

SANTA FE IMPROV

Improv4Schools

High School Teen Improv Program Proposal Fall 2024

About Santa Fe Improv

Santa Fe Performing Arts Collaboration dba Santa Fe Improv is a 501(c)(3) is a non-profit organization (santafeimprov.org).

Since 2009, we have taught improv to thousands of people from all walks of life. We have led workshops for The O’Keeffe Museum, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Santa Fe Opera, Santa Fe Public Schools, Rancho La Puerta, General Electric (GE), The Upstart Crows, and St. John’s College. We have been featured by [Santa Fe Reporter](#), Santa Fe New Mexican, The Magazine, KTRC, [The Albuquerque Journal](#), and Santa Fe Magazine. Our Community Programs, including our Improv Jams, and Student Teams Performance Programs, are funded by donors and a grant from the city of Santa Fe. We run a training center and hold several monthly performances at our theater space in the Siler/Rufina arts district.



In the summer of 2024, we hosted our first teen improv camp at the SFI Theater, which was a raging success. This fall, Santa Fe Improv is expanding its programming to a wider community-base, to include the public schools.

Goal

The goal of our multi-week Improv4Schools program is to teach core improv skills to a group of young people who can then apply those skills in their daily lives. Improv teaches skills such as listening, being present, acceptance, and readiness for anything. These portable skills are learned almost immediately through improv. Studies indicate that improv reduces anxiety and increases coping mechanisms. Santa Fe Improv wishes to bring the gift of improv to the Santa Fe community

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at large, at low or no cost to young people. We also offer our teen students the opportunity to perform at the SFI theater at the end of their semester of learning. The show is free to the community and family members.

Why Teens in Schools?

Santa Fe Improv would like to partner with you to operate our program for teens in schools, Improv4Schools. Improv is both fun and serious, and people who learn it tend to love it. We would like students of all backgrounds, ages, and cultures to have access to this serious yet fun learning tool. We already have over 275 adult enrollments in our adult improv classes every year. So, this year we are expanding our community outreach to include in-school programming for teens and will be offering the program to high schools such as Capital High, ATC, and Mandela International Magnet School. There is no cost to the school.



Impact

While improv students learn social, emotional, and executive function skills, improv doesn't feel like school – it's just a new way to play and have fun.

- For administrators: improv is inexpensive to program – no sets, no costumes, no computers, no lights, no sound systems, no scripts to memorize. All we need is a room with space to move around and a door that closes.

A [2019 study](#), *The use of improvisational theater training to reduce social anxiety in adolescents*, conducted specifically with middle and high school age youth, across a ten- week period, published by Dr. Peter Felsman, indicated the following:

- Teens screened for social phobia showed reduced anxiety after improv training.
- Reduced anxiety was correlated with improved social skills, hope, and creativity.
- Students who were more engaged in the program showed the greatest benefit.
- Students agreed that improvisational training was useful in life outside of class.

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These changes in the students over a short period can be profound, and may include “increases in social skills, hope, creative self-efficacy, comfort performing for others, and willingness to make mistakes, along with marginal decreases in symptoms of depression” (Felsman et. al). *See also a [2023 study](#) he co-authored with Santa Fe Improv’s Executive Director, Eric Weiss, A Pilot Experience with Improvisational Theater to Reduce Burnout in Psychiatric Residency*).

Outcome

Students will have fun, develop portable life skills, and explore their creative talents. Improv is for everyone. Anyone can do it, and the benefits are universal. Students will strengthen friendships among their classmates, engage in teamwork, learn to speak in public, and conquer their fears.

Instructors

Our teen-program instructor team has, collectively, over fifty years of teaching, acting, performance, and improv experience. Our instructors teach regularly, and individual profiles and resumes are available on our website.

Eric Weiss, Executive & Artistic Director
<https://santafeimprov.org/project/eric-weiss-2/>

Lucy River, Board President/MD & Instructor
<https://santafeimprov.org/project/lucy-river/>

Kristin Larsen, Instructor/Lead Teen Instructor
<https://santafeimprov.org/project/kristin-larsen/>

Laurel Grace Johnson, Operations Coordinator & Teen Instructor
<https://santafeimprov.org/project/laurel-johnson/>



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Improv4Schools Program Curriculum

We offer a multi-week (preferably an eight-week) series of improv workshops, which can be as little as 50 minutes in length or as long as 90 minutes. The ideal number of students is 16 or fewer, but we can offer two teachers to accommodate up to 30 students if there are two rooms available for breakout students. Each workshop will focus on a foundational technique in improv, these basic elements include:

- Saying Yes---radical agreement
- Saying And: Building on the choices of others while still making strong individual choices
- Emotional and Point of view work
- Psychological flexibility
- Group mind (teamwork and ensemble building)

The class will follow the same structure each week:

1. A group share
2. Physical/cognitive warmup
3. An improv game
4. Guided scene work
5. Cool downs

Workshop #1 Example (90 minute class)

Everyone stands up in a circle. The circle is an integral part of how we begin our workshops. We call it the “Yes” circle. Everyone in the circle is empowered to speak and everyone in the circle is always affirmed.

Group share exercise #1 (everyone in circle):

Introduce yourself, tell your life story in 1 minute.

Focus: Learning to speak extemporaneously, but in a circle so it’s not as presentational as it would be in front of the class. Time is capped at 1 minute and students aren’t required to fill the entire minute, just to stand there in silence if necessary. Allowing themselves to absorb focus.

Warmup #1 (in circle):

5 Things

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Students generate a category, it may be “top 5 Taylor Swift songs” or “top 5 things to do on the weekend.” Player 1 generates the category, players 2,3,4,5, and 6 fill in the categories, player 7 generates a new category and so on.

Focus: Sharing the first thing that comes to mind, not judging the quality of our choices, trying to tamp down our inner critic, and focus on a making a choice vs. making the “correct” choice.

Improv Game #1 (half of the students up/half watching):

Conducted Story

1. In a line facing the audience, players tell a group story.
2. One player is designated “the conductor” and kneels in front of the line.
3. When “the conductor” points to someone they must begin to tell a story.
4. After a few beats have passed and the first player has developed a story line, the pointer will randomly point at someone else who must pick up the story exactly where the first student left off, be it mid-sentence or mid word.

Students may take on a distinct character trait when beginning the story. All other players must tell the story as this “character”.

Focus: Yes/And. Valuing the thing that has come before and adding to that idea. Learning to listen even while we are preparing to speak. Understanding that the group’s efforts are greater than the sum of its parts. Begin to develop mirroring, observing and taking on the traits of another’s physicality and vocality.

Guided Scene-work #1 (2 people up)

Students are given a basic scenario with a who, what, and where. For example, two astronauts, in a space station, eating snacks. The students are then encouraged to improvise a scene. Making choices about their characters’ points of view, their opinions and beliefs. They will practice enhanced listening and being affected by the other students offering. While they are encouraged to use their imaginations to take the scene anywhere, they would like.

Cool Down#1

Count 1-20

We end where we began. Everyone in circle. The group will count 1-20, each player may go as many times as necessary but cannot say two numbers in a row. If two people say a number out loud at the same time, the group must start back at 1.

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What Next? Contact Us!

For more information on Santa Fe Improv's Improv4Schools program, please contact us:

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