

# TEEN KITCHEN TABLE MANUAL

TEEN AMBASSADORS  
ACROSS EUROPE

TEEN  
THEATRE  
EUROPEAN  
ENGAGEMENT  
NETWORK



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# TEEN KITCHEN TABLE MANUAL

The TEEN Kitchen Table Manual was written as a handbook for facilitators who want to host a TEEN Kitchen Table Meeting.

In this manual you can find suggestions on how to prepare for hosting a TEEN Kitchen Table Meeting and learn more about the recommended rules.



## HOW TO PREPARE FOR A TEEN KITCHEN TABLE MEETING

When you prepare a TEEN Kitchen Table Meeting you must first recruit a group of teenagers to host the event and decide on a topic or question for discussion. We have often recruited TEEN Ambassadors. This means Teenagers who are already involved with (or at least have a deep interest in) Theatre, the Arts and Culture. Inviting them to sign up for an Ambassadorial role has given them a forum in which they can discuss their Arts & Cultural interests – which is often an experience that our Teenagers have not previously had the opportunity for.

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After recruiting this 'core' group of Teenagers, we have found it very much easier to then invite other Teenagers who may be less culturally active.

The Ambassadors help to structure the conversation and their passion often encourages the less confident Teenagers to participate. We have found it best to recruit Teenagers from different backgrounds which often means that the participating Teenagers will not have met each other before the Kitchen Table Meeting.

Sometimes, we have structured the Kitchen Table Meetings to begin with an external expert (which could be a Teenager or an Adult) who may share their ideas as an inspirational starting point for the Teenagers' discussion. The external expert could even deliver a workshop beforehand. What is often very interesting is for this expert to stay engaged throughout the Kitchen Table Meeting in an active way – as someone who helps actively challenge the Teenagers with follow-up questions, for example.

Other times, we have given the Teenagers a specified topic within which to base their conversation. Certainly, our experience has shown that a certain narrowing of the topic focus is a great help for the Teenagers to structure their thoughts. Often, the context in which the Kitchen Table Meeting is being presented will naturally offer a topic or theme to be discussed. For example, if the Kitchen Table Meeting is being hosted at a festival, you might pick the Festival theme or ask the Festival Curator to suggest a suitably relevant topic. Of course, you could also ask the Teenagers to pick their own topic, although this takes an element of challenge away! Some topics that our



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international Kitchen Table Meetings have drawn on include: Confronting the Unknown in Theatre, Theatre & Climate Change, and Theatre in Schools.

## PREPARATION MEETING

Before the Kitchen Table Meeting begins, the Teenagers should be given time to meet each other, and discuss among themselves, without having adults present. This helps them draw up some fundamental themes of the topic they want to explore and gives them an impression of what their peers are thinking about the chosen topic. Remind them that they are more than welcome to share the exact same thoughts from this initial 'private' discussion in the final public Kitchen Table Meeting, or they may come up with new ideas and thoughts as the conversation develops. Either way, this initial meeting helps them to get comfortable with the topic (as well as with each other) and is an opportunity to feel more confident about the responsibility of conveying a range of different views in the public forum.

This preparation time is also an opportunity for the Teenagers to discuss what they think, and how they feel, about the TEEN Kitchen Table rules. Will they use them as written or challenge them a bit? Maybe the context in which your Kitchen Table Meeting is being held requires a slight variation on the normal rules. It would be useful to discuss these rules in relation to how the Teenagers want to engage the spectators of the Kitchen Table Meeting and how they want to make them actively contribute (or not – that's fine too). For example, they may decide that they want to ask audience members, upon entering the room, to each write down a question they are interested



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in exploring. Or they may decide to have an empty chair at the table to which audience members may be invited to sit for a specified period of time.



Asking specific audience members a direct question and offering audience members snacks from the table at regular intervals are particularly useful ways of ensuring people are paying attention and are not on their phones!



In fact, our Teenagers frequently complained that they were often better behaved, in terms of not taking out their phones or randomly leaving the room for a bathroom break, than most of the adult audience members – probably, because they are more used to the discipline of school.



DIALOGUE  
THE COMMUNITY  
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All in all, discussions about ‘managing the audience’ are super useful to make sure they are made to feel welcome and participate to their fullest capacity



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## THE TEEN KITCHEN TABLE RULES



These rules have been devised and refined by TEEN Ambassadors. They allow TEEN Kitchen Table Meeting sessions to run smoothly with clear expectations of what everybody's participation should be. We often ask one of the Teenagers to read them out at the beginning of the session.

- **RULE ONE - The room must be set out to resemble a kitchen table (or a picnic).**
- **RULE TWO - There has to be food at the Kitchen Table.**

These rules relate to the set-up of the room which is very important in setting the right feel for the event. The most important thing is to let the Teenagers feel like they have control of the room - so letting them set it up in a way they are comfortable is the best policy.

- **RULE THREE - The moderator should be a Teenager.**
- **RULE FOUR - The Teenagers are the experts and the adults in the audience (in rows of chairs outside of the table) are the students.**

These rules are probably the most important because they clearly prioritise the voices of the Teenagers in the room. Challenging the normal hierarchies of school or home, when adults tend to be in charge, leads to a much more constructive discussion as the Teenagers are able to take some ownership over the activity!



- **RULE FIVE - Whilst it is important that the audience is involved, the discussion should focus on the opinion of the Teenagers, so adults should listen and raise their hand if they want to talk. There may be a spare seat at the table which the Teenagers can use for inviting adults to the table, if they wish.**
- **RULE SIX - Comments from the audience should last no longer than three minutes, unless it is agreed upon by the Teenagers to grant the speaker more time.**
- **RULE SEVEN - Opinions should be supported by experiences, or at least examples.**

These rules, related to audience participation, should be explained by the Teenagers to the adults in the audience at the beginning of the TEEN Kitchen Table Meeting so that it is clear for everybody in the room before the discussion starts.



## EQUIPMENT YOU WILL NEED

- Table and chairs for the Teenagers to sit around. The adults, and anyone else in the audience, should place their chairs in parallel circles around the table.
- Food at the table is a must. However, participants are often shy to reach across the table and take

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food unless they are invited. So, ask the Teenagers who are facilitating the session to pause for breaks so that everybody (Teenagers and Adults included) can reach in for a snack!

- Possibly a tablecloth and/or candles to set the mood etc.
- Maybe a microphone (we often use a 'Catchbox', which is a throwable microphone)
- If you want to document the event then you will need a Video Camera, Tripods, or other Recording Device.

## THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATORS

The Kitchen Table Meeting is led by the Teenagers themselves – we have found it best to let them decide and/or vote on which of them will take facilitating role(s) (often two Teenagers do it jointly).



Some of the roles of a Teenage-Facilitator include:

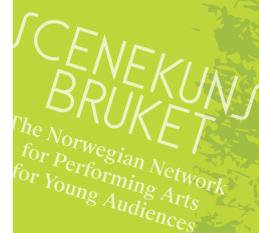
- The Timekeeper: keeping an eye on the clock, knowing when the session is ending, and also reminding contributors not to speak for too long.
- The Questioner: being in charge of pushing the conversation forward by putting new questions to the Teenagers at the table.
- The Includer: involving everybody around the table, for example, by remembering things that were said during the preparation time and reintroducing these to the other Teenagers seated at the table.
- The Audience Involver: involving the audience, asking them questions, inviting them to speak/sit at the table, or to notice when someone from the audience has something to say.

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The Teenagers (and any adults invited to speak briefly) should be encouraged to relate their comments to something which has just been said. This means they need to listen and link their comment to what has just been raised. For example, they may say, "I agree, but would like to add...", "I don't agree because..." or "I don't think I understand what you mean, can you please elaborate?" etc. This structure really helps participants to develop a dialogue where they challenge the opinions being shared, as well as their own mindsets.



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