

projectart works

8. Guidelines for working with people with complex needs in a collaborative workshop

Calm bafflement is the key. If you are baffled by a person's way of communicating be calm with the feelings this may induce in you and over time you will find a way to connect with them. Don't rush. Be calm.

The following information is a guideline produced by Project Art Works for artists new to our workshop settings. Whilst audiences and those involved in exhibitions and projects may not be working directly with makers, they may share the same space. The following guidelines may help support successful interactions.

When first entering the workshop:

- When first introduced to the workshop setting take a quiet observational backseat.
- Give yourself time to acclimatise to the workshop atmosphere, themes, ethos, dynamics, space, participants and artist team's approaches.
- The role of artist in the workshop is an enabling one – supporting another person to communicate through their artwork.
- Begin working alongside and/or interacting with people when you naturally see a 'way in'.

When working 1:1 with a participant:

- Be conscious of working alongside the participant, take time to gauge an awareness of how they interact through eye contact, movement, gesture and vocalisation.
- Give time for trust to develop between you and the participant. This might not happen immediately– remain alert, aware and in the moment and see where points of shared attention occur. There are no right or wrong ways of making work together (other than direct and overtly coercive intervention like hand over hand drawing/painting– this is not advisable and/or desirable).
- Be sensitive to the space you occupy with a participant. Be aware of how much personal space a participant might need. This might range from a slight distance to very close up. For instance one participant we have worked with in the past enjoyed close eye contact, pressing nose to nose, as a recognition of shared interaction.

- Be aware of the level of your voice. Is it necessary to talk during the interaction? If so, is your level of voice appropriate? Are you speaking too loudly or is the language you use clear?
- Share attention with the participant. Be led by the person you are interacting with.
- Don't direct for the other person (i.e. don't paint for a person). It's unnecessary. Gentle interaction is a good way into sharing communication – also in some cases humour and games. Let the participant you are working with guide you as to how they want to interact. Sometimes this will happen by purely being present with a person, working alongside them or turn taking on the same artwork.
- Ask someone from the artist's team if you feel unsure. They are in the workshop to guide and support.
- Key points to remember are to be **relaxed, non-directive** and **responsive** and **enjoy** the experience

General Studio Guidelines for Artists, Support Workers and Staff

- Please keep talking to a minimum (unless this is necessary for engagement with a participant). The environment is carefully balance to enable optimum concentration and many of our participants respond well to quiet, non-verbal interaction. Unless absolutely necessary please use time outside of the workshops for discussions.
- Please use mobile phones outside of the workshop space. We understand having a mobile phone available for communication and in case of emergencies is vital. However, it is necessary for those in the workshop space to be fully focused on participants. Therefore, we would ask you to switch phones to silent and make calls and texts outside of the workshop space.

Guidance on Participants Needs

We aim to minimise environmental factors that may have a negative impact on participants. In order to do this, the following provides some information about possible known triggers for participants attending regular workshops to help you know what to expect.

- Some participants find meal times and food challenging. Please be aware of handling your own food and that of the person you support within the workshops. Participants may be on a strict diet or may find seeing other people's food causes anxiety. This can generally be managed at lunch periods but we have found at times it is preferable to keep the presence of food to a minimum (i.e. we don't offer biscuits at tea break).
- Watch and observe how (experienced and skilled) support workers interact
- Some participants find it stressful hearing about future events happening at Project Art Works (such as a trip the following week). If possible, please ask the artists about future events away from the workshop space.