**Creating Theatre Experiences for Youth with Autism to Participate in as AUDIENCE MEMBERS**

**Created by Gretta Berghammer**

**February 2019**

**The Why:**

Share a love theatre event that supports them in making a connection with that performance event

**WHY THEATRE**

Theatre production has strong connections to:

Engagement in Pretend play

Incorporation of Repetition/Repetitive behaviors

Non-language based ways of communicating

Transitions/preparing for change

Turn taking

Language pragmatics: using language in social situations

1. The ability to use language for different purposes (e.g. to greet, inform people about things, demand, command, request).

2. The ability to adapt language to meet the needs of the listener or situation (e.g. talking differently to a baby versus an adult, talking louder when there is lots of noise, being aware of the listener’s knowledge and giving more information or less when needed).

3. Following the often “unspoken” rules of conversation and storytelling (e.g. taking turns in conversations, looking at the speaker, standing at an appropriate distance from the speaker, using facial expressions and gestures).

Eye contact

Sensory exploration/Sensory sensitivity

Modeling

**Ways in which theatre production can provide a point of entry for and support of audiences of youth with autism and others with developmental delays**

Physical

Visual

Sensory Aware\*

Low language

Distinct characters

Episodic with a clear schedule

Offer ideas concurrent with an event or experience (communicate and do)

Engaging and participatory; opportunities for “audience empowerment”

Safe spaces

Non-restrictive seating

Empathetic improv: responding to the needs individual audience members with understanding, compassion, joy and artistry

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Intimacy between actor and audience; a “relationship” is built between actor and audience member

The world of the play exists wherever the audience member looks or goes; a 360 approach to the design of the space

Everything is tactile, durable, sensory mindful

Supportive of behavior as it is created mindful of behaviors

As much as possible the actors seek to understand the needs of the audience and create an experience that responds to those needs

Place importance on the language of objects

Puppets may be a component of the language

DON’T predict/force what engagement looks like; plan but keep the impact of the “plan” open ended

Zoom in/Zoom out: community of audience members “watching” with flexible one to one interactions