

Fact Series

Child Protection Policy (Model)

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MODEL CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

NODA Headquarters regularly receives requests from affiliated societies for advice about implementing a Child Protection Policy. The following is offered as a set of model guidelines which can be adapted by societies. Whilst every care has been taken in preparation of the Model Child Protection Policy, societies must rely on their own judgment and take their own advice as to its appropriateness for their particular circumstances.

The NSPCC has noted the following characteristics as being common in organisations where abuse is most likely to exist. These provide a useful first step in considering the work of your society:

- Minimal supervision of children
- Inadequate guidelines or procedures for dealing with concerns about children
- Lack of specialist skills or knowledge about child protection
- Minimal staff support
- Children left to their own devices
- Discouragement of parental involvement (eg. as observers or as accompanying adults)
- Lack of resources
- Gaps between policy and practice
- Poor co-ordination and lack of consistency in supervision

This factsheet aims to help affiliated societies avoid these characteristics and ensure the protection of children and vulnerable adults in the society's care. A child is defined as anyone up to the age of 18 years. Please bear in mind, however, that the regulations relating to children in theatrical performances apply up to the age of 16, so young people between the ages of 16 and 18 will need to be treated differently from children under 16.

Societies who wish to register as a charity should note that the Charity Commission now asks all organisations applying for registration, which may have direct contact with children, for a copy of their child protection policy. NODA's Model Child Protection Policy has been accepted by the Charity Commission as being appropriate for amateur theatre groups. Affiliated societies wishing to register as a charity do not need to file an individual copy with the Charity Commission, but need only to confirm that they have adopted the NODA policy.

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Professional support for amateur theatre

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Registered charity number 256460 Registered company number 241572 Patron: The Lord Lloyd Webber

If you are working with, or providing services for children you should have a written protection policy and set of procedures in place. All your members should be fully aware of them, understand their responsibilities and be 'signed up' to the policy and procedures. Your policy need not be more than 1 or 2 sides of A4, but it should provide the foundation for:

- An understanding across your society of its role in the protection of children in its care.
- Practical objectives for ensuring the protection of children.
- Reasons why the society needs formal procedures, including the recruitment and training of relevant personnel, responding to allegations of abuse, and who it is that takes lead responsibility within the society for the protection of children.
- Acquiring basic information on current legislation and issues.
- Accessing further information and advice.

Procedures set out how to put your policy into practice. Your policy and procedures should be dated and should be reviewed and updated regularly. They will be particular to how your society engages with children. Your written procedures should include:

- Risk assessment and risk management, eg. areas of potential hazard, routes to and from the rehearsal and performance venue etc.
- Recruitment practices.
- Training provision.
- Project planning and implementation.
- What to do if there is a problem.

Please note that it is NOT the role of the society to decide whether a child has been abused or not. This is the task of Social Services. It is, however, everybody's responsibility to ensure that concerns are shared and appropriate action taken.

Photographs and images of children

A number of societies have asked for advice about the risks posed, directly and indirectly, to children and young people through the use of photographs on web sites and in other publications such as programmes. Photographs can be used as a means of identifying children when they are accompanied with personal information, for example, "this is X who goes to such-and-such a school and who likes Westlife". This information can make a child vulnerable to an individual who may wish to start to 'groom' that child for abuse. Secondly, the content of the photo can be used or adapted for inappropriate use. There is evidence of this adapted material finding its way on to child pornography sites.

Societies need to develop a policy in relation to the use of images of children and young people on their web sites, programmes and other material. The society will need to make decisions about the type of images they consider suitable and which appropriately represent the society, without putting children at increased risk. You should ensure that parents support your policy. When assessing the potential risks in the use of images of children, the most important factor is the potential for inappropriate use.

It is recommended that the society's attitude to photographs is made clear at audition, rather than a week before the show. Best practice would be to ask the parents to give clearance at audition to avoid a potential for conflict later.

In the context of a programme, it is of course difficult to avoid the use of the first name and surname of individuals in a photograph. However, it is sensible to avoid any additional information that might help locate the child and only use images of children in suitable dress to reduce the risk of inappropriate use. Ask for parental permission to use an image of a young person. This ensures that parents are aware of the way the image of their child is being used to represent the society.

If parents or other members of the audience are intending to photograph or video an event, they should be made aware of your expectations. However, do please remember that the law in any case forbids the videoing of copyright material. The use of cameras or mobile phones with camera or video capability, in dressing rooms and other inappropriate environments should be expressly forbidden.

Further advice

For further advice contact the NSPCC (020 7825 2775 or visit www.nspcc.org.uk) or contact your Area Child Protection Committee. To find your local committee, go to www.doh.gov.uk/acpc/local or contact your local authority social service department.

Further reading

- *Keeping Arts Safe, Protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults involved in arts activities*, Arts Council of England. Available from Marston Book Services on 01235 465500.
- *FIRST CHECK, a step by step guide for organizations to safeguard children*, NSPCC. This excellent and detailed guide also contains templates for recording allegations or suspicions.

Note: Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this factsheet it is not intended to be a complete guide to the law. Societies should seek appropriate advice on specific problems before any action is taken.

MODEL CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The Anytown Operatic & Dramatic Society recognizes its duty of care under the Children and Young Persons Act 1963, the Child (Performances) Regulations 1968, the Protection of Children Act 1999 and the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (*in Scotland change to Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003*).

The society recognizes that abuse can take many forms, whether it be physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. The society is committed to practice which protects children from harm. All members of the society accept and recognize their responsibilities to develop awareness of the issues which cause children harm.

The society believes that:

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse should be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All members and employees of the society should be clear on how to respond appropriately.

The society will ensure that:

- All children will be treated equally and with respect and dignity.
- The duty of care to children will always be put first.
- A balanced relationship based on mutual trust will be built which empowers the children to share in the decision making process.
- Enthusiastic and constructive feedback will be given rather than negative criticism.
- Bullying will not be accepted or condoned.
- All adult members of the society provide a positive role model for dealing with other people.
- Action will be taken to stop any inappropriate verbal or physical behaviour.
- It will keep up-to-date with health & safety legislation.
- It will keep informed of changes in legislation and policies for the protection of children.
- It will undertake relevant development and training.
- It will hold a register of every child involved with the society and will retain a contact name and number close at hand in case of emergencies.

The society has child protection procedures which accompany this policy. This policy should also be read in conjunction with the society's Equal Opportunities Policy and Health & Safety Policy.

The society has a dedicated Child Protection Officer, who is in charge of ensuring that the child protection policy and procedures are adhered to. That person's name is and he/she can be contacted on

This policy will be regularly monitored by the Executive Committee of the society and will be subject to annual review.

Date:

MODEL 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.
- Engage in effective recruitment of chaperones and other individuals with responsibility for children, including appropriate vetting (if necessary in consultation with the local education authority).
- Ensure that children are supervised at all times.
- Know how to get in touch with the local authority social services, in case it needs to report a concern.

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 the society's Child Protection Policy and procedures.
- All parents have the responsibility to collect (or arrange collection of) their children after rehearsals or performances. 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 minimize 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 or 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.

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.

Suspicion of abuse

- If you see or suspect abuse of a child while in the care of the society, please make this known to the person with responsibility for child protection. If you suspect that the person with responsibility for child protection is the source of the problem, you should make your concerns known to the Chairman.
- Please make a note for your own records of what you witnessed as well as your response, in case there is follow-up in which you are involved.
- If a serious allegation is made against any member of the society, chaperone, venue staff etc., that individual will be suspended immediately until the investigation is concluded. The individual will be excluded from the theatre, rehearsal rooms etc. and will not have any unsupervised contact with any other children in the production.

Disclosure of abuse

If a child confides in you that abuse has taken place:

- Remain calm and in control but do not delay taking action.
- Listen carefully to what has been said. Allow the child to tell you at their own pace and ask questions only for clarification. Don't ask questions that suggest a particular answer.
- Don't promise to keep it a secret. Use the first opportunity you have to share the information with the person with responsibility for child protection. Make it clear to the child that you will need to share this information with others. Make it clear that you will only tell the people who need to know and who should be able to help.
- Reassure the child that 'they did the right thing' in telling someone.
- Tell the child what you are going to do next.

- Speak immediately to the person with responsibility for child protection. It is that person's responsibility to liaise with the relevant authorities, usually social services or the police.
- As soon as possible after the disclosing conversation, make a note of what was said, using the child's own words. Note the date, time, any names that were involved or mentioned, and who you gave the information to. Make sure you sign and date your record.

Recording

- 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 will be recorded, regardless of whether or not the concerns have been shared with a statutory child protection agency.
- An accurate note shall be made of the date and time of the 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 an individual, where relevant the reasons 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 & Confidentiality

- If a complaint is made against a member of the society, he or she will be made aware of his rights under the society's disciplinary procedures.
- No matter how you may feel about the accusation, 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. Remember also that any possible criminal investigation could be compromised through inappropriate information being released.
- In criminal law the Crown, or other prosecuting authority, has to prove guilt and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Accidents

- To avoid accidents, chaperones and children will be advised of "house rules" regarding health and 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 injury will be recorded in the society's accident book. This record will be countersigned by the person with responsibility for child protection.

- If a child joins the production with an obvious physical injury a record of this will be made in the accident book. This record will be countersigned by the person with responsibility for child protection. This record can be useful if a formal allegation is made later and will also 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. A Standard disclosure will apply for anyone with supervised access to children. An Enhanced disclosure will be required for anyone with unsupervised access.
- 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

- Chaperones will be appointed by the society for the care of children during the production process. 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 the chaperone's care shall not exceed 12.
- Potential chaperones will be required to supply 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 requirement 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 producer. 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.
- Children will not be allowed to enter the adult dressing rooms.
- 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 by the society.
- 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).
- Chaperones should have written arrangements for children after performances. If someone different is to collect the child, a telephone call should be made to the parent to confirm the arrangements.
- 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.