

# Working with an Intimacy Coordinator

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## **Acknowledgements**

These guidelines for working with an intimacy coordinator have been drafted using the international standards currently available regarding working with intimacy, nudity and simulated sex in audiovisual media. Countries that have published protocols so far are Australia (Equity), Finland (Finnish Film Foundation), New Zealand (Equity), South Africa (IPSA et al.), United Kingdom (DirectorsUK), Canada (ACTRA) and United States (SAG-AFTRA).

**Published in 2021.**

**In co-operation:**



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This document is intended to be read in conjunction with the *Guidelines for doing intimate scenes in camera work* published in October 2020 by the Finnish Film Foundation (referred later as FFF Guidelines).

Sex and intimacy have always been part of engaging storytelling because these scenes convey strong feelings and powerful emotions to an audience. Effective intimate scenes have potential to advance the story and reveal something new about the characters and their relationships.

However, working with hyper-sensitive content, may trigger cast and crew working on them as although action is simulated, the performance of it can impact an individual. Performer/s can find themselves in situations that risk boundaries being pushed or crossed. Their personal, intimate body may be touched in a way that is inappropriate or even damaging if not dealt with care. The high level of domestic violence in Finland also calls for a responsible approach to this sensitive topic.

Psychophysically and -socially stressful situations are always a hazard to the employee's wellbeing. Intimate<sup>1</sup> scenes with any activity, interaction or exposure occurring within the Performer's close personal space hold a physical, emotional and psychological risk. Issues surrounding power dynamics can eliminate open communication and influence how a Performer goes about giving or seeking consent. The challenges in interference and raising issues can then lead to a traumatic experience for both cast and crew on set.

The safety of an intimate scene is managed in the same way as other elements of the production. Safety is assessed, monitored and improved constantly. Risk management, effective communication and clear responsibilities are key. Safety management also involves cooperation with experts and other partners. In October 2020 Finland became the first EU country to publish guidance for working with intimate content in recorded media. In the FFF Guidelines, the use of Intimacy Coordinators (IC) in the industry was recommended to be increased (2020:9).

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<sup>1</sup> Intimacy in this context covers simulated sexual acts or nudity by one or more people or any intimacy between people with vulnerabilities like age, disability etc. See [Appendix 1](#).

## CONSENT

Consent can only be given by the Performer/s doing the action and the Performer/s receiving the action. Consent must be gained from the Performer/s in relation to each and every intimate action. It cannot be assumed and it may be withdrawn at any time before or during the filming. In order to genuinely consent, a Performer must be informed of the intimate scene and its specific requirements in advance. Intimacy is individual and should not be assumed.

At the point of engagement, consent should be given in writing for any performance of intimacy and specified in the 'Nudity rider'<sup>2</sup> which is a separate contract supplement for scenes that include nudity, simulated sex and/ or sexual violence. Intimacy Coordinator should be hired for at least those scenes that are subject to a separate nudity rider, and for intimacy with minors. To enable intimate content to be realised with the creative engagement and ongoing active consent of the Performer, best practice should follow in pre-production, rehearsal and performance through to post-production and marketing.

## WHAT DOES AN INTIMACY COORDINATOR DO?

Intimacy Coordinator is a creative physical storyteller who is hired to help create accurate intimate dramaturgy, and a safe and respectful work environment. They serve as a department head, akin to a stunt coordinator to help deliver the director's vision.

Intimacy Coordinator should have extensive experience in film/TV and/or live performance and a previous qualification in movement, acting, directing or equivalent. They are specifically trained in intimacy coordination, choreography and health & safety awareness. They must have additional knowledge and understanding of intimacy protocols, on-set etiquette and the use of intimacy garments and barriers.

Intimacy Coordinator should also demonstrate that they have undertaken the following training:

- Mental Health First Aider
- Consent
- Anti-Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying Awareness
- LGBTQIA+<sup>3</sup> Awareness
- Diversity and Equality Awareness
- Conflict Resolution/problem solving
- Bystander Intervention training

Intimacy Coordinator liaises between the departments. They also advocate for Performers and Crew, which provides some protection to the Production Company and Director by demonstrating that duty of care has been taken seriously. Paying attention to safety and wellbeing are key in providing a respectful, inclusive & mindful workplace that supports creativity.

When the Producer is hiring an Intimacy Coordinator, in addition to the qualifications mentioned above, they should also ask about that person's prior work and methodologies. In this document, the role of the Intimacy Coordinator and the creative collaboration with one is explained in more detail.

## DO I NEED AN INTIMACY COORDINATOR?

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<sup>2</sup> See more information on Nudity rider in Appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> LGBTQIA+ is an acronym which refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual + communities.

If the answer to any of the questions below is 'yes', engaging an Intimacy Coordinator would be appropriate:

- Does the scene depict nudity or semi-nudity?
- Is there sexual activity depicted on camera or in audio?
- Are there any other sensitive or exposing factors of the scene (eg. a graphic or sexual violent nature)?
- Are there any cultural or other factors in relation to intimacy?
- Are there any individual performer circumstances (e.g., history between performers or director, personal/ cultural issues)?
- Are there any issues with power dynamics (vulnerabilities e.g., age, gender, experience)?

If the answer to a factor of sexual violence is 'yes', then engaging a Stunt Coordinator and an Intimacy Coordinator is expected. Ideally, there should also be a psychotherapist or wellbeing facilitator on set to provide mental health support when working with graphic or sexually violent scenes.

Hiring an Intimacy Coordinator to work with children and minors is advised when the content includes any physical contact and/ or highly emotional content and is required with any sexual or violent content whether explicit or implied.

The Performer/s should have as much information about their scene partner as possible and be informed about the use of an Intimacy Coordinator in advance.

## **WORKING WITH AN INTIMACY COORDINATOR**

### **Pre-production**

The Performer can suggest the use of an Intimacy Coordinator but due to the power imbalance, it is the responsibility of the Producer to offer for the use of an Intimacy Coordinator in a production with any intimate content.

IC can be hired early to work with production and casting directors to make sure that casting breakdowns are as detailed as possible. IC can be available for auditions.

To ensure that the intimate content is dealt with effectively and so the Intimacy Coordinator can work to the best of their abilities, the Producer/ Director should share the script and their vision of it with the IC as early as possible. Intimacy Coordinator is engaged with the following:

- Pre-production meetings
- Access to essential departments and cast
- Pre-rehearsals
- Duty of care procedures
- Respect and safety consideration

After discussions with the Director and Producer, the Intimacy Coordinator will be given access to the relevant Performers (once cast) prior to rehearsal and filming. In this stage, the nudity/simulated sex rider will be drafted by the Intimacy Coordinator. If the production has already drafted a nudity rider, it would now be shared with the Intimacy Coordinator.

The Intimacy Coordinator will facilitate discussions between Performer/s, Director, Producer, 1st Assistant Director (1st AD) and other Head of Departments (HOD) about each of the scenes in advance of

rehearsal and filming. The discussion will cover:

- Director's vision (e.g., style, content, shot by shot description)
- Extent of nudity and what wardrobe will be used (underwear, intimacy garments, barriers)
- Type of contact and intensity required
- What the rehearsal process will be
- Any other questions anyone may have

If the need subsequently arises (e.g. in a long running series) to add or change the previously agreed content with additional nudity, simulated sexual activity or sexual violence, the Performer needs to be informed no less than 48 hours prior to filming, and the Performer is not obligated to agree to the proposed changes. Whenever the need arises, the Director and Performer will discuss this as soon as possible and/or consult with an Intimacy Coordinator and the Performer's representative. The Performer may suggest alternatives to the changes. The changes will be updated in the rider and signed by the Performer/their representative before filming. Without increasing the amount of intimacy, adjusting the choreography to the needs of the Performer/s, Director and camera may continue on location.

Intimacy Coordinator undertakes risk assessment for each intimate scene, detailing what the hazard is and how the risks are mitigated. Intimacy Coordinator keeps a logbook throughout the production to record any and all relevant conversations with the Performer/s and the Production.

## Pre-rehearsals

When or before rehearsing intimate scenes with the Performer/s and Director, the Intimacy Coordinator will

- Schedule sufficient time for the pre-production rehearsal process
- Check with performers which actions and language might be 'triggering' for them
- Facilitate open discussion around what might be achieved with the Performer's consent
- Help to establish personal boundaries between Performers
- Collaborate with the Performers, Director and Director of Photography (DOP) to create body movement and intimacy choreography rooted in the storytelling
- Discuss and agree the process for the day of filming
- Agree a halt of action/ safety cue with Performers
- Agree on-going check-in process with Performers
- Ensure closed room/ set
- Can suggest substitute actions and contact, utilising safe practice techniques.
- Document the rehearsed and agreed choreography.

## Production

A list of essential crew required on closed sets will be identified by the Producer/1st AD. Intimacy Coordinator will be informed of the essential crew and the number of cameras and monitors, and those recording. On the day of filming, the IC should have access to the monitor and listening.

When filming nudity, simulated sexual content or sexual violence, the Producer will ensure scenes are scheduled at least 48 hours in advance. The set is closed to all, but essential crew and the Intimacy Coordinator provides Closed Set Protocols to be sent out with the call sheet. A verbal briefing<sup>4</sup> such as below will be given before the intimate scene led by the 1st AD or the Intimacy Coordinator:

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<sup>4</sup> Safety briefing by Screen Safe, SWAG (Screen Women's Action Group) & Equity New Zealand  
<https://screensafe.co.nz/guidelines/crew-briefing-sex-scenes/>

*“We are about to shoot a scene involving intimacy. This will be a closed set so essential crew only on set, please. Essential crew for this scene is: (list the essential personnel). Essential monitors for this scene are: (list them). All non-essential monitors should now be switched off. Video village should also disconnect streaming to any apps. If you do not need to be present, please leave the set and note that viewing monitors or footage is prohibited for anyone other than essential crew. If you do need to be present, we expect the highest professional standards. If you are uncertain as to what this entails, please refer to the Intimacy Guidelines on your call sheet. Please follow any requests from (insert name) who is the Intimacy Coordinator. Additional if relevant: Please note that this scene involves simulated sex, nudity, depictions of sexual assault/rape/ child abuse etc. If you feel this content may be distressing, please speak to the 1st AD.”*

On the day of filming, the Performer/s together with the Intimacy Coordinator in a rehearsal space appropriate for check in:

- Agree context and content as rehearsed prior to the shooting day
- Agree consent & areas of physical touch
- Agree halt/ safety cue
- Discuss any issues or questions in advance of filming

Before technical rehearsal, the Performer/s together with the Director, DOP and Intimacy Coordinator:

- Adjust the choreography for the location & block the scene
- Agree set ups and shots together

Technical rehearsal with crew follows. If nudity or semi-nudity is required in the technical rehearsal, this should be agreed with the Intimacy Coordinator in advance who then confirms this with the Performer/s.

Before and/or during the filming, the Intimacy Coordinator

- Checks the intimacy garments and barriers before filming
- Checks the protocol of covering Performer/s in between takes before filming
- Ensures the closed set is adhered to on set and behind monitors
- Ensures continuous consent during filming
- Ensures Performer/s to be dressed for rehearsals and in between takes
- Ensures the agreed areas of touch and show are adhered to and, where changes are required, ensures that these are negotiated
- Continues to adjust the choreography to the needs of the Performer/s and Director and for camera angles/ shot sizes throughout the filming process
- Advocates for Performers and Crew
- Discusses any concerns with the Director or directly with Performer/s if they request or if any issues arise
- Monitors that a Performer does not independently override agreed choreography

There are no still photographs taken during rehearsal or performance. A special still photography session may be conducted immediately prior or after the filming of such scenes, provided that the Performer's written consent is obtained and the Performer has been advised prior to the day of filming.

After the filming, the Intimacy Coordinator

- Provides an opportunity for a closure
- Checks in with each Performer
- Provides feedback report to the Production

## Post-production

Intimacy Coordinator can be consulted on the edited versions to check they comply with the previously agreed nudity riders. Intimacy Coordinator can be involved in ADR (additional dialogue recording) and in filming of promotional material. The use of material from the intimate scenes to be used in promotional material needs to be agreed with the Performer in advance of filming and recorded in the contract/rider.

The Producer ensures that the editorial and post-production teams are briefed about the intimate content and are familiar with FFF Guidelines. Riders will be shared with the Editor. The material should only

- Be viewed by essential personnel
- Shared only in password-protected form
- Should not go out in general rushes or be uploaded

The Producer ensures that all recordings of scenes (except final cut) involving nudity, simulated sex or sexual violence are destroyed whenever no longer required or within FIVE YEARS, whichever is sooner.

## ONGOING SAFETY AND DUTY OF CARE

All parties are encouraged to exercise proper self-care during and after the creation of intimate performance or post-production. Sexual harassment & bullying reporting protocols need to be clarified for each team member and a mental health helpline should be added on all call sheets. Intimacy Coordinator should be contacted with low threshold to discuss any issues in regards the content.

Respectful, inclusive & mindful language should be used in production documents (e.g., crew lists) and on set e.g., use of an anti-racist language, correct pronouns and LGBTQIA+ informed language. Production should avoid calling scenes in triggering ways such as “rape scene” on the call sheet or when discussing the scene. Please note that the way how these scenes are described and discussed is essential for the safety of the production.

## RESOURCES

- Intimacy Guidelines for Stage and Screen by MEEA Equity Australia.
- Best Practices Guide by ACTRA Toronto, Canada.
- Guidelines for Intimate Scenes in Camera Work by The Finnish Film Foundation.
- Intimacy Guidelines for Stage and Screen by Equity New Zealand.
- Guide for Working with Intimacy by Directors UK.
- Nudity and Simulated Sex Rider Basics, TimesUp UK.
- Standards, Protocols & Resources for intimacy set out by SAG-AFTRA, USA.
- Protocols for Intimate Content in TV, Film and Associated Media by IPSA et. al. South Africa.

## **APPENDIX 1: Intimacy in film & TV covers the following (the list is not exhaustive):**

- Simulated sex
- All levels of nudity (including implied nudity)
- Sexually charged contact/ kissing/ touching (mouth and/or body)
- Simulated kissing (mouth and/or body)
- Simulated sexual violence or assault
- Intimacy with minors (both sexual and non-sexual)
- Contact with intimate/sensitive body parts
- Post-coital physical touch of an intimate nature / physical intimacy
- Sexually or emotionally charged scenes with or without physical touch or action
- When an actor or their representative requests the presence of an IC
- When working with actors with sensitivity to intimate content and physical touch
- Use of merkins (pubic wigs), prosthetic genitalia, prosthetic breasts, prosthetic buttocks and sex props etc.
- Use of digital body doubling or digital genitalia
- Use of a body double

## **APPENDIX 2: Nudity Rider**

Nudity rider, nudity waiver, simulated sex rider, intimate scene rider or simulated sex waiver: With all, the purpose is to establish the rights and obligations of the production and the actor performing in a nude, intimate or simulated sex act, or simulated sexual assault scene. A rider is also required if a performer or background actor is to appear nude or perform a simulated sex act on set, even if this exposure or performance is only meant to aid the filming process and will not be depicted in the film.

The rider must include a general description of the nudity or simulated sex acts, and the relevant script pages should be attached and referenced. If a production does not obtain consent, it does not have the right to use the footage.

Computer-generated imagery, prosthetics, or digitising of Performer's image or body with respect to the nude and simulated sex scenes may be conducted only with Performer's written consent. This applies to digital or body doubling. In a situation where the Performer has withdrawn their consent before or during the filming, the Production can finish filming the scene by using a body double. The nudity, simulated sexual content, and agreed choreography of the intimate scene portrayed through doubling shall be limited to what was originally agreed to by the actor.

The use of material from the intimate scenes to be used in promotional material needs to be agreed with the Performer in advance of filming and recorded in the contract/rider.