

The logo features the letters 'ASK' in a bold, dark blue serif font. Behind the letters is a complex, multi-colored geometric pattern of overlapping lines and shapes in shades of blue, green, orange, and purple. The entire logo is centered within a white, irregularly shaped frame that has a scalloped, star-like border. This frame is surrounded by a ring of colorful, overlapping triangles in shades of purple, yellow, and pink.

ASK

Assistant Trainers
Sharing Knowledge

**Assistant Trainer Guidebook for
Circus Schools**



Introduction

This booklet is a guide to provide tips for circus training organisations on how to support assistant trainers. Due to the differences in practice, culture and laws across the EU, the contents are intended as suggestions, and each organisation can adapt them according to their own circumstances. This guidebook and curriculum focuses on pedagogical training: it is assumed that each organisation will train assistant trainers in circus techniques in their own way.

It was developed as part of the Assistant Trainers Sharing Knowledge (ASK) KA2 Erasmus+ Project which ran from 2018-2020. 79 trainers from 11 different European countries worked together to produce this, supported by three facilitators.

Glossary

AT - Assistant Trainer

T - Trainer

HT & T can in some cases be the same person.

HT - Head trainer or equivalent: person responsible for guiding the AT's training.

Why Take on Assistant Trainers?

An assistant trainer can be a valuable asset to a circus training space. As well as acting as an extra pair of hands, an AT can:

- Serve as a role model for young people attending classes
- Demonstrate skills while the trainer explains them
- Improve the ratio of trainers to students
- Keep the classes fun!

Taking on an AT can increase the AT's future opportunities by increasing their competencies and adding to their CV's.

From the organisation's point of view, taking on an AT is an indication that it is planning for the future: training young people to become future trainers.

An Assistant Trainer's Learning Journey

In the following pages we outline the support an organisation will need to give to ensure an AT has a good training experience. The AT may be working towards becoming a trainer, or an AT may be content with achieving this level and remaining an AT.

Some countries have training courses for ATs. In this instance the organisation may need to support the AT through an internship. In countries without an official AT course the AT's organisation will be wholly responsible for the training. In this case, refer to the ASK curriculum.

The ASK Curriculum

This guidebook is a companion to the ASK curriculum, which is a comprehensive course to teach an assistant trainer. It is designed to be used either as a course to teach a group of ATs, or for organisations to use it to teach individual ATs. You can download the ASK curriculum through the EYCO Website Resource page at www.eyco.org.

Primary Responsibilities of a Circus School

- To provide an appropriate training space
- Clarity: provide appropriate paperwork. Inform ATs about policies, and rigging and safety procedures in the space
- To provide a supervisor/mentor
- To make an agreement or contract with the AT
- An AT should not in any circumstance be considered a replacement for a HT or T.

Preparation - First Steps

Introducing your AT to your Organisation and Training Space

Every country has its own laws, customs and procedures, so the process of taking on an AT will vary from country to country, and from organisation to organisation.

This section deals with the preparation an organisation needs to do before an AT begins their training. We suggest using this information to make a document or info pack, which can be given to the AT on their first day. This could take a variety of formats: e.g. a file or folder with paperwork, which the AT can add to as they go along, or a diary/journal with pre-prepared information on the inside pages.

Background of Organisation

Write an introduction explaining your organisation to the AT. This should give the AT an idea of the type of organisation they are working for.

Some things you may want to include:

- History
- Values
- Vision
- Statistics
- Goals
- Calendar of Events & Notable Dates

Where to find more information

Methods

You may want to let the AT know about your working methods, how your classes are structured, and what your aims are. This might be the same in all of the organisation's work, or they may differ depending on which class the AT is assisting on.

Your methods might be defined by your mission statement. Or you might want to go into more detail, as in the example below.

Examples

Name of Class	Our Aims	Our Methods
Age 5-7 youth circus beginners	To introduce children to circus skills in a fun, interactive way	Circus games, theatre games, working on whole group activities
Circus Stars	To prepare young people age 16-18 for circus school auditions	Conditioning and flexibility sessions in each class. Small group and 1:1 training. Work towards termly performances
All-stars circus class. An integrated class for all abilities.	To create an atmosphere where everyone feels welcome, valued and supported.	Circus games; peer-to-peer learning; Focus on supporting young people- if they want to try something, we will find a way!

Structure

Make a diagram of the staff structure in your organisation in relation to the AT: who holds responsibility/who they need to communicate with about what.

This could take the form of a pyramid, a map of the organisation, or simply a contact list.

Practicalities

What Responsibilities do you have Towards your AT?

1) Responsibility in the Working Space

Organisation/ HT/ T/ AT: Who is Responsible?

Make clear guidelines about who holds responsibility in different circumstances. This is essential for the AT to feel secure in their role. For example, if it is clear that communication with parents in certain circumstances is the role of the HT, the AT can feel comfortable signposting parents in their direction when these occasions arise.

Prior to the AT starting, it may be useful for the HT, and the circus organisation to think about who holds responsibility in a range of different circumstances. There will always be flexibility in how much responsibility an AT should be given depending on maturity, age, experience and familiarity. But it's good to establish some basic principles.

Code of Conduct: How to Behave Inside and Outside of Classes

Most organisations will have a code of conduct that outlines how trainers are expected to look and behave in relation to their students. This can cover how they dress, speak, and interact. It can also include the organisation's guidelines on trainer/student interactions on social media.

Safeguarding Policy

A safeguarding policy will outline all aspects of how an organisation works to keep people who use its services, and work for it, safe. It will also contain procedures to make this possible. Safeguarding is by its nature aligned with the laws of the country, therefore schools should look to their national umbrella organisations or local authorities for guidance on this.

First Aid

Does the AT know what to do in case of an accident? Again, expectations differ between countries. Some expect ATs to be fully trained in first aid, others will only expect the AT to report immediately to the HT or T, which assumes that they will not be in a position where they are on their own. The main message is clarity on action.

Criminal Record Checks

Procedures differ again in different countries. If you are unsure what checks need to be made, check with relevant authorities in your country. Depending

on the AT's age and the country, they may need a criminal record check prior to starting.

2) Use of the Space

Safe training Space & Safe Use of Materials

Take the AT on a tour of the space and explain how you work together to keep it safe. If you have risk assessments, introduce the AT to them at this point.

Storeroom

Pay particular attention to the way equipment is stored in the space, and the way it should be put back, as well as whose responsibility this is. If young people clear up after a class, stress that the AT needs to double check it is all put away properly.

Rigging Policy of the School

This is an important area that needs clarity: who can rig, and to what extent? What happens if a piece of equipment is needed for a class and isn't rigged? This is a good point to discuss advanced planning and who the AT needs to talk to if rigging needs to be done. Also discuss what happens if a piece of equipment needs repairs, and procedures around rosin/chalk use.

Safety of Participants

This will be included in any safeguarding/child protection documents, but it is worth having a discussion on all aspects of safety: physical, mental and emotional.

3) Contract/ Payment

Legalities will differ in each country around this. The important message is clarity. Is the AT on a salary, or volunteering? How do they get paid? Tax details? Discuss their status – self employed, employed, invoicing, dates of payments, methods and bank details.

Job Description

It is helpful to have a job description for the AT so that all of the information covered so far is available in writing, and agreed in advance. It also gives a point of reference for the AT if they are being asked to perform duties outside of their agreed role.

The Learning Journey of the AT

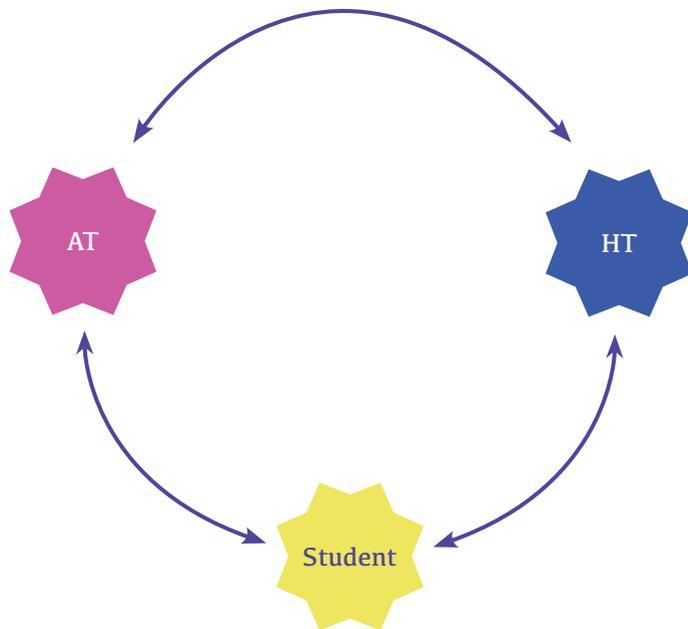
Competencies

Feedback

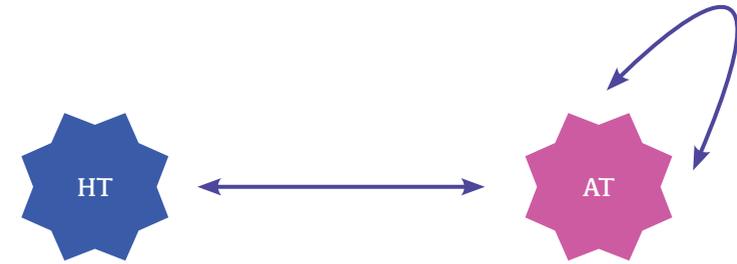
It is important for the AT to learn to give and receive feedback. Feedback takes place between the HT and the AT, the AT and the students, and the students and the HT. In all cases feedback should be in both directions. Discuss how this happens in your school: is there a regular weekly staff/trainers meeting? A termly evaluation with the students? How formal is the feedback? Do you keep records?

It is very important that time is allocated to this; it should be factored into the HT's weekly duties, and budgeted for appropriately.

Feedback between the HT and AT will include looking at the AT's ability to observe and analyse: can the AT look at technique in the student's practice and suggest adjustments?



Reflection / Appraisal and Self Reflection



Reflection between the HT and AT is a valuable process and should be part of the AT's learning. They should also be encouraged to self reflect. A good way to do this is as part of an appraisal. This is a two-way conversation, usually between the HT and AT and involves continuous reflection and goal setting. Questions should be 'open' to encourage conversation. It is useful for the AT to keep a journal to record their learning and progress.

This is a good tool for self-reflection, and can also be used in appraisals as a tool to remember any issues, difficulties and successes that the AT may have had since the last appraisal.

Pedagogical and Circus Knowledge

The AT's learning journey should include some theoretical learning, including:

- Pedagogical methods
- Teaching and learning styles
- Circus history

It is also important for you to provide opportunities for them to see other teachers work.

Autonomous Work

The learning process should gradually support the AT towards being capable of autonomous work: for example, to lead a game or a small group session. The time an AT spends leading a group can be short at first, increasing gradually over time.

Safety

Emotional Safety

Throughout the AT's learning journey it is important to consider their safety: in particular, as employers, their emotional safety. Make sure that they are aware of company procedures in case of bullying or intimidation. Be sure that they know who they can talk to if they have any issues. Try to make sure that more than one person can be approached for this.

Physical Safety

The AT should be conscious of keeping themselves safe, as well as their students. The following considerations apply in all training:

- Spotting- how to spot
- Rigging- clarity on rigging regulations in the space
- Physical Preparation- knowledge of warm ups and cool downs, and general body care
- Mats- how to use and care for them
- Safety- around hair, jewellery, piercings, and clothes
- Hydration

Planning and Developing their Own Practice

Help the AT to set their own personal goals. Discuss what resources they need to achieve them, and how the circus school can help. Discuss what freedom they can have in using the circus space, and what support they need. Encourage them to have a wide perspective: help them research and give advice on their personal development.

Providing a Good Working Environment

All of the above will help to ensure a good environment for the AT. However keep in mind that the following is vital for their happiness in the workplace:

- Communication- clarity of communication is important at all levels, for understanding, feeling included, confidence, and empowerment.
- Teamwork- feeling part of a team is essential when an AT is learning. This will give them the support and encouragement they need on their learning journey.

- Inclusion at events, meetings etc.- It is important to make the AT feel part of the organisation. Of course, this doesn't need to be all meetings, but make sure they are included when possible.
- Meeting other ATs- It may be useful for the AT to meet others who are on the same journey as them. This could be done by arrangement with other schools.

Checklist

Does the AT Know the following?

- The vision and goals of the circus school
- The organisation structure and contacts
- Their job description
- Where/who to get more information from
- Their growing path
- The structure of their training (the duration, and how it ends)

The ASK guidebook was developed as part of the ASK Project 2018-2020.

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The ASK curriculum can be found at www.eyco.org.

ASK Partners:

Lead Partner: Suomen Nuorisosirkusliitto, Finland: www.snsi.fi

Estonian Contemporary Circus Development Centre, Estonia: tsirkusekeskus.ee

Fundacja Miasto Projekt, Poland: www.pedagogikacyrku.pl

Vlaams centrum voor circuskunsten vzw, Belgium: www.circuscentrum.be

ASD Giocolieri e Dintorni, Italy: www.circosfera.it

Circomundo, Netherlands: www.circomundo.nl

Federación Española de Escuelas de Circo Socio Educativo, Spain: www.fecse.es

Fédération Française des Ecoles de Cirque, France: www.ffec.asso.fr

UK YOUTH CIRCUS NETWORK (CircusWorks),

United Kingdom: www.circusworks.org

BAG-Zirkuspädagogik, Germany: www.bag-zirkus.de

Slovensko združenje za cirkusko pedagogiko – Cirkokrog, Slovenia:
www.cirkokrog.com

