



# QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT JOINING A YOUTH ARTS PROJECT: HELPING YOU FIND THE PERFECT FIT!

A resource from NYCI Youth Arts Programme

## NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND

The National Youth Council of Ireland is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. It uses its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people. It seeks to ensure that all young people are empowered to develop the skills and confidence to fully participate as active citizens in an inclusive society. NYCI's role is recognised in legislation through the Youth Work Act 2001 and as a Social Partner in the Community and Voluntary Pillar.

[www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)

## NYCI YOUTH ARTS PROGRAMME

The National Youth Council of Ireland's Youth Arts Programme is a partnership approach to promoting and developing youth arts in Ireland. It is a strategic partnership of the NYCI, the Arts Council and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

[www.youtharts.ie](http://www.youtharts.ie)

### CREDITS:

Written by Anne O' Gorman  
Edited by Anne O' Gorman  
Design by Fuse

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

**Leish Burke**, Artistic Director, Griese Youth Theatre  
**Marie Carey**, Youth Arts Officer, Clondalkin Youth Service  
**Niamh Corcoran**, Drama Assistant, Griese Youth Theatre  
**Fiona Creedon**, Youth Outreach Drug Education, East Wicklow Youth Service  
**Ella Daly**, General Manager, Dublin Youth Theatre  
**David Doyle**, Youth Arts Programme Support  
**Rhona Dunnett**, Resources and Development Manager, Youth Theatre Ireland  
**Garry McHugh**, Director, Young Irish Filmmakers  
**Kim Molloy**, Drama Assistant, Griese Youth Theatre  
**Louise Monaghan**, Training Consultant  
**Olive Ring**, National Child Protection Manager, National Youth Council of Ireland  
**Jess Tobin**, Youth Development Officer, Clondalkin Youth Service  
**Anne Walsh**, Intercultural and Equality Officer, National Youth Council of Ireland

### AND MOST ESPECIALLY TO OUR YOUNG TESTERS:

Donncha Adams	Stephanie Hood	PJ Pender
Ethan Allison	Sean Jackson	Esther Petit-Frere
Aoife Barrett	Rory Kerins	Yoshua Petit-Frere
Nigel Barrett	Sarah Lawlor	Ella Quinn
Hannah Bevan	William McCabe	Shannon Sheridan
Kate Bevan	Leah McMullen	Cathlin Smith
Molly Coyne	Kate Meredith-Gregg	Evan Smith
Caoimhe Doolan	Fionn O'Caoimh	Karina Trzeciak
Niamh Finlay	Shannon O Doherty	Jordan Walsh
Jamie Gillespie	Danny O'Grady	



# INTRODUCTION

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## WHAT IS A YOUTH ARTS PROJECT?

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It's a place you choose to go, in your own time, to learn about an art form and make new friends. It could be the music class you go to, the youth club where you make films or your local youth theatre. It could be lots of other art forms or a mix of them all.

NYCI believes that a good youth arts project will value you for the contribution you can make, create a safe environment for you and help you make friends as well as learn about the art form.

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## WHY MIGHT YOU USE THIS SET OF QUESTIONS?

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There are as many reasons to join a youth arts project as there are youth arts projects to join. They are all different – which is good because all participants are different. You might be a very talented actor or musician and you want to be 'pushed' so you can find out how good you really are. Or, you might like drama or music but mostly want to make new friends and spend time with them doing something enjoyable. It's important that you feel like you're in exactly the right place for you.

**These questions will help you get a sense of what the project is about and what's involved, so that you can make that decision.**

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## HOW MIGHT I USE THESE QUESTIONS?

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There are things that should be in place in all projects (such as child protection policies, recruitment procedures etc.) but in other ways, they can be very different. A lot of good projects will want you to have a say in what happens.

Don't be afraid to ask these questions, you have every right to find out what you're joining. All good projects are open about giving you information.

You might be more interested in some of these questions than in others, but we've tried to put together a complete list of all the important ones for you.

Good luck with your new adventure – we hope it's an enjoyable one, that you learn loads, make great friends and most importantly have fun!

You can always ring us in NYCI if you have questions!

**Anne O' Gorman**  
Senior Project Officer, Youth Arts  
National Youth Council of Ireland



QUESTION TO ASK	WHAT AM I TRYING TO FIND OUT?	POSSIBLE ANSWERS MIGHT SOUND LIKE:
<p><b>QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT WHAT I WILL ACTUALLY BE DOING</b></p>		
<p><b>WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THIS GROUP – FOR EXAMPLE IS IT TO LEARN ABOUT MUSIC/ DRAMA/ART ETC?</b></p>	<p>You want to find out what the group actually does, what you will be learning and doing and how you'll be learning and doing it.</p>	<p>This is a youth choir, we learn how to sing together in a fun environment, we'll be covering a mix of classic and modern music and we're very ambitious to build everyone's skills.</p>
<p><b>OR...IS IT TO LEARN SOMETHING ELSE (HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS, SOCIAL SKILLS ETC.) THROUGH MUSIC/DRAMA/ART?</b></p>	<p>Again, you want to find out what the group actually does and why - what it's trying to achieve so you can be sure that it's a good fit with your expectations.</p>	<p>This is a choir and we meet regularly to sing, but what's more important to us is that the young people in this neighbourhood have a place to meet up and make friends.</p>
<p><b>WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THIS GROUP? (YOU MIGHT HEAR THIS DESCRIBED AS THE GROUP'S 'ETHOS').</b></p>	<p>This gives you a better understanding of what the group's foundations are, for example it might be important to the group to encourage you to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>grow in confidence</li> <li>make new friends</li> <li>be yourself</li> <li>learn new skills</li> </ul>	<p>We hold auditions and you must maintain a certain standard of work in order to remain a member.</p> <p>Everyone is welcome.</p> <p>We work very hard to make sure this is a safe creative environment and we think this brings out the best in members.</p> <p>We work the young people very hard to help them achieve their potential.</p>
<p><b>WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR THE YEAR? (YOU MIGHT HEAR THIS DESCRIBED AS 'ANNUAL PROGRAMME').</b></p>	<p>You are trying to find out what happens from week to week, what you're signing up for and what the commitment will be (you also want to find out that the group is organised enough to know this). You may also want to know if there is extra work that you have to do outside of the meeting times.</p>	<p>We meet weekly for workshops* and then we begin rehearsals in March twice a week for a performance in June.</p> <p>We meet weekly for rehearsals* and then travel to competitions once a month for most of the winter.</p> <p><b>*workshops are complete (when they're over, they're over) they are for learning or exploring a skill, technique or topic. A rehearsal is different in that it's preparing for something – most likely a performance.</b></p>

## TIPS

You may not want to ask all of these questions. Some may be more relevant to you than others. Feel free to show this list to your parent/guardian as there may be some questions they are interested in having answered.

These are not the only answers and different answers aren't necessarily wrong, the possible answers give you some key points to be listening out for. The most important thing is that the leaders you speak to are open to hearing your questions and giving you open, honest answers.

Some young people we spoke to felt this sounded very harsh – but others felt a strict group is what some people are looking for, and, if that's not for you – it's important to find out.

Ask if they have an open day or taster sessions where you can come for a session or two and see what you think!

QUESTION TO ASK	WHAT AM I TRYING TO FIND OUT?	POSSIBLE ANSWERS MIGHT SOUND LIKE:
<p><b>FOLLOW ON QUESTIONS TO THIS MIGHT BE:</b></p> <p><b>WILL I HAVE TO GET UP ON STAGE?</b></p> <p><b>DO I HAVE TO BE GOOD AT DRAWING?</b></p> <p><b>WHAT WAYS ARE THERE FOR ME TO PROGRESS?</b></p>		<p>No, you can go onstage when you feel ready, there's plenty for you to do behind the scenes.</p> <p>No, we're all going to learn together!</p> <p>In two years you'll have the chance to be a junior leader if you are interested.</p>
<p><b>WHO WILL MAKE THE DECISIONS ABOUT WHO IS DOING WHAT?</b></p>	<p>Does everyone get a turn? Is it competitive? Is it audition based? Do I get to pick what I'd like to do?</p> <p>You want to find out if the leaders will always make the decisions or if you'll get to say what you're interested in doing and if you'll get to try things out.</p>	<p>Main parts are shared among participants, so, over the course of a year, everyone will have a turn at a big part. It's important to us everyone gets a chance.</p> <p>As we will be entering competitions, it'll be decided on merit, the best players will be chosen.</p> <p>The chance to participate in the masterclasses will be based on paying the fee.</p>
<p><b>HOW CAN I COME AND DISCUSS THINGS THAT ARE ON MY MIND WITH THE LEADERS?</b></p>	<p>You just want to know that the group leaders have your best interests at heart and that you are always welcome to come speak with them.</p>	<p>There is a youth representative on our board of directors.</p> <p>You can always ring us and our number is on the information sheet. Feedback is important to us and we take it seriously.</p> <p>We set aside one hour per month from classes/workshops for the group to feedback how things have been going and if they have any concerns.</p>

QUESTION TO ASK	WHAT AM I TRYING TO FIND OUT?	POSSIBLE ANSWERS MIGHT SOUND LIKE:
<p><b>QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW IT'S SET UP AND RUN</b></p>		
<p><b>WHERE DOES MY MONEY GO?</b></p>	<p>You want to find out if the money is for the person who runs it (meaning it's a for profit project) or does the money goes back into the project (meaning it's not for profit). Neither is wrong but they'll have different priorities.</p> <p>You want to know if fees you pay are going back into the group and paying for teacher time, transport, equipment or if it's income to the business. Will you be expected to buy or supply your own costume, equipment, props or instrument for example?</p>	<p>This is a commercial activity, the fees are the income of the business, and we will need to charge for participation, costumes, and extra rehearsals.</p> <p>This is run by the local arts centre, fees are voluntary and contribute towards the overall budget for our activities and fees.</p> <p>There are no fees for young people to participate (but part of the programme during the year will be fundraising).</p>
<p><b>DOES THIS GROUP WELCOME ALL YOUNG PEOPLE EVEN THOSE WHO MIGHT NOT HAVE THE FEES?</b></p>	<p>You want to find out if there are ways for you to join even if you don't have the money. (Lots of projects would still be delighted to have you, but you might have to ask).</p>	<p>We have a number of free places we offer in confidence to young people who can't afford fees.</p> <p>Everyone is welcome, we can work something out, come talk to us.</p> <p>This is a commercial project- unfortunately we can't accept participants who can't pay.</p>
<p><b>IS THE PROJECT PART OF A LARGER FAMILY?</b></p>	<p>Larger 'affiliate' organisations are a great support and resource to small projects – there'll be training opportunities for the staff/leaders and codes/standards of conduct in place. There may also be opportunities for you to mix with other young people and participate in bigger projects like the National Festival of Youth Theatres or the National Youth Orchestra or the Irish Youth Music Awards.</p> <p>It's not a bad thing if the project isn't part of a larger 'family' but it may have fewer supports and resources (such as training opportunities etc.) than if it was connected to a bigger organisation. Bigger organisations tend to have policies in place that they expect all members to follow, so they can be more structured.</p>	<p>Yes, this youth theatre is affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland.</p> <p>Yes, this youth orchestra is affiliated to the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras.</p> <p>Yes, this project is affiliated to a national youth work organisation, Youth Work Ireland or Foróige.</p>

**TIP**

These are examples. There are many umbrella organisations that a project might be a part of. You can find a list of NYCI's member organisations on our website [www.youth.ie](http://www.youth.ie)

QUESTION TO ASK	WHAT AM I TRYING TO FIND OUT?	POSSIBLE ANSWERS MIGHT SOUND LIKE:
<p>CAN I SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING AND HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE?</p>	<p>You want to find out how much you will hear about what's happening in the group and have chances to have your say. You want to get a sense that the group is happy to tell you how and why they made decisions and work the way they do (like being able to look inside a machine and see how it's working).</p>	<p>Yes, we have an AGM once a year which is open to everyone.</p> <p>Yes, we send out a newsletter every term.</p> <p>Yes, we have young people on our planning group.</p> <p>Yes, we have youth advisory panel.</p>
<p>HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN THE DECISION MAKING?</p>	<p>You want to find out if you are going to have chances to decide for yourself some of the things that will happen in the group, what ways the group hears from young people and whether their ideas are taken on board.</p>	<p>Yes we have a youth advisory panel which helps decide what we're going to do for the year and helps decide what people are going to work with us.</p> <p>Yes, we always have a conversation where the group decide on the annual performance.</p> <p>Yes, we talk about what's happening in the group for the first ten minutes of every meeting.</p>
<p>HOW ARE THINGS LIKE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR, CONFLICT, DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ETC. BETWEEN THE YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE LEADERS HANDLED?</p>	<p>You want to find out if you will at all times be treated with respect and dignity, that there is a plan in place for dealing with challenging behaviour or conflict in positive ways.</p> <p><b>** The cliché of the temperamental artist is an unfortunate one and very few artists behave like this. It is never acceptable to treat young participants in any way that is less than professional, dignified and respectful.</b></p>	<p>We would try to get to the bottom of why someone was acting out in the group by discussing it with them and trying to help.</p> <p>Differences of opinions are healthy, and to be encouraged. It's important for young people to question and learn to challenge in a respectful manner. When this happens in a group, it can provide great learning opportunities for both the young person, youth worker and the group.</p>

QUESTION TO ASK	WHAT AM I TRYING TO FIND OUT?	POSSIBLE ANSWERS MIGHT SOUND LIKE:
<p><b>QUESTIONS ABOUT THE POLICIES AND STANDARDS IT ABIDES BY (INCLUDING RECRUITMENT)</b></p>		
<p><b>DOES THIS PROJECT HAVE AN UP TO DATE CHILD PROTECTION AND WELFARE POLICY?</b></p>	<p>You want to find out if this group abides by best practice requirements for safeguarding children and young people. This policy will outline things like how staff are recruited and background checked, how you will be treated and kept safe (who will be working with you, have they been background checked) and things like who can photograph you and where/if those photos will be published). It will also outline how disclosures (of abuse) from children and young people would be handled and how complaints would be dealt with.</p> <p><b>You have the right to participate in a safe environment</b></p> <p><b>The answers are less grey for this question: Best practice requires that groups have a <b>child protection policy in place</b> and that <b>staff are trained in this area</b> and have <b>been Garda vetted</b> as well as having previous <b>references verified</b>.</b></p>	<p>Yes, we do.</p> <p>No we don't (in which case you should rethink participating).</p>
<p><b>DOES THE PROJECT COMPLY WITH GUIDELINES SUCH AS THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS FOR CLUBS AND GROUPS (DCYA) OR SIMILAR? (SUCH AS NYC1'S WORKING SAFELY IN YOUTH CLUBS)</b></p>	<p>Again you want to find out if there is a code of conduct, standards of practice or a way of working that this project abides by.</p>	<p>Yes, we do</p> <p>No we don't (in which case you should rethink participating).</p>
<p><b>WHAT CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION WILL YOU NEED ABOUT ME?</b></p> <p><b>WHAT WILL YOU NEED IT FOR?</b></p> <p><b>HOW LONG WILL YOU HOLD ONTO IT?</b></p>	<p>This relates to codes of conduct and child protection policies from before; you want to know how information you provide (your medical history, your family's address, photos of you) will be protected and stored.</p> <p>There are good best practice guidelines on this –basically you should be confident that the group treats your information in strictest confidence, limits access to who can see it, and destroys it after a certain amount of time.</p>	<p>No one sees your information except anyone it's relevant to – a leader who will go with you on a day trip, a leader who'll be working with you every week and needs to know.</p> <p>The information is kept in a locked drawer/ protected file.</p>



QUESTION TO ASK	WHAT AM I TRYING TO FIND OUT?	POSSIBLE ANSWERS MIGHT SOUND LIKE:
<p>WILL YOU TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS OF ME AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THOSE AFTER THE PROJECT?</p>	<p>You want to know who will take pictures of you, where will they be published, will your permission be sought and for how long will the images be stored.</p> <p>There are good guidelines on this available from the Arts Council and NYCI, as well as others, which a group should be familiar with. Your permission should be sought in writing for the taking of any photographs and it should be very clear what they will be used for.</p> <p><b>NB: You have the right not to be photographed, to ask that your photograph not be used if you'd prefer that- and the right for photos that are used to be taken down if you change your mind.</b></p>	<p>We will ask for your written permission to take your photograph and to use it.</p>
<p>HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH BULLYING?</p>	<p>You want to know that the leaders work to make the group a safe and happy place for you and for all other young people. This doesn't happen by accident- it's worked on.</p> <p>A small group, or volunteer led project may not have very developed policies in place, but it should have clear values and a plan about what is acceptable in the group and how things are handled.</p>	<p>We have an anti-bullying policy in place.</p> <p>One of the rules of the group which everyone must agree to is to respect and be kind to everyone else. We expect everyone to help keep that rule in the group.</p>
<p>WHAT DO YOU DO TO INCLUDE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO FIND IT DIFFICULT TO JOIN THINGS?</p>	<p>You might want to know if the group makes a conscious effort to include young people who find it more difficult to join things, for example, because of physical, learning or social difficulties, who are less well off, or who are from minority ethnic groups.</p> <p>As above, it might not have a very developed 'policy' but a good project will have thought about ways of actively making it easier for all young people to join and ways of supporting them to enjoy the project and to stay involved if they do join.</p>	<p>We ask the members of the group about themselves (their ethnicity, any difficulties or challenges they have), so that we know we are including young people from diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>We invite young people who are not included to join our group; we have open days to introduce them to what we do.</p> <p>We follow up if someone stops attending.</p> <p>We do themed workshops that look at social issues such as disability, racism, privilege and marginalisation.</p>



## NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND

3 Montague Street, Dublin 2, D02 V327. [Youtharts.ie](http://Youtharts.ie) [Youth.ie](http://Youth.ie)



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthai Óige  
Department of  
Children and Youth Affairs