

## CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

### Responsibilities of the Society

At the outset of any production involving children, the Society will:

- undertake a risk assessment and monitor risk throughout the production process,
- identify at the outset the person with designated responsibility for child protection,
- recruit chaperones and other individuals with responsibility for children, including appropriate vetting,
- ensure that children will be supervised at all times,
- know how to get in touch with the local authority social services, in case it needs to report a concern.
- in the event of a licence for a child to perform being required, application must be made to the Local Education Authority for the area in which the child lives.

### Parents

- the Society believes it to be important that there is a partnership between parents and the Society. Parents are encouraged to be involved in the activities of the Society and to share responsibility for the care of children.
- all parents will be given a copy of the Society's Statement of Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Procedures,
- all parents have the responsibility to collect (or arrange collection of) their children after rehearsals or performances. To this end parents should supply the chaperone with a written note setting out the arrangements for collection, eg the name(s) of persons who will be collecting the child after the performance. It is NOT the responsibility of the Society to take children home.

### Unsupervised contact

- the Society will attempt to ensure that no adult has unsupervised contact with children,
- if possible there will always be two adults in the room when working with children,
- if unsupervised contact is unavoidable, steps will be taken to minimise risk. For example, work will be carried out in a public area or in a designated room with a door open.
- if it is predicted that an individual is likely to require unsupervised contact with children, he/she may be required to obtain a criminal record disclosure.

### Physical contact

- all adults will maintain a safe and appropriate distance from children,
- adults will only touch children when it is absolutely necessary in relation to the particular activity,
- adults will seek the consent of the child prior to any physical contact and the purpose of the contact shall be made clear.
- dressing rooms, toilets and washing facilities should be separate from adults and separate for boys and girls aged 5 or over

### Managing sensitive information

- the Society has a policy and procedures for the taking, using and storage of photographs or images of children,
- permission will be sought from the parents for use of photographic material featuring children for promotional or other purposes,
- the Society's web-based materials and activities will be carefully monitored for inappropriate use,
- the Society will ensure confidentiality in order to protect the rights of its members, including the safe handling, storage and disposal of any sensitive information such as criminal record disclosures.

### Suspicious of abuse

- any person to whom a child confides that abuse has taken place should remain calm, but should not delay taking action. That person should listen carefully to what has been said, allow the child to tell him/her what has occurred at their own pace, and questions should only be asked for clarification. Questions that suggest a particular response should be avoided. No promise should be made that the situation will be kept secret. The child should be re-assured that s/he "did the right thing" in telling someone and made clear to him/her that it will be necessary to share this information with other, but that it will only be shared with people who need to know and who should be able to help.

- The child should be told what will happen next.
- a person witnessing, suspecting or being told by a child that abuse has allegedly occurred should make a note of the occurrence and a note of what action s/he took for his/her own records, in case there is a follow-up in which s/he is involved. The date; time; name of the child; name of person(s) against whom the allegations have been made; a note of what was said, using the child's own words and details of any other relevant person involved should be recorded. The note should be signed and dated by the person making the record.
- any person witnessing, suspecting or being told by a child that abuse has allegedly occurred while that child was in the care of the Society should, in the first instance, make this known to the person with responsibility for child protection, and convey concerns also to the Chairperson of the Society. If it suspected that the person with responsibility for child protection is the source of the problem the Chairperson should be informed immediately. It will be the Chairperson's responsibility to liaise with the relevant authorities, usually social services or the police.
- if a serious allegation is made against any member of the Society, chaperone, or other person connected with the Society, that person will be excluded from the theatre. rehearsal rooms etc, and will not be allowed to have unsupervised contact with any children in the production.

### **Records**

- in all situations, including those in which the cause of concern arises from a disclosure made in confidence, the details of an allegation or reported incident should be recorded regardless of whether or not the concerns have been shared with a statutory child protection agency.
- an accurate note should be made of the date and time of the alleged incident or disclosure, the parties involved, what was said or done and by whom, any action taken to investigate the matter, any further action taken, eg suspension of the membership of an individual; if relevant why the matter was not referred to a statutory agency and the name of the persons reporting and to whom it was reported.
- the record will be stored securely and shared only with those who need to know about the incident or allegation.

### **Rights and confidentiality**

- if a complaint is made against a member of the Society s/he will be made aware of his rights under the Society's disciplinary procedures,
- both the alleged abuser and the child who is thought to have been abused have the right to confidentiality under the Data Protection act 1998. Care should be taken not to compromise any possible criminal investigation through the release of inappropriate information.

### **Accidents**

- to avoid accidents, chaperones and children will be advised of "house rules" regarding health & safety and will be notified of areas that are out of bounds. Children will be advised of the clothing and footwear appropriate to the work that will be undertaken.
- if a child is injured while in the care of the Society, a designated first-aider will administer first aid and the accident will be recorded in the Society's accident book. This record will be counter-signed by the person with responsibility for child protection.
- if a child attends a rehearsal/performance with an obvious physical injury a record of this will be made in the accident book. This record will be counter-signed by the person with responsibility for child protection. This record can be useful if a formal allegation is later made that the injury was sustained while in the care of the Society and will be a record that the child did not sustain the injury while participating in the production.

### **Criminal record disclosures**

- if the Society believes it is in its best interests to obtain criminal record disclosures for chaperones or other personnel it will inform the individual of the necessary procedures and the level of disclosure required. In most cases, due to the degree of sole supervisory contact between a chaperone and the children, the level that will be required by the Society is "Enhanced", but if contact is always supervised a "Standard" disclosure will be sufficient.
- the Society will have a written code of practice for the handling of disclosure information,
- the Society will ensure that information contained in the disclosure is not misused.

### **Chaperones**

- the Society is responsible for ensuring that, during the period beginning with the first performance and ending with the last performance covered by the licence, children performing in a production will be in the charge of a person approved by the Licensing Authority. The Regulations describe this person as a matron although it need not necessarily be a woman and may be the child's parent or teacher. The chaperone's duties inter alia are to ensure that the child is properly supervised
- chaperones will be appointed by the Society for the care of children during a production. By law the

chaperone is acting in loco parentis and should exercise the care which a good parent might be reasonably expected to give to a child. The maximum number of children in a chaperone's care shall not exceed 12,

- potential chaperones will be required to produce photographic proof of identity (eg passport, driving licence) and two references from individuals with knowledge of their previous work with children, unless already well known to the Society. They will also be asked to sign a declaration stating that there is no reason why they would be considered unsuitable to work with children.
- chaperones will be made aware of the Society's Child Protection Policy and Procedures,
- chaperones will not usually have unsupervised access to children in their care. If unsupervised access is unavoidable, or if this is a required of the local authority, a criminal record disclosure will be sought.
- where chaperones are not satisfied with the conditions for the children, they should bring this to the attention of the Chairperson. If changes cannot be made satisfactorily the chaperone should consider not allowing the child to continue.
- if a chaperone considers that a child is unwell or too tired to continue, the chaperone must inform the producer and not allow the child to continue.
- under the Dangerous Performances Act, no child of compulsory school age is permitted to do anything which may endanger life or limb. This could include working on wires or heavy lifting. Chaperones should tell the producer to cease using children in this way, and should contact the Local Authority.
- during performances, chaperones will be responsible for meeting children at the stage door and signing them into the building,
- children will be kept together at all times except when using separate dressing rooms,
- chaperones will be aware of where the children are at all times,
- children are not to leave the theatre unsupervised by chaperones unless in the company of their parents,
- children will be adequately supervised while going to and from the toilets,
- during shows children shall not enter an adult dressing-room unless accompanied by a chaperone. Similarly, an adult shall not enter a child's dressing-room unless a chaperone is present.
- chaperones should be aware of the safety arrangements and first aid procedures in the venue, and will ensure that children in their care do not place themselves and others in danger,
- chaperones should ensure that any accidents are reported to and recorded in the Society's accident book,
- chaperones should examine accident books each day. If an accident has occurred, the producer is not allowed to use that child until a medically qualified opinion has been obtained (not just the word of the parent or child),
- parents should supply chaperones with written confirmation of the arrangements for collecting their children after performances. If someone different is to collect the child a telephone call should be made to the parent to confirm the arrangements if this is not covered in the written record,
- children should be signed out when leaving and a record made of the person collecting,
- if a parent has not collected the child, it is the duty of the chaperone to stay with that child or make arrangements to take them home.