

Guidance for Health and Safety within Circus Activities

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Introduction

Juggling

Juggling in general is not a dangerous act in the context of the circus, but caution must be taken when juggling in the presence of other people. Never go beyond your limits in any way that may endanger other people, and always ensure you have adequate space before starting practice or performance. Do not throw equipment at other members without their prior consent, as although the juggling balls themselves are soft, they can still cause damage or distress.

Club Juggling

The same rules apply to club juggling as normal ball juggling, with some additions. Never practice club juggling with any hand, finger, wrist, or arm injury, as this can further provoke injury. Never intentionally throw at or hit anyone with a juggling club, with the exception of partner passing and club combat. Always be aware of your practice radius, as people may not be aware of the passes you intend to make, or be able to react fast enough to any incidents that may occur. Whilst juggling clubs it is advisable to follow safe practices, catching the clubs reliably with the handles as opposed to the body, as this will reinforce habits if the performer chooses to move onto more advanced equipment.

Knife and Fire Juggling

Similarly to clubs, safe practices must be observed, catching the clubs by the handles reliably. For a member of the Society to be allowed to practice knife or fire juggling within Society time, they must demonstrate to the Health and Safety Regulatory Body that they can competently club juggle, safely drop (intentionally miss) the clubs whilst juggling, in addition to demonstrating knowledge of safe practice to this Group. This includes a demonstration of the safe practice radius, and being able to inform the Society when they intend to practice. The member is responsible for the safe use of their own equipment and must not lend it out for use by other members within Society time without permission from the Health and Safety Regulatory Body.

When a member is practising with this equipment, all present members of the Society must be made aware, and a practice radius must be blocked off for the safety of the members. Note that if there is not enough space available, the member may not practice.

Miscellaneous Object Juggling

For objects such as hats and hoops, no extra precautions may be taken, however, the members must be made aware of the risks associated with the equipment and how the usage differs from that of balls. The Health and Safety Regulatory Body reserve the right to refuse usage of juggling equipment on Society time if they deem it to be inappropriate or dangerous.

Unicycling and Stilt Walking

Unicycling and Stilt Walking, in addition to any equipment that will raise a member off the floor and cause unbalance, must be closely monitored by the Health and Safety Regulatory Body until it is established that the member can perform these activities without supervision.

In the case of Stilt Walking, protective gear must always be worn, this includes knee pads, elbow pads, and a helmet. Members who want to learn to stilt walk must be taught and supervised by an experienced member, who has been cleared to teach by the Health and Safety Regulatory Body.

In the case of Unicycle Riding, protective gear (helmet and wrist straps) **must** be worn until the member is assessed by the Health and Safety Regulatory Body. This assessment requires the learner to demonstrate safe falling procedures, in addition to competent skill. The member must demonstrate knowledge of the risks the equipment possesses, both to the rider and to observers. The use of giraffe unicycles (5 feet and over) is allowed, provided they are assessed and approved by the Health and Safety Regulatory Body. All protective gear (helmet, wrist guards, knee guards, and elbow guards) **must** be worn while undertaking this activity to be covered by the Society insurance.

Staff Spinning

Contact Staff

Contact Staff is the most common form of staff spinning that a member will participate in. The risks of contact staff mainly involve hitting other members which, considering both the speed and weight of the equipment, can be very dangerous to observers. Members practising staff must be aware of their practice radius and of any members who may be at risk due to their activities. Tricks with the equipment extend the usual practice radius, and they require consideration regarding the reach of the equipment and effects on members before being carried out.

Acro Staff

Acrobatic Staff equipment is sometimes used in the same manner as contact staff, in which case, no extra precautions must be taken. When a member is practising with this equipment in an acrobatic way, with jumps, spins, or any move in which the member's body is balanced on or being moved by the staff, they must be on a soft floor (safety mats or grass) and must not attempt moves that are outside their comfort zone and/or physical ability. The Health and Safety Regulatory Body has the right to restrict the use of this equipment if they have any concerns over the safety of any members.

Fire Staff

Fire Staff is often a specialty that is explored by members after they have reached a competent level in contact staff. In order for a member to become cleared for fire staff, they have to demonstrate competency in all tricks they intend to perform with fire. It is up to the judgement of the Health and Safety Regulatory Body, in addition to a member that has previously been cleared in the discipline, to clear new performers.

Hoop Manipulation

Contact Hoop and Isolation

Hoop Manipulation is relatively safe, and doesn't need much regulation. The main considerations for Hoop Performers include the practice radius and the weight of the equipment. The judgement of the Health and Safety Regulatory Body is trusted with observation of performers.

Fire Hoop

The same guidance on contact hoop applies here, as well as the information found in the Fire Health and Safety document. Fire hoop usually consists of spokes that have the wick connected, so a wider practice radius is recommended, in addition to a higher level of supervision when using this equipment.

Cigar Box Manipulation

Cigar Box Manipulation has the same health and safety considerations as regular ball juggling, with the added weight and density of the boxes. It is advised that Cigar Box Manipulation is done on a soft floor to prevent members being distressed by the noise they make when they are dropped, and to prevent the props from being damaged.

Acrobatics

Solo Acro

Acrobatics can be somewhat risky to both the participating body and people in the area. Mats **must** be used to outline the member's practice area, which will provide both a practice radius, and reduce the severity of falls during both practice and performance. The member must warm up sufficiently before practice, and cool down afterwards to prevent injury.

Partner and Group Acro

Partner and Group Acrobatics is generally considered more risky than Solo Acro, due to the extra people involved. In addition to the guidance set out for Solo Acro, a larger area of mats should be used to account for the potential extra height of falls. In addition to physical safety of practising members, all participating bodies must be able and feel comfortable to communicate effectively about comfort and physical boundaries, as this type of acro is more intimate than a lot of the activities usually performed. If a participating member shows or expresses discomfort, the activity **must** be paused to ensure the comfort of all participating,

Clowning

There isn't much risk involved within clowning, unless faux falls are a large part of the persona. In that case, the guidance for Solo Acro must be used within practice. In the case that a member is a professional clown (being paid for performances through the Society), the member **must** do research on appropriate clowning Health and Safety, as working closely with children is not something that we practice within the group. In this case, the member should work closely with the Health and Safety Regulatory Body to create a risk assessment and discuss all precautionary measures.

Devil Sticks

Devil Sticks do not pose a massive risk within the Society, but the usual practice radius must be observed. Do not intentionally hit anyone with the devil sticks. There may be a chance of the equipment 'spinning out' of control while certain moves are being performed, so an awareness of the people around the practice radius is required.

Poi

The main risk with poi comes from the chord wrapping around limbs during practice. Never intentionally wrap anyone with the chord unless it is part of a predetermined and mutually agreed

performance. The force that the poi travels with while spinning is considerable, so **extreme** caution is advised when practising in an enclosed space that is shared with other people. As with all other equipment outlined in this document, a suitable practice radius should be observed during practice and performance.

Fire Poi

The general poi guidance should be followed with fire poi. However, the chain that holds the poi in place will get hot as the equipment is used lit. This poses a **serious** threat if it becomes wrapped around a limb while lit, as it will be difficult to unwrap in a timely manner. In the case that this occurs, all other fire activities **must** immediately cease, and a damp towel must be used to carefully extinguish the prop, while ensuring that no one is burned. Keeping calm during this situation is essential, and due to this, only experienced and competent members may practice lit poi.

Contact Juggling

When one practices contact juggling, the ball tends to stop, drop, and roll its way out of the performer's practice radius. The performer should be aware of this, and allow for these occurrences within their practice radius. Other than the risk of the contact ball falling onto other members, there are no other significant risks associated with this prop.

Things on Strings

0.1 Diabolo

Members practising Diabolo must be very aware of their surroundings, as the prop can easily fall out of the member's practice radius. This poses a threat to other members in the area, so extreme caution is advised when using this prop. While practising spins with the prop, be aware of surrounding people as well as the length and speed of the string and prop itself.

0.2 YO-YO

Yo-yos are not inherently dangerous, the main risk arises from spinning moves, where the prop is being accelerated at the end of the string. Awareness of the practice radius and the member's surrounding is advised.

Rola Bola

This balancing act mainly poses a threat to the member practising with this equipment. The main risks being falling and hurting joints such as wrists and ankles. For new members who are using this equipment, full protective gear is advised until they are confident and competent.

Club Combat

Club combat is one of the more risk-filled areas that will be practised within LUMACS sessions. The main risk comes from the clubs being hit into other members who may not be aware of the activity. To avoid this, prior to practising club combat, the participating members **must** make other members aware of the activity and the risks. While practising this discipline, it is important to understand the risks to all members within the area. The most common injuries are facial and on the member's hands. If a member has a pre-existing injury in one of these areas, it is recommended that the member does not participate in club combat.

Magic

Magic in general is not dangerous, especially the types that are practised within the Society. With regard to card tricks, never throw cards into someone else's face or eyes, and always respect any volunteer's personal boundaries. Performances often involve a lot of talking to the audience, when doing this, ensure not to offend or be rude to the audience or volunteers (unless this is part of the show).

Public Performances

When performing in public or 'busking', health and safety must be taken seriously and carefully considered before the performance takes place, as it may endanger members of the public. If public performances are planned, it is recommended to check with the local authorities to check that a licence is not required. If the performance involves any equipment that requires a practice radius, the performer should lay out a performance area such that the audience cannot interfere and get hurt. Cones or tape is a good choice for laying out this area. Insurance is also important to consider in these situations in case something was to go wrong.

Equipment Maintenance

The responsibility of maintaining the equipment falls to the Health and Safety Officer and the Aerial Coordinator when applicable. This responsibility should be taken with responsibility and seriousness, as it will affect the safety of the members of the Society. All maintenance jobs should be undertaken with prior research and understanding of the equipment involved.

Staff and Hoop

The maintenance of both staff and hoop is important, but it does not inherently pose a severe health and safety risk if it is neglected. The majority of the Society staff are made with a central wooden stick that is coated in tape and tipped with rubber ends. The handle should be re-taped when significant wear is evident, or the state of the equipment affects its use. The same applies to the hoops, as they should be stripped and re-taped when the state of the tape affects the user's experience with the equipment.

If the rubber ends of the staff are loose, they should be re-secured before returning the piece of equipment to Society use.

Aerial Equipment

The hoop will need re-taping periodically with aerial specific tape. Any colour tape can be used for this. First, the old tape will need to be peeled off, and the residue will need to be wiped off with isopropyl alcohol. This should be done outside, preferably using a ventilator to ensure minimal inhalation of fumes. Once dried, the hoop can be re-taped with new tape. This should be done tightly with overlapping layers (see image).



Figure 1: Example of correct hoop taping

After the tape has been applied, chalk should be applied (at least a few days after so it has time to stick, but before first use). This should be done sparingly, but still prevent it from being too sticky for use.

All aerial equipment should come with a lifespan from the manufacturer. This is usually a timespan or hours of use, with the one that is reached first determining the overall lifespan of the equipment. All equipment will need to be regularly inspected for damage and wear, regardless of its lifespan. Failure to maintain equipment and identify any wear present could result in safety issues and injury of members. Regular inspections will also help increase the lifespan of your equipment (within the manufacturing guidelines) (information from firetoys blog).

To inspect the aerial silks, remove them from the rigging and lay them out in a large area. Go over all areas, making note of any holes or ladders. **Always remove jewellery before starting training and avoid wearing clothes with zips or anything that could get caught on the fabric.**

The guidance within the society is to wash the silks in a bath (not washing machine!) with a sensitive detergent, to prevent both equipment damage, and reduce the risk of allergens within detergent. If any members of the society have allergies that could be effected by the silks being washed, this should be discussed with them beforehand.

This document must be available to all participating members of circus activities within the society.

For more information regarding the regulations for fire activities, please see the accompanying document.

This information was collected by Amy Holmes in 2025 for Lancaster University Magic and Circus Society. Although this document outlines all Society guidance, it may not be an appropriate guideline for most external organisations, and it is recommended that individual research is undertaken prior to fire activities. Useful information can be found at <https://www.firetoys.co.uk/blogs/fire/fire-safety-for-fire-spinners>.

LUMACS holds no responsibility for incidents that may occur when using the guidance that this document presents. For questions or comments feel free to email me at aholmesd20@gmail.com