



Child Protection: Policy on Safeguarding the Welfare of Children

The policy recognises that 'The Children Act 1989' places specific duties on agencies to co-operate in the interests of vulnerable children:

1. This policy acknowledges that:
 - a) Child abuse exists and can present itself in any of its forms, physical, emotional, neglect or sexual, alone or in combination.
 - b) Children may be abused and/or neglected by their parents, carers, guardians or other trusted adults as well as by strangers.
 - c) Abuse may be perpetrated by individuals, groups or networks of individuals.
 - d) Children may also be abused by other children.
2. Children and young persons under the age of 18 of all races, religions and cultures, with or without disabilities, from any model of family life have an equal right to protection from abuse.
3. Local authorities have the legal responsibility for the protection of children and normally have policies in place for those working with children within that authority. Theatrics has a responsibility to report all allegations of abuse to the Social Service Departments of the Authorities in which the allegation has occurred.
4. Record keeping is essential in relation to child protection issues. Records will be kept of all incidences related to child abuse, both allegations and concerns. These records will be kept in a separate file by the Principal.
5. To ensure compliance with local authority policies, the School will ensure that all Teachers complete a disclosure application form and undergo a Criminal Records Bureau Check. Teachers will be individually responsible for paying the cost of CRB checks.
6. The School will undertake to observe principles of confidentiality in all procedures related to child protection.
- 7 The School will provide guidance and support, including a Code of Conduct, to all Teachers working with children and young people.

Child Protection

Guidance Note (1)

Police Checks for Teachers Working in Independent and Community Organisations.

Why is it necessary for me to have a police check?

During your classes & shows you will be working with children and young persons under the age of 18, for whom there are legal safeguards against the risk of abuse. The local authorities are the legally responsible bodies, and these normally have policies in place which require all those individuals working with children within the authority to undergo a police check. This includes all Staff of Theatrics Stage School.

So, the check is to protect children and young people?

Primarily yes, but it protects you too.

What kind of police check does Theatrics require?

A Criminal Records Bureau Check (enhanced police check)

This check covers three different areas of information:

(i) a criminal record check;

This will indicate any convictions for offences for the named adult.

(ii) criminal intelligence check;

This check interrogates any wider intelligence that the Police hold on the adult, for example, drug/alcohol misuse, mental health/domestic violence issues that have come to the notice of the Police.

(iii) general registry check:

This check indicates any criminal investigation that has been undertaken in relation to the named adult that has not resulted in a prosecution. The lack of prosecution may be for a number of reasons, for example, the investigation may not have been presented to court for prosecution because of the lack of corroborative medical evidence. This area of intelligence is therefore particularly important in relation to the safety of children.

Social Services and the Police are also aware of a high number of child abuse investigations which are not presented to the court for prosecution as the child/young person is not willing or able to give evidence in court against the alleged perpetrator. This does not mean that the alleged abuse has not taken place. This check also highlights any intelligence about patterns of behaviour in relation to the named adult, for example, whether there is any grooming behaviour or whether certain age or gender would seem to have been targeted.

Who is responsible for ensuring Teachers checks are done?

The Principal, who has overall responsibility for activities in which young persons under the age of 18 are included, is responsible for ensuring any Teachers in contact with these performers have undergone a CRB check prior to engagement.

How often is the check done?

The current position is that you will need to undergo a check only once unless you change address. You will be able to work with children and young people during your time at Theatrics and possibly thereafter in any setting without the need to undergo further checks unless required by other employers.

Child Protection

Guidance Note (2)

Defining, recognising and dealing with abuse

What is abuse?

The definitions of abuse outlined below are taken from 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', Department of Health 1999.

Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting; by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger.

Physical Abuse:

May involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

Emotional Abuse:

This is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless and unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.

Sexual Abuse:

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may or may not involve physical contact and includes children looking at pornographic material or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Neglect:

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failure to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

Organised Abuse

Organised or multiple abuse may be defined as abuse involving one or more abuser and a number of related or non-related abused children and young people. The abusers concerned may be acting in concert to abuse children, sometimes acting in isolation, or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for abuse.

Note: Children whose situations do not currently fit the above categories may also be at significant risk of harm. This could include situations where another child in the household has been harmed or the household contains a known child abuser.

How do I identify child abuse?

Child abuse can take place in a number of different settings, of which the following are examples:

It is likely to occur most commonly where the young person knows the individual/s and is trusted. This can be a parent, carer, babysitter, sibling, relative, or friend of the child or of the family. The abuser is sometimes someone in authority such as a teacher, youth leader, children's worker or church worker/leader.

The abuser is sometimes a paedophile or other person who sets out to join organisations to obtain access to children.

Theatrics Staff, in their work with children and young people have a responsibility to act if abuse comes to light and, as far as possible, to protect children from the possibility of being abused.

What are the signs of abuse?

Extreme care should be taken as misreading signs of abuse can result in significant harm or trauma to the child and their family. In general you will not have the expertise to diagnose child abuse but you do have a responsibility to be alert and aware of the signs.

Just because a child exhibits one of the signs listed below, this does not mean that they have been abused. Nevertheless, the presence of one or more of the signs, or their repeated presence, might raise concerns and you should share these with the Principal who is designated to deal with matters of child protection.

Physical signs

Any injuries, bruises, bites, burns, fractures, etc, not consistent with the explanation given for them.
Injuries which occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc.
Injuries which appear to have been caused by a weapon e.g. Cuts, welts, etc.
Injuries which have not received medical attention.
Instances where children are kept away from the group inappropriately or without explanation.
Self-mutilation or self-harm e.g. Cutting, slashing, drug abuse.

Emotional signs

Changes or regression in mood and behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clinging.
Also depression/aggression.
Nervousness/inappropriate fear of particular adults e.g. Frozen watchfulness.
Sudden changes in behavior e.g. Under-achievement or lack of concentration.
Inappropriate relationships with peers and/or adults e.g. Excessive dependence.
Attention-seeking behaviour.
Persistent tiredness.

Neglect signs

Regular poor hygiene.
Persistent tiredness.
Inadequate clothing.
Excessive appetite.
Failure to thrive e.g. Poor weight gain.
Consistently being left alone and unsupervised.

Sexual signs

Any direct disclosure made by a child concerning sexual abuse.
Child with excessive preoccupation with sexual matters or who regularly engages in age inappropriate sexual play.
Preoccupation with sexual activity through words or play.
Child who is sexually provocative or seductive with adults.
Other emotional signs may be indicative of sexual or some other form of abuse.

How should I respond to allegations/concerns regarding abuse?

1. You should report it immediately to the Principal who is designated to deal with matters of child protection. You should not discuss your suspicions or allegations with anyone else.
2. Under no circumstances attempt to carry out any investigation into allegations or suspicions of abuse. It is the task of Social Services to investigate the matter under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
3. Referrals may lead to:
 - a) No further action.
 - b) Directly to the provision of services or other help.
 - c) A fuller assessment of the needs and circumstances of the child which may in turn lead to child protection inquiries.
 - d) Emergency action to safeguard the child.
 - e) Child protection inquiries being undertaken.

General Points

When talking to a child about possible abuse:
Keep calm - do not appear shocked or disgusted.
Accept what the child says without passing judgement (however unlikely the disclosure may sound).
Look directly at the child.
Be honest.
Let them know you will need to tell someone else, don't promise confidentiality.
Be aware the child may have been threatened and fear reprisals for having spoken to you.
Never push for information or question the child as this can undermine any subsequent criminal, investigation. If at any point a child decides not to continue, accept that and let them know that you are ready to listen should they wish to continue at any time.

Helpful things to say or show

Show acceptance of what the child says 'I take what you are saying very seriously'. 'I am pleased that you have told me'. 'Thank you for telling me'
If appropriate: 'It isn't your fault and you are not to blame at all', 'I am sorry that happened to you'
'I will help you'.

Things not to say

'Why didn't you say something before?'
'I really can't believe it'.
'Are you sure this has happened?'.
'Why?' 'Where?' 'When?' 'Who?' 'What?' 'How?'.
Don't make false promises - like confidentiality - be honest now, any lies will be further abuse and betrayal.
Never make statements such as 'I am shocked!' or 'don't tell anyone else'.

Concluding the conversation

Reassure the child that they were right to tell you.

Let the child know what you are going to do next and tell them that you will let them know what is happening at each stage.

What to do after the Conversation

Make notes about the conversation as soon as possible after the discussion. Record exactly what the child said and when he or she said it and what was happening immediately beforehand e.g. (description of the activity). Note the time, date and place of the conversation and the name of any other person present. If the initial note is handwritten, keep it if it is subsequently typed up.

Inform the designated Child Protection employee (Principal), immediately.

The Principal should contact the Social Services Area Office.

Do not be tempted to try to investigate further the claims - this could lead to contamination of the evidence and could jeopardize any Police investigation and criminal prosecution activity.

What are the boundaries when I am with children?

You are responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries and/or ensuring that meeting your own emotional needs is not dependent on your relationships with children and young people. Keep everything public. A hug in the context of a group is very different from a hug behind closed doors. Touch should be related to a child's needs not your own. Touch should be age appropriate and generally be initiated by the child rather than you. Avoid any physical activity, which is, or may be construed as, sexually stimulating to the adult or child.

Summary of procedures in relation to Police Checks & Criminal Convictions

Teachers

1. All Teachers whose work will take them into contact with children are required to undergo a disclosure for all criminal record information. It is the responsibility of the Principal appointing the Teacher to make this known to them, and to ensure that they have completed a disclosure form on appointment or, in the case of current Teachers, well in advance of contact with children.

2. In the event of the check disclosing a criminal record of any kind:

Disclosures of criminal activity will be considered by the Principal and a decision will be made about the continuation of employment or the adjustment of the range of duties of the Teacher. If a conviction related to child abuse has emerged Theatrics reserves the right to terminate employment of the convicted person.

3. Annual monitoring

Teachers will be required to sign an annual self declaration indicating that they have had no criminal conviction. It is the responsibility of the Principal to ensure this is signed and placed on the Teachers members file.

4. Withholding of information

The School reserves the right to terminate employment of a member of Staff if it becomes apparent that she/he has deliberately withheld or falsified information in relation to any convictions.

Data Security

5. No information regarding criminal convictions or disclosure will be released to any individual or organisation not authorised to receive it under Section 124 of the Police Act, Part V, 1977.

6. All disclosure information about Teachers, including annual self declarations, to be held securely under the direct supervision of the Principal.



Theatrics Code of Conduct for Teachers

To ensure that all forms of abuse are prevented and to help protect people who work with young performers the following guidelines should be followed:

Always be publicly open when working with children. Avoid situations where you and an individual child are completely unobserved.

- If a performer needs to be physically positioned or corrected, this should be provided openly and the performer should be asked first. Care is needed, as it is difficult to maintain hand positions when providing manual support if the child is constantly moving. Some parents are becoming increasingly sensitive about touching children and their views should always be carefully considered.
- Where possible parents should take responsibility for their children in changing rooms. If groups are to be supervised in changing rooms, always ensure that adults work in pairs.
- Where mixed groups perform away from the studio's they should always be accompanied by at least one male adult and one female adult.
- Teachers must respect the rights and dignity and worth of all and treat everyone with equality.
- Teachers must place the well-being and safety of the performer above the development of performance. They should follow all guidelines laid down by Theatrics and be adequately insured. (Theatrics provides insurance for Teachers)
- Teachers must ensure that the activities, which they direct or advocate, are appropriate to the age, maturity and ability of the performer.
- Teachers should always promote the positive aspects of stage craft (e.g. team play).
- Teachers must consistently display high standards of personal behaviour and appearance.
- Teachers should never overtly criticise performers or use sarcasm where it may cause the child to lose self-esteem or confidence
- Teachers must avoid communicating with students on social networking sites such as Facebook MSN etc. Do not invite Students to become friends nor accept invitations from them either. Networking with senior students (over age 16) must be limited to Theatre company specifics and even then is not encouraged.

Everyone should also be aware that as a general rule it does not make sense to:

- Spend amounts of time alone with children away from others.
- Take children alone on car journeys, however short.
- Take children to your home if they will be alone with you.
- Contact children by text, email or through social networks.
- If it should arise that such situations are unavoidable they should only take place with the full knowledge and consent of someone in charge from Theatrics and the child's parents/carer.

If you accidentally hurt a child, or cause distress in any manner, or the child appears to be sexually aroused by your actions, or misunderstands, or misinterprets something you have done, report the incident as soon as possible. Parents/carers should also be informed of the occurrence.

You should never:

- Engage in rough physical or provocative games, including horseplay.
- Share a room with a child.
- Permit or engage in any form of inappropriate touching.
- Permit children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun.
- Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for itself. However it may be necessary for a volunteer to do things of a personal nature for children particularly if they are very young or disabled. Such tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of the parent/carer. There is also a need in these instances to be responsive to the child's reactions - if a child is fully dependant upon you talking with him/her about what you are doing and give choices where possible.
- Agree to meet a young performer on your own.

You should always:

- Report to the Principal any behavioural issues, however minor so that should there be a complaint from the student or parent / guardian about the teacher, the principal has a record of the incident and can deal appropriately with the situation.