



Relaxed Performance Information Sheet

Ensuring the right welcome for all audience members is very important to Touretteshero which is why every performance of Backstage In Biscuit Land is 'relaxed'. This is a quick guide to what 'relaxed' means to us and answers some common questions about the concept.

What is a relaxed performance?

Relaxed performances are performances that offer a warm welcome to people who find it difficult to follow the usual conventions of theatre behaviour. This can include: people with learning disabilities, movement disorders, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, other neurological conditions, those with young children or babies, and of course, people with Tourettes syndrome.

Many other people may choose to attend a relaxed performance, either as an access requirement or because they enjoy the inclusive environment.

Relaxed performances take a laid-back approach to noise or movement coming from the audience. They give everyone permission to relax and respond naturally. Many people feel that relaxed performances offer a more dynamic theatrical experience, which benefits everyone.

The history of relaxed performance

Relaxed performances have grown out of work around autism-friendly cinema and theatre events. While this movement has its roots in the 1990s, its momentum has increased significantly in the past six years. In 2012 eight theatres worked together on the Relaxed Performance Project led by Include Arts, piloting relaxed performances across a number of venues.

The popularity and scope of relaxed performances has grown, as has understanding about who benefits from them. They are no longer associated solely with children's work or with specific conditions. Many established venues and performers are now offering relaxed performances on a regular basis.

What makes a relaxed performance 'relaxed'?

Relaxed performances don't need to be complicated. The responsibility for making a show 'relaxed' is shared by the audience, the venue and the performers. The elements they should all include are:

- A clear explanation for all audience members about what a relaxed performance is when they book
- Pre-show information describing what to expect from the show
- Staff who take an inclusive approach from start to finish
- An introduction at the start of the show to remind the audience that it's a relaxed performance and giving anyone who needs to move or be noisy the freedom to do so

- Consideration given to sound and lighting levels, taking into account sensory sensitivities
- A clear plan for how any complaints from audience members will be managed
- And, ideally, a quiet space outside the auditorium where people can go during the performance if they need to

Why provide relaxed performances?

Relaxed performances offer a way to reach new audiences, including people who might normally find it difficult to access the theatre. One in five people in the UK identifies as disabled so there's a strong business case for improved accessibility.

In addition, all organisations offering a service to the public have a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to take all reasonable steps to make the service accessible to disabled people.

At Touretteshero we strongly believe that making theatre accessible makes it better and leads to more exciting experiences for everyone. A show that builds in an agreement between performers, audience and venue that unexpected outcomes are possible allows each individual performance to feel completely unique and compelling; this is the very essence of live performance.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does every venue have to do relaxed performances in the same way?

While it's important that the key principles of relaxed performances are consistent across venues, we encourage theatres to develop their own house-style for delivering them. A theatre's character and ethos is expressed through its programming and branding, and its approach to relaxed performances should be consistent with this ethos.

If someone's making noises or moving about, will it distract me from the performance?

Most people edit out background noise all the time, particularly when they know why it's happening. If a performance is holding your attention, experience tells us you will not get distracted.

People who have expressed concern about this often turn out not to have been to a relaxed performance; they have just assumed they will be distracted. Conversely, people who have been to one often say the relaxed environment has enhanced their experience of the piece.

Should we introduce a performance as being relaxed at the start of the show?

Absolutely. In our experience it's essential that everyone knows what's happening from the outset. At the start of Backstage in Biscuit Land, Chopin tells the audience:

“All of our shows are relaxed. This means if you'd like to make noise or wriggle around you're very welcome. However if there's enough demand we'll try and arrange an “up-tight” performance.”

This light-touch introduction works well with audiences, and because it comes directly from a performer it helps to put the audience at ease.

Audience members tend to worry for the performers on stage if they hear unexpected noises coming from the auditorium; so even if the performers themselves are on-board with the relaxed nature of the performance it's essential to make a brief announcement at the start so that everyone can relax and enjoy the show.

What if I put on a relaxed performance and no one with a disability turns up?

It doesn't matter! Firstly, the reason why someone wants to go to a relaxed performance will not always be obvious, nor should it have to be. Secondly, just by having a relaxed performance you are introducing more people to the concept.

Remember, there may be someone in the audience who thinks, 'Wow, my friend with Tourettes would've felt really welcome here' or 'My mum with dementia would've loved the atmosphere', and they'll come to the next one.

I'm worried that if I hold a relaxed performance some audience members might be put off, and the show won't sell as well.

It's important to explain what a relaxed performance is, and to frame it positively. Performers and audience members benefit from the invitation to relax, and the more people who experience the benefits of attending a relaxed performance and understand what it means, the more readily others will be persuaded to attend one.

What sort of work is suitable for a relaxed performance?

The simple answer is *all* work. People who benefit from relaxed performances as an access requirement come from diverse backgrounds and have varied tastes and interests. This might include wanting to see work that's energetic or quiet, comic or tragic, classic or modern, for adults or for children. While this might present interesting creative challenges for theatre makers, no work should be off limits to audiences with access requirements. It's not the job of theatre programmers to "protect" their audience from certain types of work, and the work itself should stand up to the creative opportunities relaxed performances provide. Makers should certainly not expect to make work that excludes people because of their access requirements.

On a practical level it's important that pre-show information clearly describes the show so that anyone can make an informed choice about whether it's something they want to see.

Should relaxed performances be only for people who have access requirements?

Touretteshero advocates for inclusive rather than segregated performances and also believes that relaxed performances should not be hidden away in less popular time slots.

How should we market our relaxed performance?

In many ways relaxed performances should be marketed in the same way as any other. They should feature with equal prominence on the venue's website and marketing material, and be clearly identified as relaxed. It is often useful to offer a brief description of what this means, positively framing the potential benefits to all audience members.

Targeted outreach will help broaden your audience. We suggest utilising local disability networks as well as larger national organisations.

Should we charge less for a relaxed performance?

Discounting relaxed performances risks implying that they're of a lesser quality when this is not the case. It is however important that appropriate concessionary rates are available to disabled people or those on low incomes and that a free and straightforward ticket scheme is offered to personal assistants or carers.

Our Company takes a relaxed approach anyway: do we still need to say it's a relaxed performance?

It's important for everyone in the audience to understand that they're attending a relaxed performance for two main reasons. Firstly, so that everyone can benefit from the permission to relax. Secondly, so that everyone knows that they can expect additional movement and noise so they can concentrate on the show rather than worrying about what else might be happening.

How do I find out more?

You can read more about Touretteshero and the relaxed performance movement [here](#).

If you are interested in making your work or venue more accessible check out Unlimited's resource pack - Demystifying Access, which is available [here](#).

The Future of Relaxed Performances

One exciting idea to emerge from discussions around relaxed performances is the concept of 'relaxed venues'. These are theatres that would programme relaxed performances during every run of a show and commit to turning any other show into a relaxed performance upon request.

This is particularly interesting because it would give opportunities to introduce relaxed performances to more people, build and sustain links with audiences, and embed confidence around accessibility.

There is so much amazing theatre out there and nobody should miss out because of preconceptions about who it's for or how it should be enjoyed.

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