub-standard or unsafe performance will inevitably give the whole industry a bad name and has done in NZ in the past. This affects all of us and results in less paid work for everyone.

It is important to recognize the role and place of circus as profession; the dedication it takes, the years of training, the commitment to safety, and the detailed knowledge of your discipline. There is more to being a professional performer than is often initially thought and it's important that we all value and honour this role. The more we honour this and keep pushing the standard higher, the more audiences and clients will take us seriously and value our work in accordance with that.

It is also really important to be able to recognise the stages of career development in yourself and others. Being able to recognize when practitioners should move from working in a non-professional context into pre-professional activities and then again when they're ready to move into the professional space. For extreme risk activities such as aerial work and fire acts there should be a extensive process that moves you through pre-professional and professional stages with clear guidance from other knowledgeable and experienced experts in the field.

These are a few of the questions that it's good to ask before you consider yourself ready to be performing...

- Do you know how to recognize an opportunity that is positive for the industry and one that's not?
- Do you know how and when and why you would say no to a performance?
- Do you know the value of your work and why?
- Do you know where you fit into the industry?
- Do you know how to read a contract?
- Are you ready to think about and talk about the actual dangers of performing?
- Do you know all the questions you need to ask to know you will be safe?
- Do you have all your H and S documentation in place?
- Have you had written confirmation that the things you need will be there?
- Do you know your legal status and what you might be liable for given any situation?
- Do you have insurance?
- Are you ready for a possible change in environment affecting how your equipment will feel?
- Are you able to adjust your performance safely to suit any major changes on the day?
- Is your performance 'performance ready' (see below for a definition)?
- Have you performed this act in front of people a least a few times?
- Can you run your act perfectly on the first run every time?
- Can you run your act five times in a row?
- Do you know how to prepare and to manage your prep time to keep yourself safe?
- Do you know what the extra adrenaline will feel like and what it will do to you?
- Do you know what the extra fatigue of last minute rehearsals will do to your strength stores?
- Are you prepared for the psychological effect of not having mats or other safety equipment?
- Have you transitioned your act off mats and know that you can cope with this?
- Have you done the act in full costume makeup and hair?
- Do you have several costume options that work for this act?
- Do you know what to do if something goes wrong?
- Do you know the potential moments in the act where you need a plan b and do you have one?
- Do you know all your contacts at the gig and do you understand what each person's role is?
- Do you know what your responsibilities are?
- Do you know your music inside and out?
- Will your audience feel safe watching you?
- Do you know that you're presenting something that is unique and authentic?
- Have you received creative and performative feedback on this act/performance?

**For aerialists:**

- Do you have basic rigging knowledge?
- Do you know the limits of your rigging knowledge?
- Do you know where to source further appropriate rigging knowledge?

**Fire performers:**

- Do I understand the flash point of my fuel and how it will react in adverse conditions?
- Do I know exactly how to control the size and direction of my flame?
- Do I know where the audience will be at all times?
- Do I know that my costume and hairstyle will keep me safe?
- Do I have the right safety gear on standby and is there someone who will respond in case of emergency?

## The Definition of 'Performance Ready' Skills

You can perform the skill safely no matter what the conditions around you and no matter how you are feeling in that moment. You know how to save the skill at every moment within the execution of it. You can implement the skill artistically and within a sequence.

Some of the most difficult and unique things about circus performance are;

**Performer Safety Brain;** A circus performer requires a mental focus which can be split in many ways. It is important to have a safe balance between the focus on execution/safety and the artistic performance and generosity to the audience.

**Expectations;** Audiences, clients and producers have the expectation that circus is magical, superhuman and death-defying and the resulting effect of this expectation is felt keenly by performers, producers, presenters and organisers.

**Danger:** As circus performers we often want to put the most impressive, difficult, newly acquired or unique skills into our acts, which frequently is a lot about our own expectations and goals.

**Communication:** Once the performance has begun, communication between the performer and technical teams can be difficult depending on the discipline being performed.

It is highly recommended you have performance training and go through one of the available training programs in order further develop your capacity as a performer before venturing into the world as a pre-professional. Some of the awesome pathways in Aotearoa currently include:

- The Whitireia Degree Course in Wellington
- React's Mentorship Program in Auckland
- The Dust Palace Advanced Class in Auckland

## Yourself and Performance (Developing your performer brain)

*“You don't train a circus trick until you've got it. You train a circus trick until you can't not get it.” (anon)*

### **It will all feel different...**

You will be different when you perform. Your brain works differently and may not think as safely as you might expect it to. You should find or create opportunities to explore this before being in a high-pressure, high-risk situation. Having and maintaining a split focus during all performances is a skill that needs to be developed like any other. The safety part of your focus is always thinking about what you need to do to keep yourself and everyone around you safe. The performance part of your focus is listening and responding to the music or the other performers on stage, thinking through the acting process and story of your character.

### **Allocate a percentage of your focus to safety and a percentage to performance before getting on stage.**

These will change depending on how comfortable you are with that act. If it's the first time you've performed it you might be looking at 80% safety / 20% performance split. If you have performed it a thousand times you might be operating at a 20% safety/ 80% performance split.

Know the limits of your body and mind at any given moment. Learn to monitor your energy levels and to understand how adrenaline and fatigue affect your body. You may be stronger, more flexible, more able to express to your fullest, but not necessarily as physically aware, controlled or articulate. Sometimes the lead-in to a performance can be extremely physically draining. Know and feel confident communicating your limits and needs. It's in everyone's best interest that you remain safe.

The people you are performing with will be different as well. They may be stronger or less physically aware and you can't know that they are aware of this or the risks around it.

## Preparation

- Knowing what you need prior to performing and being able to communicate this is an important skill to develop. Don't expect anyone to guess what it is that you need to perform safely and to the best of your ability. Certain things that can help you prepare for a performance are easily communicated for example, water and a warm room. However, these things may not be obvious to an organiser that doesn't know much about your practice
- There may be other things that you need to prepare yourself mentally for your performance. Your psychological preparation could be vastly different to others. It is very important that you respect others needs whilst coping with what you need prior to performance. Trust is a key ingredient in circus performance and being able to remain calm and generous is good practice.
- You don't always get the prep time you want or feel you need. Your performance time might change at the last minute or rehearsals might go on too long. It's important that the show goes on but not at the expense of safety. Sometimes we can't warm up for an act properly in five minutes and it's very difficult and draining to stay warm for more than 45 minutes. Clearly communicate with the production team or other relevant people what you need in terms of timeframe. Often suggesting they give you a 30-minute call and then a five-minute call is a good idea to get to your most peaky performance ready.

## Within Performance

- Knowing how to get yourself out of dangerous situations within a performance is important and something you will have wanted to practise safely in training and away from the eyes of the audience. Being able to adapt mid performance is a skill you'll need at some point. Someone might put something underneath you, above you or right in the middle of the space you had rehearsed in earlier that day. They might even do so mid performance, it's been known to happen. The safety brain will be necessary in these situations.
- Pressures of performing are numerous, and this links back into the audience's expectations. All performers want to do their best and be amazing for the audience. In performance you'll feel the need to go harder than you ever have. With the performance adrenaline your body doesn't have the same warning signs. Pain won't necessarily stop you from doing something you physically might not be ready for. Allowing this adrenaline to become something you depend on for sufficient strength or focus to be able to perform the skills in your routine is a slippery, dangerous, inadvisable path.

- People who don't perform or aren't part of the performance world can't always be expected to understand performance or performing. It's our responsibility to educate them in a respectful way; to let them know not to stand underneath us or that we might be backflipping into them in a moment etc. Being generous means allowing time to allay fears and outline expectations by communicating clearly. Written communication before the day followed up with verbal communication again ideally before the day means that everyone is on the same page and knows what to expect. You may need to repeat yourself. Always do so with respect.
- Focus on aesthetic and 'newness' in performance is also part of audience, client or community expectation. There will always be times when you perform a new thing; trick, element, skill, routine, apparatus. Those extra hours you've spent prepping and rehearsing this new element will pay off in its first outing. Ensuring that these things are communicated is definitely useful, even if it means admitting to a client that it is your first rodeo! There is often massive pressure to have all the answers, know all the things and to be the best at everything. Be clear with everyone and you'll never end up in a sticky or risky situation.
- Don't let your excitement and desire to perform cloud your judgement.

## Recovery

- Knowing how you and your body respond after performance is key for a long career. You may need a day off after every performance or you may need to do stability and flexibility only the following day. Make sure you know what you need to recover and do it. Your mind may need one thing and your body may need something else, find your balance. It might be the same after every performance or it might be different every time. Other members of your team or your performing partner may need different things... they may be completely the opposite of you; but you need to be aware of respecting what they need too.

## Expectations from the Audience

Circus is magic, and audiences go to circus to see things which they feel aren't humanly possible. There is collective understanding that the audience will always want and expect more: bigger, better, higher, more dangerous etc.

We train to look superhuman and we are, relatively, superhuman. But to get to this point takes years of physical performance training and experience. We know this as practitioners. Other members of the industry or members of the public probably won't know this, may have misinformation or might choose to ignore the information that they do have. Often the audience doesn't want to have the illusion of superhuman-ness shattered.

Producers and event organisers have their own set of assumptions about what the audience wants and feel just as keenly as the performers the desire to fulfil the audiences perceived expectations. You may be asked to provide something which takes years to train, may only be attainable for two or three people worldwide or is simply impossible.

Try not to be offended by misinformation or lack of information; there are lots of myths within and around circus culture and we need to know how to communicate and be cool with communicating clearly even if it means exposing yourself, your skills, your limitations, or others. Most importantly, feel empowered to say no if there are unrealistic expectations placed on you by any other person. **Be ok with saying no** and know that you can turn to the community for back up.

**Professionalism on and off stage** is so very important. Both for your career and also for the name of circus in NZ. You will be expected by the client, events company, studio or company you are performing with, to do all the things you'd imagine a professional being asked to do; be on time, look presentable on and off stage, meet the performance expectations, deal with disagreements, artistic differences and grievances in an adult manner etc. Even if you aren't quite as magical as the client or audience were expecting, if you present yourself and your work in the best possible, most generous manner you'll be fully appreciated by all.

## Industry Expectations

Clarity around expectations is about controlling risk, career stability and cultural growth. Communication is, again, key. Due to the historically secretive nature of circus arts and the relatively new industry in New Zealand, people of all parts of the industry can have outrageous expectations. Expectations that could damage your reputation, damage the name of New Zealand circus practitioners or even damage you physically either short term or long term.



Practitioners should be able to feel safe that their livelihood is valued by other members of the industry. Maybe you would be able to learn a brand-new skill in two weeks if someone specially requested it (eg. to ride elephants!) but if they are expecting you to train that skill just for them you should be paid to do so. If you want to ask someone to learn to ride elephants in two weeks you should expect to pay them to do so.

Circus performers may be superhuman but we're just people and everyone has limitations. Some performers have more endurance than others, but everyone will fatigue eventually and much of what we do gets dangerous.

### **Rehearsal time for an event or performance**

Depending on your skill level you will have different amounts of rehearsal required. When more than one performer is required the amount of rehearsal time is dramatically increased, as is the danger. Be honest with clients or events companies if something is unachievable in the timeframe, they may try to push you for more in less time but at the end of the day it's your career (and safety) that's at stake.

### **Onsite rehearsal / stage tech time**

This will depend vastly on the act. At lots of events in NZ it's difficult to get more than 45 minutes of onstage preparation time with the tech team's attention. For many acts this is borderline and can be dangerous. Do as much as you can prior to the day, rehearse in your costumes, mark out the floor with stage dimensions, prepare stage entrances and exits, make lighting decisions etc. Make sure everyone's expectations are clear from the outset and no one will be disappointed. If you have no idea how long something will take to tech, ask around or do a dummy run. Keeping things simple for yourself and other people can help with this. It may not always be possible, but when it is, it can help create a smooth, stress free performance.

### **Skill level**

Be careful to sell yourself at your current skill level and not higher. When you reach a higher skill level you can then sell yourself there. You have both your reputation and the reputation of all other NZ circus performers in your hands. Be realistic and life will be better.

### **Performance ability**

Increasing your performance ability is a massive asset to your career. Performance ability can be an esoteric thing making it very hard for the ego to see if you're lacking. Acting classes and performance experience in a range of situations and genres will definitely help. The industry will expect you to have amazing performance ability from the outset simply because no one understands that star power is a skill and not something you're just born with.

### **Aesthetic conformity**

You may have a strong aesthetic you want to fulfil but so will the client/audience and they are the ones you're giving to. Your costume, music and performance style will all communicate something and if you know what that is you can control the experience of the audience and deliver to their expectations easily and without discomfort to yourself or danger.

### **Necessary provisions** for the performers both onstage and off

Make sure you write a tech specs, rider or contract that outlines what your needs are both onstage and offstage. Make sure this is with the client, producer or events company well before the performance so there is enough time to negotiate the details. Don't expect anyone to know what you need, the more specific you are the better.

### **Length of performance time**

Performance length differs greatly between different skills and apparatus. Be very clear about the physical and logistic limitations of what your performance is. Most equilibristic performers can do a maximum of 20 minutes for roving or installation performance before getting wobbly. A skill which is amazingly useful to learn is how to monitor your energy to remain consistently safe over a period of time.

### **Length of time between performances**

Again, this is very different depending on the act or skill being performed. A range of factors such as things running late or travel time between stage and dressing rooms can condense rest times between shows. Being clear prior to the day will alleviate unnecessary conflict.

### **Break time in between rehearsal and performing**

Ultimately you are responsible for making sure the event doesn't demand so much of you prior that you are at risk of fatigue during a performance. If this means marking things, not strength training the day before, getting enough sleep or having a power nap between the rehearsal and the performance then you must do what is needed. Make sure you are clear with everyone about what you need and why. Be ready to compromise but know where the true safety boundaries are.

### **Warm up time**

Know how much you need and ensure you communicate that this is a priority. Performance time cannot be shifted significantly without danger. Being called too early into the wings, too late to complete warm up, performance time shifting earlier without sufficient warm up time, or having the performers stay warm for too long can all pose significant risks.

### **Number of performances per night**

Again, this depends on your skill set but everyone has a limit. The difficulty of the activity, how varied each of the performances are, the rest times between and the amount of warmup time should all be considered in making decisions about the number of performances agreed to in a day or night. What may be easy and safe to perform a single time may become difficult and dangerous when performed repeatedly across a single shift as the same muscles fatigue. It may be easier for a performer to stay warm and perform several acts closer together (E.g. in a continuous show format) than to have performances spread across a number of hours.

### **Changes to the performance**

People don't necessarily understand that making changes (to music, costumes or lighting) can be significant health and safety risks. These should be detailed in your health and safety documents.

- Lighting should never change between the rehearsal and the performance or within the performance deviate from what has been rehearsed.
- Have a clause in your health and safety documentation or contract saying that no choreography will be changed within 72 - 96 hours prior to the performance (except by the performers request).
- Explain in your health and safety documentation that the costumes you are providing are designed specifically for your act and can't be changed close to the event.
- Entrances, exits, items on stage, audience areas and movements could all suddenly be different at the moment of performance. Your safety brain will help you adjust your performance in a safe manner.

### **Range of rates**

The client, producer or events company will have a budget to work within, they might know where you fit within the industry expected rates, but they also may not. They may have no idea and in this case our responsibility is to educate and to not take advantage or be taken advantage of. Taking advantage will only lead to a bad reputation for you and for circus in NZ.

- Communicate with other circus performers about rates if you're confused about what your work is worth.

- Undercutting poses a massive risk to such a small industry. Know that there is a pathway to becoming a professional and know that your worth should increase as your skills do. Figure out where you fit within the industry, be honest to yourself and others about your skill set and performance ability and charge accordingly. If we all do this undercutting can't exist. If a client wants to hire a pre-professional performer for half the price of an experienced performer they should know what they are getting.
- As an industry, we all need to value the work of professional circus performers and if we do we can build a good name and a healthy, generous industry in which we can all thrive.

### **Insurance**

At some point in your career you will be expected to have statutory or public liability or general liability insurance. It is recommended you get insurance before you start performing professionally.

### **Dependence on other parties or subcontractors**

You may require another party to be able to fulfil your obligations to a client, producer or events company. This may be a rigging company, makeup artists, costume maker or just your fellow performer(s). Operate with clear written communication and be kind, generous, and generally super cool to keep all these relationships in tip top shape. You may be asked to work with someone who you don't agree with or who has slighted you in the past. Safety above all else then professionalism.

### **Professionalism**

Fulfilling your commitments, being honest about your products, being generous and kind to other professionals, members of the industry and public, being presentable, fulfilling your obligations within the expected timeframe, and going over and above the call of duty (within reason!).

### **Photography and videography**

It is par for the course that photographers and videographers will be present at any performance both as contractors or members of the audience. It will be assumed that as the performer you are 100% ok with this. If there is anything that you are uncomfortable with communicate clearly before the day.

Flash photography poses a significant risk for any circus and even if it has been stipulated previously you may need to remind both organisers and audience just prior to performing. It is likely that any photographer present has not been fully briefed about the performance and the risks therein *E.g. being too close to performers*. It is your responsibility to control your risk.

**Use of image and/or video footage**

Even though that there may be images taken of you at performances do not expect to be able to use these and never use without express permission. However, do ask as it is most likely that you will be granted permission. It is important to understand that every client, producer or events company has their own values and systems around their public profile and social media strategy. They may not want you tagging yourself or commenting on their images online. Respect others values by communicating.

Industry expectation is that posting images of you at an event is fine but when an image of you is used in promotional material or to advertise for future events, activities or products, a fee for appearing in the image should be negotiated.

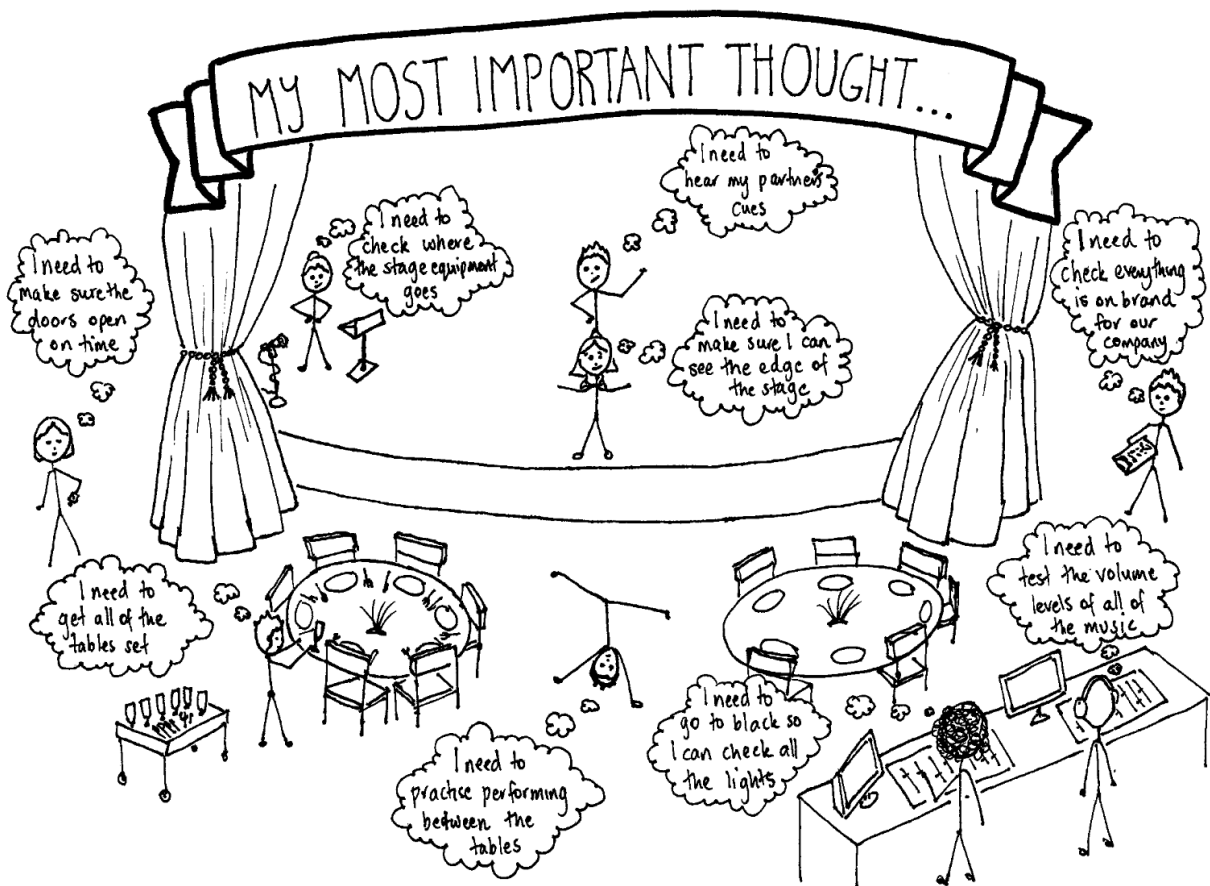
**Cleanliness**

Always leave a work space cleaner than when you found it. It will be appreciated

**Communication Through the Chain of Command**

There can often be many people working on different components of any one performance event or show. It is useful to recognise that all people involved will have their own priorities and at any moment they may conflict with your own priorities. The important thing is to respect everyone's own focuses and to communicate well so that every person through the chain of command is aware of things that may interfere with their task at hand and the safety of all people involved.

At any one moment, every person will have their own 'most important thought'...



As you can see each event has internally a complicated scenario where everyone has their own agenda and what they think is best or most important might not be safest or even plausible.

At the end of the day however worst-case scenario for many of the people involved is marginal compared with the worst-case scenario of circus performance.

In all negotiations, both written and in person, communicate that safety, yours and that of everyone around you, is the bottom line. Ensure you communicate that safety wins over aesthetics and remember this guide is your backup...

**Plans are not always the same as the actual set up.**

This happens time and again that despite the best intentions and all the paperwork laid out well in advance, something is different; a spacing on stage, the estimated room between tables, the colour of the drapes, the lectern can no longer be removed from stage, etc. It's best to deal with these things in a calm and careful manner (often you may not know exactly who you're speaking with or complaining to) and with everyone's safety as the key most important guiding factor.

Do reference back to your health and safety forms but also be flexible with what you can be flexible with and respect the fact that everyone else also has jobs to do and things to deliver.

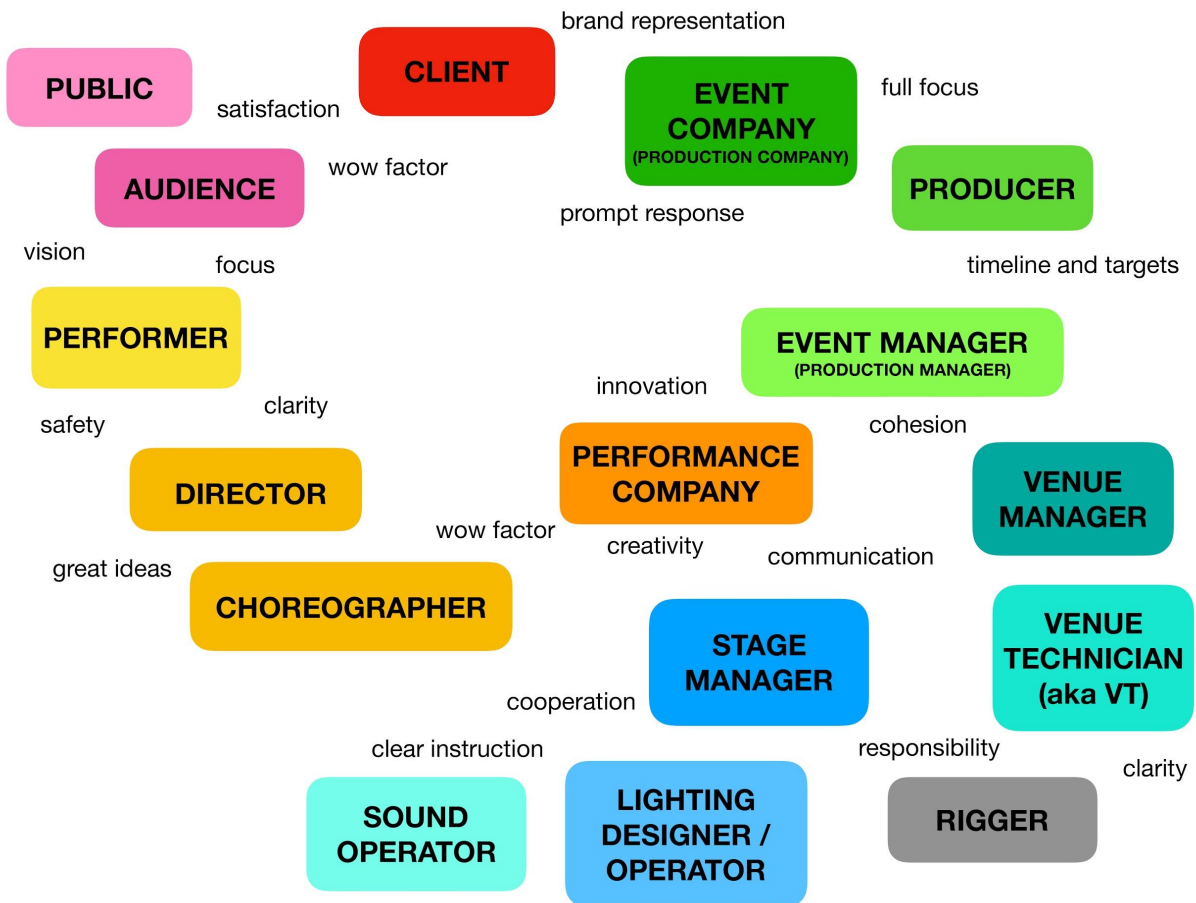
Generally being a good human helps the industry. Being able and open minded enough to consider other people's points of view, while maintaining your own safety guidelines.

Make sure that when you leave the venue at the end of the gig that everyone is happy with you and your work.

## Roles Inherent in All Performance Situations

The previous diagram depicts a bunch of people who all have tasks to perform and expectations laid upon them by others which they're trying to fulfil.

This isn't, however, the most effective way to look at the process of events because one person can have multiple roles, or the same role can have multiple people making decisions. This can vary significantly depending on the performance situation. Sometimes their may be volunteers carrying out some of the roles, or people who are taking on a new role they are not experienced in. All these variables are also factors in the overall approach and risk management strategy you should employ. Once again clear written communication between key individuals who have the key roles is the best way to ensure everyone can be safe.



Whatever the scale of the event, number of people involved, or size of the crowd, happy workplaces lead to better shows. Performance very often has a level of stress that comes with it but consulting at all levels to produce the best possible plans, cooperating with peers at every moment in generous ways and coordinating with audience to fulfil their expectations can allow for a fantastic (and safe!) experience for everyone!



## Chapter 6 - Teaching

## Teaching Circus

Teaching circus arts can be a formal, paid job or an informal skill/knowledge sharing agreement. One can even do accidental teaching or teach something without even participating at all; E.g. people mimicking vocab you've posted online.

A key responsibility when sharing any knowledge is to keep all participants and nonparticipants who are present safe. This isn't as simple as making sure someone completes this 'trick' in this 'moment' safely. Your obligation extends to keeping them safe socially and psychologically, in that moment and in their future practice. Being able to do something doesn't mean you know how to teach it. Some knowledge (and a willing student!) can be more dangerous than none! However, in some instances, a knowledgeable and experienced teacher can teach things without necessarily being able to do them.

Teaching is a specialised practice all of its own and requires an individual to excel at a range of skills all at the same time - awesome interpersonal skills so that everyone respects and will work hard for you, an 'eyes in the back of your head' ability to watch multiple students; enough self-understanding to be secure of your ability to respond calmly and sensibly in emergency situations; enough knowledge of your content so that any possible variation can be easily taken into consideration in a short timeframe; sufficient planning skills and enough flexibility within your plans to ensure the learning pathways are sequential and the outcomes achievable. Teaching is a skill that must be learnt and practised and nurtured. It's also a skill that keeps developing and growing the more you do it as you constantly adjust and respond appropriately to each situation.

There are formal and informal ways of developing your teaching abilities - some institutions have teacher training programs while some practitioners learn to teach purely alongside someone else in an apprentice or mentor type relationship. An untrained teacher should never be responsible for other people in a high-risk activity and those that are in teaching positions should have the all of knowledge and skills to be safe facilitators. Teacher Training Programs are becoming more and more popular in circus arts worldwide. An "intensive training weekend" can be either not enough to cover all the aspects and responsibilities of being a circus teacher, or too intense to retain all the information thrown at you. They can be a good aid and resource, but unless you have experience already, continued training with a mentor is advised.

## Are You Ready to Teach? Do You Know Enough About...

- Being able to set up the space in a way that is appropriate and safe
- Ensuring you can get enough energy out of yourself to make the teaching fun and awesome for your students
- Being able to recognise the role that circus plays in each student's life and adjust your teaching to fit this. Recognising why your student is there (E.g. circus for self-esteem).
- Being able to clearly communicate reasons for everything you teach and 'the anatomy of it'
- Being ready to defend your expertise
- Flexible teaching (being able to adjust communication and content on the fly)
- Accommodating different learning styles
- Understanding the student's attitude or temperament (E.g. shy, unconfident or arrogant).
- Making sure you're balancing strength and flexibility
- Being able to verbalise a physical skill
- Planning well enough to ensure all learning styles and levels are catered for
- The ability to modify your methodology according to their students' physical capabilities.
- Being able to say the same thing 10 different ways
- Being able to motivate students to do the stuff that isn't fun; E.g. knowing the importance of fundamentals to your specific discipline.
- Being able to deal with resistance to your teaching and not let it affect either the student in question or the group dynamic
- Ensuring the students respect the gear and don't damage any facilities
- Managing student to student relationships (don't teach each other dangerous things or fight)
- Having power to mitigate any potentially dangerous situation
- Making sure the environment is under control and students aren't crazed - knowing how to regain control over crazed students
- Dealing with fatigue
- Knowing the fail points and risky things
- Pre-empting things going wrong (knowing what people might do given certain situations or with certain items or props ie 'don't poke each other with the plate spinning sticks')
- Properly trained spotting techniques with sufficient confidence and competence to carry out effective spotting.
- Harm prevention (long term and short term)
- Being able to deal with danger and panic and respond instantly to situations
- Having first aid knowledge

- Being old enough or mature enough to accept the potential for severe injury and the emotional consequences
- Knowing the possible repercussions of what you're teaching.
- Knowing how to prepare your students bodies for each activity
- Being able to help students see their own progress and manage their own progress
- Being able to encourage people to push beyond their comfort zone
- Being able to maintain appropriate positive relationships and boundaries with students

## Planning

Planning is an important aspect of any teaching situation. It helps you to formulate a clear structure of what you want your students to achieve and do, and how you will achieve this within each teaching moment. In order to do effective planning, you first need knowledge of:

- The group or individuals you'll be teaching; their level, age, prior experience, physical aptitude and abilities, attitude to learning.
- The venue; appropriateness for your content; facilities, resources, procedures, culture and expectations.
- The expectations and outcomes expected by participants, the participants support people, the organisation you might be representing, the public or consumers of your efforts.

With this knowledge you will be able to devise a plan with appropriate content. When you start it's always worthwhile having a few backup plans in case certain exercises don't suit in practise or you get through your plan quicker than anticipated. The ability to be flexible and deviate from the plan is just as important as the plan itself.

You need to communicate to everyone involved (parents, students, other teachers) what their roles are and make sure that role is appropriate to their level of experience. *For example; allowing a parent to assist with a particular move in a class environment but clearly communicating that they should not be trying this at home.*

It is a really useful thing in all teaching situations to have a clear lesson plan that sets out what the class is trying to achieve through **learning objectives** and **learning outcomes**. Objectives set out the main goals and intentions of the class (E.g. *To develop an understanding of sequencing movements on aerial silks*) and outcomes set out the specific achieved skills that will let you know the objective has been met (E.g. *Students can link 3 to 4 movements together on aerial silks confidently and decisively*). Within the lesson plan it is also a good idea to have in mind the personal goals of students and to guide individual development safely. These learning objectives and outcomes will help to inform what sorts

of tasks and activities you can cover in the class that will safely help the students achieve successfully

Alongside the development of all these hard skills as a teacher you will also have your own personal philosophies, rules and styles and you need to make sure that they align who, where and what you're teaching. That doesn't mean you have to give up your own methods or philosophies, but you must be able to uphold those of the places you work and have enough consideration to be able to work with others. There is probably going to be certain teaching environments that suit your style better than others.

Each teaching environment has its own culture, rules and processes and if you're moving between different environments and institutions or encountering a new one it is your responsibility as the person who ultimately has the students' safety in hand to ensure you have all the information before you teach. Each organisation or environment that you are teaching in should have a combination or all of the following; risk management procedures, emergency protocols, social obligations, underpinning philosophies that need to be considered in your lesson plans, communication portals and professional expectations.

## Teaching and Venues

Each venue will have a different culture, rules, processes, rigging, and emergency response plans. It's best to treat each new venue you teach at whether it's a long contract or a one-off workshop with the same, full consideration.

Due to the current Worksafe legislation each venue will have a or be a Person Conducting of a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) that will be providing you with an induction, risk assessments and safety procedures specific to their venue. They may also expect full risk assessment documentation from you in exchange. They will have rules and guidelines about how to care for their facilities, resources and gear and they may have venue specific rigging methods which you may not be familiar with. If you are unsure or unknowledgeable on any aspect of these it is your responsibility to request more information, do research around it and / or consult an independent professional.

*(for a definition of PCBU please refer to the beginning of Chapter 7)*

For anything you are teaching you should know how to identify if the gear and / or rigging is appropriate to task. If you do not you should not be teaching that discipline in that situation.

For any teaching situation you enter you should also be clear and upfront about the expectations placed on you by the organisation. It's a difficult life in the arts for any organisation and the venue you're talking to is more than likely making decisions with staying afloat as the key outcome. Their thinking doesn't necessarily cover the same

knowledge you have of how to best fulfil the objectives whilst keeping everyone safe. For example; if they are asking you to teach for too long without any breaks you should communicate clearly what your limits are and that you need to reach an agreement. Safety is always the bottom line.

If you happen to be returning to a venue you have taught at in the past it is your responsibility to find out what processes, procedures, risks and risk management systems have changed.

As a teacher you have an immensely valuable position where you have the ability and power to develop thinking, respect for the artform, creative integrity, safety consciousness both personally and interpersonally, and cultural strength all by the way you teach and practise yourself. You have a responsibility to be instilling in your students the knowledge, training, safety, responsibility and sense of community that you yourself uphold.

# Chapter 7 - Formalising Your Health and Safety Processes

## Making the Systems Official

Health and Safety is an ongoing process and the paperwork is a way of proving that the thinking is in place.

If you are someone who gets paid for any circus related work (unless you know you're an 'employee') you are considered a '**Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking**' or PCBU. This means you must do everything you can in order to manage and control the risks you create in your practice or see around you.

But even if you aren't required by law to keep yourself and others safe (you're not a PCBU) the very fact that we are part of a community means that the responsibility for controlling the risks in circus practice falls on all of us.

Sole traders are PCBU's, businesses are PCBU's, non-profit organisations that have employees are PCBU's... If you're confused at all about whether you're a PCBU or not there is a definition here:

<https://worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/getting-started/understanding-the-law/primary-duty-of-care/who-or-what-is-a-pcbu/>

or call WorkSafe's freephone 0800 030 040

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, risks to health and safety must be eliminated so far as is '**reasonably practicable**' (possibly one of the most highly defined statements you'll come across). If a risk can't be eliminated, it must be minimised so far as is 'reasonably practicable'.

'Reasonably practicable' means what is or was reasonably able to be done to make sure everyone is healthy and safe. In order to figure out what is reasonably able to be done you want to take into account and weigh up relevant things such as:

- The likelihood of harm occurring
- The degree of harm if it does occur
- What the people concerned know, or ought to know, about the hazard or risk and ways of eliminating or minimising the risk
- The availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk
- The cost associated with these ways

(For more guidance read WorkSafe's fact sheet Reasonably Practicable.)

To prove that you have done everything you can to maintain health and safety in your place of work a **Health and Safety Management System (HSMS)** needs to be in place.



All the documents within an HSMS and described below are **living documents** meaning that they **will need to change** for every situation you encounter.

If you are ever worried about any of your processes there are plenty of people who can help you; experienced or established peers, ANZCA, other large circus organisations within NZ, Health and Safety professionals, and WorkSafe has a really comprehensive website!

Safe Work Helpline can offer free health and safety advice over the phone - **0800 453 616**

## An overview of a Health and Safety Management System (HSMS)

1. **Commitment** to health and safety management practices  
Collect all your practices (all the forms and written methodologies you use) in one document. The document should begin with a policy statement about how Health and Safety are maintained by you or within your organisation or community.
2. **Hazard identification, assessment and management**  
Think about the hazards and what could go wrong and then define them (PLAN and DO).
3. **Incident and injury reporting, recording and investigation**  
Ensure you have an incident and near miss register and some way of following up (CHECK). Making sure the learnings from this goes back into your overall system (ACT)
4. **Emergency planning** and preparation  
Planning for the worst regardless of how well you've controlled your hazards and risks.
5. **Education and further training** for yourself and those around you  
Keep learning, do courses, become part of the ANZCA mentor program, find online modules etc. and then tell your friends, colleagues, peers, students what you've learned!

## Commitment or Policy Statement

This is a written statement which says that you are committed to creating a health and safety conscious environment around you and shows the steps you take to achieve this in your everyday practice.

It's not a hazard register or risk assessment, more of an overview of how you think and operate describing how you consult, cooperate and coordinate with the people around you.

- It clearly states your commitment to maintaining top notch health and safety in the environment you operate in.
- It provides a really good starting point for developing a solid safety management system.
- It can allocate health and safety responsibilities within a work situation and should involve consulting the people working with you or for you.
- It states your intention to take all reasonable actions to prevent illness and injury, for example; talking about training needs of yourself or people who work for you in the

use of safe work procedures; and / or supplying supervision and support of safe work procedures.

- It states your commitment to consult and cooperate with all levels of your workplace.
- It states the opportunities you give others who work with you to contribute towards the health and safety practices you employ which are relevant to them.
- It expresses the understanding that everyone is responsible for a healthy and safe workplace.

To enhance commitment to the policy it is good practice for it to also be agreed to and signed by everyone whom it effects or is relevant to (except general public).

## Circus Act Plan

This is a document every performer should have for their act, regardless of whether it's considered a dangerous act or not.

Included in this document should be:

- Name(s) of performer(s)
- Circus discipline(s) involved
- Specs on all equipment
- Brief description of the actions involved in the act including how the act begins and ends
- Required space (floor space, clearance space and air space) (give an ideal and a minimum here)
- (for aerial acts) Weight loading or Point load rating.
- Major safety considerations for yourself and others (E.g. audience must remain seated during the act, flash photography is strictly prohibited)
- Lighting considerations (E.g. no direct down light or no red light)
- Preparation requirements (E.g. performer needs 1 hour warm up directly prior to the performance, performer can only remain in the pre-performance state for 30-minutes so stage management calls are needed to be specific)

## Hazard Register / Hazard Management Plan

This is useful for someone who operates a circus space, company or does the same show over and over again. It is a record of possible hazards, ascertains the likelihood of a harmful event happening and outlines the steps taken to control the risks. Very similar to a Job Safety Analysis but more suited to an on-going environment.

## A Risk Matrix - Working Out the Likelihood and Seriousness of Injury

A risk matrix is used to categorise risks. The main use of a risk matrix is to categorise the risks in a workplace in order to know which needs first attention.

It's not dissimilar to the fire ban billboards around the country. Risks are given a consequence value for how seriously harmful they could be and a likelihood value. These are combined to create a final value which indicates the actual danger of the risk.

The version below is relevant and perfectly suited to circus practitioners.

### ASSESSING CONSEQUENCE

The severity of the consequences can be rated by the degree of injury or illness that could occur as shown in the table below.

DESCRIPTOR	DESCRIPTION
Death	Loss of life
Major	Extensive injuries or severe illness requiring hospitalisation
Moderate	Injuries or illness requiring medical attention off-site
Minor	Injuries or illness requiring first aid, which can be carried out on-site
Negligible	Negligible or no injuries or illness, no treatment required

## ASSESSING LIKELIHOOD

The likelihood of injury or illness occurring can be rated as shown in the following table:

DESCRIPTOR	DESCRIPTION
Highly likely	Expected to occur in most circumstances
Likely	Will probably occur in most circumstances
Occasionally	Might occur at some time
Unlikely	Could occur at some time
Rare	May occur only in exceptional circumstances

## ASSESSING RISK LEVEL

The level of risk will increase as the likelihood of injury or illness and its severity increases, as the risk assessment matrix below shows. Once you have assessed the risk for each hazard, identify and put in place appropriate control measures, concentrating your efforts first on the extreme and high risks.

<b>LIKELIHOOD OF OCCURRING</b>	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Death
Highly likely	High	High	Extreme	Extreme	Extreme
Likely	Moderate	High	High	Extreme	Extreme
Occasionally	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme	Extreme
Unlikely	Low	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme
Rare	Low	Low	Moderate	High	High

### Job Safety Analysis (JSA)

This is something you'll be asked for by a venue, event manager or producer if you're providing circus performance for an event. If you're not asked for this you should ask who the relevant person is that you need to communicate the information with.

A JSA will be made or modified to be unique for each job. A bunch of environmental factors will be different, so this will be your best way of communicating what is safe and what is not in this instance.

It has roughly the same format as the Hazard Register:

- defining tasks
- defining their hazards and the resulting risks
- allocating risk levels to each
- describing the control measures in place
- allocating who is responsible for carrying out the control measures
- allocating responsibility for monitoring the risks on the day
- and there is often a sign off column for when it is agreed all measures have been taken.

## Pack in and Pack out Procedure

This is only requested by some organisations but it's a good idea to have one on hand to modify when requested. It's also a good document to pass to PCBU's or venues even if they didn't ask for it. This helps make sure that your needs are recognised and addressed early on.

Basically, the same format as the Hazard Register or JSA, a Pack in / Pack out Plan simply gives more detail on this part of the process to prove that you are not just thinking about show time.

## Working at Heights Procedure

Again, this document is the same format as a JSA, laying out tasks in order, discussing their hazards and allocating the safest methodologies. Just this time it is centred on working at height and how you keep yourself and everyone around you safe whilst doing things high in the air.

For anyone working at heights, most places now require you to have a Working at Heights qualification. There are a number of places that offer training in this area including:

AMS Group

<http://www.amsgroup.co.nz/Course-Info/Health-and-Safety/Working-At-Heights-/Working-at-Heights>

Safety 'n Action

<https://www.safetynaction.co.nz/en/our-courses/course-catalogue/height-safety-advanced/>

5<sup>th</sup> Point

<https://5thpoint.co.nz/nzqa-training/>

## Rigging Plan

This should involve a rigging drawing detailing:

- Where the points will be in the room
- The clearance zone(s), their position(s) and size
- A methodology statement
- Listing all gear to be used and their ratings
- A description of how the gear is to be handled, installed, and de-rigged and by who
- A description of the performance including any major or dynamic movements and what loading the performance generates
- Any other important or unusual factors well detailed

## Agreement for Circus Performance

Not required by law but highly recommended is an agreement between the venue, events company or client and you which stipulates:

- That everyone agrees all steps have been taken to ensure the safest environment possible
- Who holds the liability for damage to the performer, the audience, others, properties during the performance and outside of the performance time
- Who holds the responsibility for controlling the event space and public across the event

This is a brilliant way of getting all these people together on the day and in agreement for the plan of attack across the performance time.

## Hazardous Work Notification

If you or anyone you are employing could possibly fall five metres or more at any time during their work you must notify WorkSafe via their form more than 24 hours before the work begins.

## Emergency Response Plan

For performances where the worst-case scenario is the possibility of serious harm it is good practice to inform the nearest emergency services prior to the performance. If using fire, it is also good practice to inform the nearest emergency services of the nature of your work.

An emergency response plan can be divided into categories of severity. It's good to have a detailed one written down but the more complex a plan is the less likely it will be remembered.

If you're expecting performers to enact any part of an emergency response plan remember that their brains when in performance mode, don't necessarily work in the same way and they may not be capable of a task they would be ordinarily be able to do.

In a class/school environment the levels of severity can be classified in this manner:

- Mild** - The student, after first aid is administered if required, is able to continue with the class.
- Moderate** - The student, after first aid is administered, needs to seek medical attention.
- Severe** - Medical attention is required immediately.

While performance people sometimes have increased amounts of adrenaline and at times are capable of incredible things like finishing acts with broken bones or torn muscles. This easily blurs the line between mild and moderate and makes it often difficult to gauge the level of first aid required in the moment.

The most common baseline for a performance environment is something like this:

- Mild** - The performer is easily able to remain in the performance for the duration of the act/show even if they require first aid on breaks or an adjustment of their subsequent acts/parts. The performer may require medical attention directly after the show.
- Moderate** - The performer is unable to continue performing and requires immediate first aid however there is no immediate risk of further harm.
- Severe** - The performer is not able to continue the performance and medical attention is required immediately to prevent further serious harm. There may be a risk to the performer's life.

In each new scenario you find yourself you will need to create and share an emergency plan which is relevant to the activity, participants and others present and the environment.

You'll want to have the formulation of this plan in mind when doing your site recce, but you won't be able to complete it until you have all the relevant information from others involved (E.g. the run-sheet from the event manager)

Your emergency plans might also need to reflect things that often happen in your discipline; for example; people getting stuck up the silks (as a teacher you will have mitigated this situation as much as is humanly possible by teaching things to your students level and strength, going over and over the in's and out's, ensuring the pathways are completely solid in someone's mind but even still someone, one day will get stuck and won't be able to get down). This is a very specific emergency response plan but something you absolutely need a good plan for!



Your emergency response plans will need to be talked through and clearly understood or practised with anyone who is to take part in them. It is also a good idea to have them written down somewhere easily accessible for when they are really needed and the person you need has a mind blank.

If you are performing alone, you will need to communicate the main risk points of your act and your emergency response plan with someone on site. This person needs to be willing and capable of undertaking what you might need in a highly stressful situation. What happens in the first few moments after an accident can have a major impact on the outcome of people involved. The chance of recovery (or the long-term consequences) for an aerial performer who has fallen from height or a fire performer who has caught alight are dependent on someone responding appropriately when it matters most. Remember that we are used to our activity and its risks, others are not.

## Incident Reporting

We all learn from our mistakes, and incidents. Near misses are a perfect moment to re-look, rethink, re-plan, and redesign your health and safety systems. The key ingredient here being clear communication with all those involved.

Should an incident or near miss happen naturally your emergency response plan would have kicked in immediately, but don't even bother thinking about the report until everyone has had a cup of sweet tea and calmed down.

***Incidents** requiring recording are anything that requires a person to stop their activity to get first aid attention OR any injuries that have been reported to have happened in a class or training or performance space or other activity scenario.*

***WorkSafe** NZ defines a **near miss** as an incident which did not result in injury, illness or damage, but could have potentially done so. ...*

For your own records incident reporting gives you a chance to adjust your working methodologies, supply proof and deeper information of causes of incidents to investigators or Worksafe, and to see trends across time within your practice. (for example, let's say that 90% of the incidents over the last 5 years involved damage to people's shoulders, perhaps some new techniques need to be employed or a stronger, more determined approach to conditioning needs to be put in place).

## First Aid Register

Alongside the incident reports it's useful for organisations to have written communication setting out what first aid has been administered, whether it was done correctly and what stock needs to be added or replaced.

If you're running a space, you should have a list of which people are first aid trained and at what level.

If you are teaching, you should have at LEAST a first aid level one certificate. If you are teaching aerial it is recommended that you have taken a first aid course which deals with high falls.

## Participation Agreements, Waivers, Inductions, Contracts

Often the liability is what people focus on here and yes that is important but if no one is hurt there is nothing to be liable for.... except everyone having a good time!

What these all really are is another form of communication. Each one of the items above are someone saying "hey, here are the ways this could possibly screw up" and the signing of these by the participants is them saying "I understand and I'm ok with that".

It is super important to know what's in all these documents and to understand it. If you can't read them yourself for any reason get someone else to who can to talk you through it.

## A Participation Agreement and Waivers

This is from a school or company offering classes, workshops or any other kind of participatory thing where members of the public are involved. It basically says two things to new students:

- These are the risks of the activity you're about to do and this is how we control those risks so you have the least chance of getting hurt;
- If you choose to participate in this activity and do get hurt, even though the risks had been communicated and controlled, you agree not to follow any legal proceedings against us.

A participation agreement is also the best way to gather student information. Most of the time these include:

- Name
- Contact information
- Birthdate
- Emergency Contact information

- An agreement about the use of photographic images of the participant by the school/space
- The outlining of the risks involved in the activity and the hazards and risks inherent in the space
- A waiver of legal proceedings
- Often there are certain rules or behavioural agreements in here too. *For example; not being intoxicated in the space.*

It is also important that you clearly understand and respect your responsibilities with the use and privacy of the information your store about your participants. For more information check here: <https://www.privacy.org.nz/>

## Inductions

Inductions are the best way of communicating health and safety information to students, colleagues or people you've employed.

An induction tells people:

- What the emergency response plans are
- What the hazards of the space and activities are
- What the risks are to them
- What the systems are in the space and how they account for the risks and hazards
- What the rules are of the space
- What the culture is in the space and how the new person can add to it
- Tasks and behaviours that the inductee needs to carry out (this can also be part of the participant agreement and/or contract).

## Contracts

Contracts are the agreements that exist between peers within the industry or in an employer/employee situation. Contracts are a super great way to all agree on the exact borders of the job and what the expectations are from each party.

Contracts lay out the details of the job and also state what will happen if the contracted parties don't fulfil the tasks or obligations it sets out.

For contracts or agreements you are asked to sign:

- Read them carefully or ask someone to read them to you
- Be comfortable you can deliver what you've said you'll deliver
- Make sure you're not afraid to add in anything else that you need to be able to do your job to the best of your ability

- Contacts are never set in stone until they are signed, before that time everything is negotiable so never feel pressured into doing something you feel uncertain about just because someone has presented you with a contract

For contracts or agreements you are asking others to sign:

- If you want it to be legal, get a lawyer to write it / sign off on it
- Be very clear with the details of the job and expectations of each party and communicate them in a way that makes it clear what these expectations look like in the job
- The more you expect the more will be expected of you
- Make sure that you and the people you represent are being treated fairly, their work respected and that you're not undercutting the industry

Remember that you're always dealing with people, it is people who own and run businesses and at the end of the day people will be making the decisions around how to respect your work.

People have understanding and empathy, it's good to keep it real.

## Working with Children and Vulnerable People

Oranga Tamariki, the NZ Ministry for Children encourages organisations who work with children to have a child protection policy to ensure our tamariki are safe. A child protection policy is a statement that makes it clear what an organisation or group will do to keep the children in its care safe.

The Vulnerable Children's Act 2014 is aimed at improving the protection of children at risk of abuse or neglect, including stronger vetting of adults who work with children. Those who work with children for government and community agencies legally must be screened using safety checks, and those with serious convictions are banned from working closely with children. It is recommended that if your organisation works with children you get the people who work for you police vetted.

*(<http://www.police.govt.nz/advice/businesses-and-organisations/vetting>)*

Vulnerable people are those who require extra assistance or help in their lives; including older people, people with different levels of physical ability, people with psychological or mental differences, people with developmental disorders and other intellectual differences.

ONWARDS INTO THE WORLD ...

## Looking to the Future

This guide is for you to use and reference for yourself and also to help you promote and communicate safety within the industry to other people and organisations. It is your backup when people are putting pressure on you to go beyond your comfort / safety zone.

But at the end of the day it's just a book... we, the people of the circus community and industry in Aotearoa are the ones who actually hold the responsibility of maintaining and growing our reputation as an artform.

Circus is developing in NZ and the general public are really just beginning to form a cultural idea about circus and what circus is and could be... We are largely stuck in historical ideas of the form; how many times have you heard "so are you a clown then"?

Our responsibility towards our reputation and our people is in treating each situation with the respect and thought it demands in order to expand this view and create a better informed, more inclusive, interesting and artistically satisfying view of circus in NZ.

Which begs the question: What do we want the industry to look like and feel like and *be* like for participants, practitioners, consumers and those millions of patrons who are going to come out of the woodwork?

Yes, we are assuming a few things here, but the next step is: How do we get this dream of a fully formed, supportive, exciting, healthy and wealthy industry to come about?

If we consider communication a key ingredient in developing any relationship we can look at sections of the industry in these ways;

Our responsibility to younger performers and participants: In our relationship with the future we have the opportunity to develop in them a reverence for the artform, a strong work ethic, an explosive, innovative creativity, and a complete understanding of risk management, physical and cultural maintenance.

Our relationships with our contemporaries are vital in forming the core of the industry. We're a tiny community down at the end of the world but that very fact gives us the *perfect* opportunity to grow as a united force. It means we can stand together and uphold circus practice as the only way which will give us such strength, more than any other part of the world could achieve.

If we hold each other in the highest respect we will support each other in all endeavours, we will work fiercely towards maintaining the highest pay rates and treatment within the industry, we will communicate when we feel someone within the community is in an unsafe situation as this is the only way to ensure we all gain more knowledge and we will treat our relationships with buyers, clients, sponsors, audiences and members of the public with the care and patience they deserve.

Our relationships with these parties are largely about the communication of best safety practice; How we can, and should, consider our responses in order to provide gentle but firm boundaries around the inherent danger zones within our practice.

At the end of the day it's about keeping each other safe; whether it's your fellow performers' physical safety, your students' emotional safety, your colleagues' future employment safety or the safety of the community's reputation for being awesome; every level of the industry is just as important to keep safe.

The best place to reflect on unsafe actions or behaviours and to instigate change is from within. We are the best monitors because we've been there, we *are* there, and we want to stay there, doing our thing, for years to come!

### \* Pact

As a member of the Circus Community in Aotearoa New Zealand I aim to uphold best practice in all areas myself, promote best practice when I can and encourage best practice in others.

Plus, I will strive to help the industry grow and developing the name of circus performance as a valid, skilful, diverse and beautiful artform

Name:

Signed:

## Terminology (incomplete)

It is useful for everyone to speak the same language. The following list of terms include both circus-specific language and more general vocabulary used in circus contexts.

- A **Apparatus** - more often the 'aerial' object / s with which the act or skill is performed. Synonyms are; equipment, gear, props
- C **Cue to Cue** - to go through an act or show from one technical cue to the next.
- D **Drop Zone** - The area of floor space an aerialist might hit should they fall. This area will be vastly different depending on the act but should account for all possible movement.
- G **Green Room** – A designated area in which performers prepare for a performance  
**Gear** - anything that is used... apparatus, equipment props
- I **Installation Performance** - a long, often slow and static version of any given skill or apparatus. Performed in one spot, for ground-based skills often on a plinth or small stage. The performer is effectively a live set piece like a living chandelier or sculpture. Some acts are not able to be performed in this way. Installations must be active as the audience enter the space so as not to smash their expectations.
- M **Marking** (of movement) - to do a run through without tricks, energy or  
**Marking** (of a space) - to mark out with white tape significant placement of performance, apparatus or props
- O **Open Training / Open Practise / Open Studio** - when a training space allows students and performers to come and train their own skills.
- P **Props** - term used for juggling, manipulation or equilibristic objects  
**Prop Zone** - The air space a juggler or other manipulation artists needs between themselves and other objects.  
**Pegasol** - the non-smelly low temperature fuel fire performers use  
**PCBU** - Person in Charge of a Business or Undertaking  
**Performance Hour** - An hour of performance including at least 15 min of breaks or breaks as discussed
- R **Recce** (from reconnaissance) – a visit to a space before an activity to check out details that would otherwise be difficult to communicate  
**Rider** - the food, beverage, green room, warm up requirements.



- Roving** - Low key performance moving in and around the audience on at a designated non-stage area.
- S **Stumble Run/Stumble Through** - a marking run through where anyone can stop the performance at any time in order to adjust placement, or go over a certain skill, moment or pathway.
- Spacing** (or blocking) - to walk around on the stage and figure out where bits of the performance will take place.
- Spotting** - to physically assist someone to safely execute a skill
- Strike** - to remove an item from the stage.
- V **VT/Venue Technician** - the head of command from the venue for any event