

BIG AUNTY



Self-Care Toolkit for Audiences

About this resource

This toolkit is designed to support audiences engaging with the Belgrade Theatre's production of 'Big Aunty', particularly those who might be affected by its themes or content.

The resource contains information about the show that may be useful before you see it, so that you know what to expect and where to find support should you need it.

If you require a copy of this pack in large print or on different colour paper, please contact Communityadmin@belgrade.co.uk

For more information about the Belgrade's work please visit www.belgrade.co.uk

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About the show:

Big Aunty's dead. Her funeral's back in Jamaica, where she returned some years ago. The children she brought up together long ago, but have lost touch and gone their separate ways, are now forced to come together again, all these years later.

Big Aunty was the matriarch – a Mum to some, a 'second' Mum to others. She took in waifs and strays from reckless parents when they had nowhere else to go, and she gave them a home. But now she's gone and there's a Big Aunty-shaped hole in everyone's world.

Now they'll need to confront, not just each other, but their difficult pasts, and uncertain futures.

'Big Aunty' is devised and directed by the Belgrade's Creative Director, Corey Campbell (*Fighting Irish, Seaview, Freeman*), and marks the first home-produced show of the 2023 spring season.

Content Warnings & Advisories:

The play contains:

- References to the death of a loved one, including one reference to the death of an infant.
- References to abuse (implied sexual abuse).
- Exploration of the breakdown in a family relationship.
- Depiction of a funeral.
- Strong language.

You can find a detailed outline of the story in this pack, which will help you to know what to expect.

Tips for looking after yourself

- **Watch the show with others:** It may help to watch with others who know you well, particularly those who are aware of any connections you may have to the themes of the show. If this isn't possible, try to let a family member or friend know in advance so that they'll be able to support you should you need someone to talk to afterwards.
- **Read the synopsis of the story:** If you're concerned that you may be affected by some of the themes and content of the show it may help to read a synopsis of the story beforehand. You can find one on p.5 of this pack.
- **Take a break:** Remember you're in control. If you need to step away, take a moment to go for a short walk or get some fresh air.
- **Visit the self-care space:** On the Belgrade's upper foyer (Burbidge Gallery), you'll find a self-care installation, which was created with young people at Blue Coat School in Coventry. This space is designed to offer a quiet, creative place if you need time out or want to reflect on the show afterwards.
- **Remember Your Breathing:** Regulating your breathing is a simple and effective way to help you feel calm. Try taking deep breaths in and out, breathing in through your nose for four seconds and out through your mouth for four seconds.
- **Ground Yourself:** If you feel anxious, or become triggered at any point, you can help to ground yourself by focusing on your senses. Acknowledge 5 things you can see around you, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch (your clothing, the seat you're sitting in etc), 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

Synopsis

This synopsis is written for anyone who would like to have a greater understanding of the sensitive content prior to seeing the show, therefore please be aware that if you read on there will be significant spoilers.

Scene 1

Shaun is sitting anxiously at home, waiting for an online interview to start. His mobile phone rings, playing a loud ringtone. He quickly rejects the call.

The interviewer appears on screen and the interview begins – a series of informal, quick-fire questions. The mobile phone rings again and Shaun quickly silences it. The interviewer reassures Shaun, encouraging him to relax, as this is a first stage interview.

The questions resume and as Shaun begins to speak about himself, he is interrupted again by the phone, which vibrates on his desk. It is followed soon after by the ringing of the doorbell. Shaun is slightly flustered by the interruptions but manages to continue the interview. There's knocking at the door, which soon becomes loud banging.

The door is suddenly thrown off its hinges, and Shaun's sister, Naomi, appears. She demands to know why he hasn't been answering his phone. Shaun attempts to concentrate on the interview, but Naomi closes the laptop cutting off the meeting. Shaun accuses her of ruining the biggest interview of his life, telling Naomi that he doesn't have time for whatever it is she's come for. He's too busy.

Naomi reveals that there's been a death. Shaun asks if their brother Marcus is ok, and she reassures him that he is – he's outside. Big Aunty has died, and the funeral is in a couple of days. She and Marcus have known for weeks and have been trying to let Shaun know.

Marcus appears through the broken door. He tells Shaun that the funeral is taking place in Jamaica and that he and Naomi are due to fly out tomorrow. They've delayed as long as possible in the hope they'd get through to Shaun but had to make plans when they had no response. Marcus leaves.

Shaun promises Naomi that he'll get a seat on the plane. He tells her that Marcus still hates him.

Scene 2

On the plane to Jamaica, Marcus and Naomi take their seats next to each other. Shaun arrives, he is messaging on his phone. He sits away from his siblings. Naomi encourages Marcus to talk to Shaun. She understands why he's angry, but feels he needs to move on.

The pre-flight emergency checks begin. Naomi goes to text her mum, realising after a beat that she's no longer here.

The flight takes off. Naomi makes an excuse to leave her seat so that she can speak with Shaun - she wonders how he's feeling. Shaun tells her that he's shocked by the recent news of Big Aunty's death. Naomi reflects on how difficult death is – not only the loss itself but balancing funeral arrangements with the demands of daily life, which doesn't stop.

Naomi tells Shaun that he and Marcus need to organise the order of service for the funeral. Shaun is reluctant, he wants Marcus to do it. Naomi encourages him to speak with his brother, prompting Shaun to change seats to sit with Marcus.

Marcus informs Shaun that the eulogy for Big Aunty has been split into two parts. Naomi will take the start, covering the early years of her mum's life, but he wants Shaun to cover the end. Shaun says that he's not best placed to speak to the end of Big Aunty's life, given that he's been estranged from the family. Marcus reveals that he hadn't seen her either.

The siblings reminisce about their childhood. Marcus tells Shaun that he used to have vivid dreams about the past, specifically about the family BBQs, something he hasn't done since Big Aunty's death. He recognises the garden from his dreams as Shaun's.

Marcus reveals that Big Aunty died alone.

Scene 3

Arrival in Jamaica. Shaun is trying to reach the interviewer from the day before. He's forced to leave a voicemail apologising for being cut off, explaining that there's been a personal emergency.

At the funeral home, Marcus is waiting for his siblings to arrive. Big Aunty's coffin is brought in. On the top are three letters, one for each of Big Aunty's children.

Marcus wonders what she wants him to say – he used to believe Big Aunty knew everything that went on under her roof. He questions how she didn't know that he was being abused, and that he had to be the one to tell her. Big Aunty had promised him that she would sort it out, but cautioned him against telling anyone else.

Naomi arrives, followed moments later by Shaun. Marcus reminds them that Shaun's childhood nickname used to be 'Kevin', after the character in the film 'Home Alone'. They tease Shaun about it, encouraging him to sing a song from the film.

At the side of the coffin, Naomi takes a moment to speak to her mum. She apologises for having missed so much already but has tried her best – she has her own family now. Naomi finds the letters on the top of the casket, taking hers and handing the other to Shaun.

Marcus opens his letter and reads it aloud. It's a message from Big Aunty telling him that she loves him, and that she hopes he can forgive her for the decisions she made in the past. She reminds him that family is the most precious gift she can leave him.

Naomi is next to read her letter. The message encourages her to celebrate her mum's life and not to mourn the death. Big Aunty wants her to look after her brothers and keep the family together.

Shaun is last. He holds back as he wants to save his letter to read later, after the funeral. Naomi asks why, as it's what they came here to do. Shaun accuses his siblings of treating him like a child, but Marcus argues that it's not about the letter, it's the way Shaun does things – he needs to think about someone other than himself. Shaun retaliates. He tells his siblings that all he ever does is think about others, and that he's been keeping quiet for Big Aunty's sake since he got to Jamaica.

Marcus drags Shaun towards the coffin, demanding that he says what he's got to say to their mum. Shaun tells them that he is done with feeling guilty – he recognised a change in Marcus when they were young but didn't understand the cause. When he finally found the strength, he spoke up about their father's abuse. Marcus accuses him of waiting until he could leave for university to say something, using the knowledge to benefit himself, as an excuse to get away.

Marcus takes Shaun's letter.

Scene 4

Nine Night. Naomi is dancing to the music as Uncle approaches. He hasn't seen her in years and can't believe how different she looks now that she's a grown woman. Naomi draws Marcus into the conversation in a bid to extricate herself.

Marcus and Uncle talk, they're joined by Mandy and her friend from England, Jade, who wonders what the party is for. Mandy corrects her – tonight is to mark the death of her friend, Vivienne. Marcus and Shaun wonder who Vivienne is. Mandy informs them it was their mother's name, which they always believed was Mavis. Marcus reflects that there's still a lot the siblings don't know about her.

Shaun wonders why Marcus is now talking to him, as he made it clear earlier that he wasn't wanted. Marcus tells Shaun he mustn't have been listening if that's what he took from their conversation. He resents Shaun for his part in revealing the truth about what happened. If it wasn't for Shaun the past could have been buried with Big Aunty.

Naomi reappears. She wants the family to heal and tells the brothers that dancing together would be a start. Shaun and Marcus join the dance, giving them a moment to connect with each other.

The dancing finishes as Mandy, Uncle and Cousin Reno appear. Those gathered are called together to celebrate Big Aunty's life. Cousin Reno reflects that everyone dies one day and urges not to wait in order to right wrongs. Where there is breath there is hope.

Scene 5

Marcus and Shaun are getting ready for the funeral. As they dress, they remember getting ready for church as children, affectionately mimicking Big Aunty.

Marcus puts Shaun's letter from Big Aunty into his jacket pocket while he isn't looking.

Scene 6

The funeral. The procession takes place.

Naomi reads the eulogy for her mum, describing how her parents met and their desire to make a new life together in England, where they often faced discrimination. Vivienne, a.k.a. Big Aunty, struggled to conceive, but finally became pregnant with twins, one of whom, Naomi's brother, didn't survive.

It's Shaun's turn to speak. He begins to describe how Big Aunty opened her home to her nephews, but falters. Marcus steps in to finish the eulogy telling the congregation that Big Aunty took them in from her sisters – Naomi, Shaun and Marcus are cousins. Big Aunty had returned to Jamaica after her husband died several years earlier.

Scene 7

Naomi, Shaun and Marcus stand by the graveside. They begin to fix it up, rearranging the flowers. They joke that not knowing Big Aunty's real name helped them to make a saving on the wreath.

Shaun receives a call, it's about the interview, which didn't go his way. Naomi asks if it's because of them, and Marcus promises that there will be other jobs. Shaun reveals that it was an interview to adopt a child, something he wanted to do in order to give and 'make things right'. Marcus and Naomi offer to help him reapply, promising that it's not over.

Marcus draws Shaun attention to Big Aunty's letter, which is now in his pocket. Shaun reads it. The message asks him to hold his family dear, and requests that he sing one last song as they lay Big Aunty's body to rest. Shaun is upset that he didn't read the letter earlier and that he hasn't honoured this last request. Marcus encourages him to sing the song now.

Shaun sings 'O Holy Night' as the siblings stand together.

Signposting

If you have been affected by any of the themes of 'Big Aunty', the following organisations can offer expert advice and support.

This information is correct as of April 2023.

Support Organisations for Grief & Bereavement:

[Compassionate Communities](#) - Offer Bereavement Point support groups in four Coventry locations, Rugby and Nuneaton, and 1:1 Listening Hour appointments for people over the age of 18. Open to all, regardless of when bereavement occurred. Drop ins welcome. For more information: visit compassionatecw@uhcw.nhs.uk or telephone 07500 782658. Peer support groups can be booked via Eventbrite at <https://bit.ly/3DS1UwA>

[The Good Grief Trust](https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/) - Helping those affected by grief. <https://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org/>

Support Organisations for Survivors of Abuse:

[National Association for People Abused in Childhood](#) - Offers support to adult survivors of all types of childhood abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect.

Free, confidential helpline: 0808 801 0331. Open Monday to Thursday: 10am – 9pm and Friday: 10am – 6pm. <https://napac.org.uk/>

[Sexual Abuse Support](#) - If you are over the age of 16, living in England & Wales, and have been affected by any form of sexual violence or abuse, specialist and confidential support is available 24/7. Call 0808 500 2222 or visit <https://247sexualabusesupport.org.uk> to chat online or find out more.

Support Organisations for Family Estrangement:

[StandAlone](#) - Helping people of all ages that become estranged or disowned from their family or a key member of their family. Visit: <https://www.standalone.org.uk/about/>

Other Resources

[The Grief Café](#)

Following each performance of 'Big Aunty', Charlotte Temple and Lisa Sant from the Compassionate Communities team at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust will be hosting a grief café in our Shortland Foyer (ground floor).

The Grief Cafe is a space for anyone wanting to connect with others around experiences of grief and bereavement.

Charlotte has a background in hospital nursing and believes in the enriching power of "memento mori" – thinking about death.

Lisa is a qualified bereavement counsellor with a special passion for children's work and has a talent for helping people find their way through the tangle of grief. Charlotte and Lisa will be supported by a committed team of volunteers.



Charlotte Temple



Lisa Sant

[Belgrade Self-Care Space](#)

A self-care space, which has been created with local young people, is located on the Belgrade's Burbidge Gallery (upper foyer). The installation is designed to offer a quiet place for anyone needing to take time out during the show or reflect on it afterwards.