Casting Roles, CYT Parents & Hard Choices

Here at CYT, we have to make many hard choices. That’s ok because making hard choices goes hand-in-hand with building character. It’s in our mission statement - we are dedicated to developing character in children of all ages.

Below are some guidelines to help us all stay on track when we parents (and our children) get blindsided by disappointments, hurt feelings, and temptations to make accusations.

It’s for the kids

CYT uses theater to build up kids; we don't use kids to build up theater.

This does not mean, however, that we compromise our productions by casting less than the best actor/singer/dancer available for a certain role.

When CYT does a production, everyone’s goal is to put on the best show we can. This brings about the best show experience for all involved.

CYT is about much more than shows, however. We use theater to build up kids in a number of ways. Here are just some of those ways:

- Seeing kids and parents work together as a family
- Providing a safe and fun environment to foster friendships and community
- Offering class and rehearsal devotions
- Building character (facing disappointments and successes with maturity)
- Increasing acting/singing/dancing skills with a variety of theater classes
- Forming leadership skills through the HYPE leadership program

Fairness, character, and casting

When a child does not get the role they want or think they deserve, they are tempted to become discouraged. We parents may think to ourselves, “they have worked hard and been a part of the program for years, don’t they deserve a role (or even a “better” role)?” This question reveals a mistaken understanding of how the “team” (cast) works.

Kids should work hard, do their best, and behave responsibly because that is the right, mature thing to do. Their reward is that they will eat the fruit of their own integrity. We do not cast kids in “better roles” as a way to build and reward good character. Why? Because a show is a team. We can’t think about what is best for ourselves or our children; we must think of what is best for the team as a whole. When your team is the cast of a play, then the goal is to have the best play possible.

Generally, the more an actor/singer/dancer builds their craft, the more they will shine. Eventually, directors will take note. The Artistic Team’s job is to pick the best actors for each role. That is how it works in the real world - as it should.
Fairness can be defined as “playing by the rules.” Some parents think there is an unwritten rule that if they or their children work hard, for many sessions, then it is only “fair” for their children to eventually get a lead role in a play. They may call this seniority. If their child does not get a lead role, then they feel that CYT is being “unfair.” But this is a false notion because they are judging the situation based on those (mistaken) unwritten rules.

What are the real “rules?” Keep in mind that shows are inherently talent driven - also, there are very few lead roles. Therefore, the “rule” in casting plays is that the best person for the part gets the role. Even if that person is new. Even if that person had lead roles for the past five shows.

If we cast kids based on seniority, then shows would suffer, but more importantly - the morale of the cast would suffer. We cannot and should not try to change this reality based on a sense of “fairness.” But we should support the subjective decisions of the show directors.

Support your show director

In CYT, we choose the best directors available. Show directors, music directors, choreographers, etc. The directors lead this "team" that all of us are a part of when we do a show.

These musical productions are huge undertakings, and directors have a lot of responsibility on their shoulders.

The directors make hard choices about casting - about set design - about choreography, etc. We need to support these choices even if we don't agree with them. That is the only way our team can succeed!

We must stand by our director's choices. Tonja and I have learned this hard lesson over and over. There are a number of times we disagreed with the decisions of the directors concerning our own kid’s roles. When this happened, we dropped our personal preferences, and we made a conscious choice to support the director’s vision and to believe that they were making the best decisions for the show. Anything else would be to sabotage the directors, the show, and the cast at large.

Yes, we chose to stand by the director’s choices even when our own daughters were crying due to great disappointment. Is it hard? Yes! But we did it anyway. Why? Because we want CYT as a whole to succeed so that hundreds of kids can have a great experience.

If we question the show director’s choices or even her character - then we are tearing down the whole team. Also, we are dangerously close to making accusations that can harm the integrity of the whole team. This is one of the biggest areas in which CYT builds character in adults!

Our kids are watching us. We, as parents, are there to model how to handle disappointment and how to be team players. These “hard choices” are opportunities to seize teachable moments and foster important life lessons that will form the character of our children and pave the way for their successful future.

-- David Rainey, CYT Baton Rouge co-founder