



Why is it non-verbal?

If you stop talking, it releases other ways of communicating. Verbal communication involves mental processing that interferes with more creative impulses, instincts, ideas and journeys, especially for children with learning disabilities.

For children, talking is often related to them being informed, directed or instructed – we deliberately do not talk, as it can be very limiting and restrictive when finding ways to connect and express oneself.

Instead of 'drama without words' think of it as '**drama beyond words**'.

This document has been designed specifically for teaching staff, to provide need-to-know information about how '**non-verbal physical theatre**' sessions work in schools, how best to support, what not to do and why.

As a member of school teaching staff in the room, there is a lot you can do to support the process. The very best progress children can ever make depends on your appreciation and understanding of the following information:

Children do not have to join in

Children need the chance to develop their own responses to what happens in these sessions. We respect when a child does not want to join in, because when they do want to, it has so much more meaning! These sessions are not about teaching compliance.

A child can take part at any time and in their own way

Usually, the session will be set up with everyone sitting in a circle. The practitioner will demonstrate something to start with and then each child has a chance to respond to this and get involved, often one at a time. If a child wants to take part more than once, this is to be celebrated! Leave this up to the practitioner to manage. It is their job to work with how the children want to engage and interact. There is no 'right way' to participate. There is no such thing as 'doing it properly' in these sessions.

If you are concerned about how a child is being allowed to participate, we will always be willing to discuss and explain this, so please do talk to us.

How does it work?

- Connecting the music with how they move, play and perform
- Connecting with the practitioner and others around them
- Connecting with how what happens makes them *feel inside*
- Providing the children with a sense of 'I can do this'
- No talking (verbal communication)

For this to occur, a suitable atmosphere needs to be created. Music is crucial in us achieving all kinds of different atmospheres and engagement from children - it steers the feelings in the space - talking interrupts this and can ruin it altogether.

Common examples of talking that staff should aim to avoid

Chatting with fellow staff in the room (even if it's about the session). People often misunderstand that not talking applies to *everyone* in the room. Even if you are not sitting in the circle, talking will spoil the atmosphere and children will become distracted.

Asking a practitioner to repeat an interaction so that you can take a photo. This work is all about being in the moment, so please try to capture the moments as and when they happen.

Telling a child to be quiet. The children themselves do not have to be silent – spoken language simply is not required. Likewise, noise, e.g. laughter, is natural – any volume of this is entirely acceptable

Explaining what to do. There will be times that children haven't quite understood what is happening straight away or are unsure. It will be very tempting to give a quick/discreet verbal explanation or prompt, e.g. "that's right, take the hat" or "quick, hide it". But *please resist*. It is not about giving the children instructions. Every demonstration we give and interaction we have is deliberately non-verbal – we work to develop children's ability to interpret and express things in a physical way. Explaining will bring language back into it, which contradicts the aim. There is no rush.

Congratulating children. We totally appreciate that children deserve praise! But remember, we're creating an atmosphere, which words can easily break. You can always praise non-verbally instead, e.g. a high-five, which is still meaningful communication. Also, when you verbally congratulate a child, it can send out a message that they have finished – but they might have had wanted to continue.