

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The South Devon Players, a theatre production team (hereafter referred to as “the Company”, recognises its duty of care under the Children and Young Persons Act 1963, the The Children (Performances and Activities) (England) Regulations 2014, 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).

Theatre shows sometimes need children both for specific productions and, more importantly, because they often form the cast, crew and audience of the future. In order to achieve this, children need to feel safe and respected; their parents need to be confident about their children’s welfare and members of the organisation need to feel able to exercise their responsibilities. This document addresses many of the issues that may arise when children are involved in the theatre’s activities and performances.

The South Devon Players are not a “children’s” theatre group, and therefore do not frequently have shows requiring child participants. However, we do have a small number of children involved on occasion, when suitable roles are available (which is not every production), and therefore it is important to have this policy nonetheless.

A child is defined as anyone up to the age of 18 years. It should be borne in mind that the regulations relating to children in theatrical performances apply up to the age of 16. The Company is committed to practice which protects children from harm. All members of the Company accept and recognise their responsibilities to develop awareness of the issues which cause children harm.

The Company believes that:

The welfare of the child is paramount.

All children, whatever their age, culture, disability status, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs, 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 by the production team (especially chaperones) in their role as mandated reporters.

All members and employees of the Company should be clear on how to respond appropriately to a suspicion or allegation of abuse.

The Company 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 Company 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 all related 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 Company and will retain a contact name and number close at hand in case of emergencies.

The Company has child protection procedures which accompany this policy.

This policy will be regularly monitored by the Management team of the Company and will be subject to regular review.

CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

Responsibilities of the Company

At the outset of any production involving children the Company will:

- Undertake a risk assessment and monitor risk throughout the production process.
- Identify and check at the outset the person with designated responsibility for child protection. This is usually the child's licensed chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone.
- Engage in effective recruitment and continual checking of licensed chaperones if relevant.
- 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.
- If a child aged under 16, attends an audition, rehearsal, or performance without their chaperone or parent/guardian, they will not be allowed to participate in the production.

Parents

The Company believes it to be important that there is a partnership between parents and the Company. Parents are encouraged to be involved in the activities of the Company and to share responsibility for the care of children. All parents have access to the Company's Child Protection Policy and Procedures via our website (www.southdevonplayers.com). Each child is required to have a licensed chaperone, or parent/guardian acting as chaperone present at all rehearsals and performances. It is NOT the responsibility of the chaperone or Company to take children home.

When a child applies to be cast in a production, a licensed chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone must accompany the child to all auditions, rehearsals and performances, and must remain with the child during the process, supervising in line with current chaperoning laws and best practice, with which they must make themselves familiar. The child must remain in the line of sight of the licensed chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone at all times.

The chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone may not take on any separate task or activity associated with the production, nor any other activity that would require them to not have their eyeline and full concentration on the child at any time during production activities.

Chaperones

A person acting as a chaperone for a child must hold at least one of two legal requirements. They must either be an officially licensed and qualified chaperone who has presented their license to the Stage Manager for inspection, and wearing their credential card prominently at all times, or a parent/guardian acting as chaperone.

Any person who is working as a licensed chaperone must at all times, wear their official chaperone card prominently on a lanyard, and prove that it is up to date.

If a parent wishes their child to participate in a production, but is not willing to engage and pay a licensed chaperone, they must chaperone their own child, to the satisfaction of the law and the production company. Any person claiming to be a licensed chaperone without the correct documents proving their status, will not be accepted and will be referred to the authority from whom they claim their status.

Unaccompanied Children

The company does not permit children to attend auditions, rehearsals, performances or social events, or to travel to/from these events if they unaccompanied by a licensed chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone. In order to participate in any production, the child must at all times be in the presence and control of its licensed chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone.

In situations where children are found to be unaccompanied, e.g. arriving at auditions without a chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone, or the parent dropping the child off and departing, the production team will call the police, and only hand the child over to a uniformed police officer for the child to be returned home. The production will also make a full report to local child protection officials.

Unsupervised Contact

The Company will never permit unsupervised contact with a minor child as the chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone, is required to be present with the child at all times

Physical Contact

Adults will not touch children unless absolutely necessary in relation to the particular activity. Adults will seek the consent of the child and the child's chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone, prior to any physical contact, and the purpose of the contact shall be made clear.

Managing sensitive information

Permission will be sought from the parents for use of photographic material featuring children for promotional or other purposes.

The Company's web-based materials and activities will be carefully monitored for inappropriate use. The Company 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 records.

Injured or distressed children.

Children who perform with us, are required to be healthy, confident and happy. If the production team have any concern about a child's health status, the production team will require a letter from a practicing doctor who is involved with the treatment of the child, confirming that the performance activities will not create additional injury or strain, in order to permit the child to perform with us.

If we find that a child appears distressed or tearful when working with us, we will raise this concern with the parents to discuss a way forward to prevent this occurring again. If the parents are aware of the distress and any mutually agreed remedies have been followed, but the distress occurs again, the child will be removed from the production for their own wellbeing; and if there is a concern that there may be any abuse that has caused this, the production company will raise the concern with the relevant authorities.

Suspicion of abuse

If you see or suspect abuse of a child while in the care of the Company, please make this known to the chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone. If you suspect that the chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone is the source of the problem, you should make your concerns known to senior production staff, and the company will approach the relevant authorities to make a formal report.

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 Company, 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 involvement in the production until such time as they are absolved of any issues.

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. Do not ask questions that suggest a particular answer.

Do not promise to keep it a secret. 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.

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 e.g. suspension of an individual, 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.

Accidents

To avoid accidents, chaperones or parent/guardian acting as chaperone and children will be advised of "house rules" regarding health and safety and will be notified of areas or activities that are out of bounds, for each performance or rehearsal venue. Following this instruction is non-negotiable.

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 Company, a designated first-aider will administer first aid and the injury recorded in the Company's accident book. This record will be countersigned by the chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone in control of the child at the time of the accident.

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 chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone in control of the child.

Chaperones (inclusive of parent chaperones)

Under UK law, children up to the age of 16, must be accompanied by a chaperone or parent/legal guardian, who is best placed to be present with the child at all times.

In a rare instance where a licensed chaperone cannot be appointed, a parent/guardian must be at all times present and responsible for the care and supervision of children during acting

as their chaperone throughout the production process, which will be confirmed and agreed in writing by both parties.

By law the chaperone is acting *in loco parentis* and the maximum number of children in the chaperone's care shall not exceed the maximum for the age group of the child/ren, or five, whichever is the fewer.

A licensed chaperone must be hired and paid by the parents of the child. Every chaperone is required to have their credentials checked by the production company before the company agrees to their acting as chaperone on any SDP production.

During performances, as with auditions and rehearsals, the licensed chaperone, or parent/guardian acting as chaperone is to remain within direct line of sight of the child at all times, except when the child uses toilet facilities, when the chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone must await the child outside the stall, or bathroom door if the chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone is not of the appropriate gender to be in that particular bathroom.

During the performance the chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone must accompany the child to the stage "wings", or similar such space, and keep the child in full line of sight while the performance takes place, before returning with them to a designated changing or waiting space.

Chaperones or parent/guardian acting as chaperone must not permit the child to be in, or enter the same space as adults who are dressing.

Chaperones or parent/guardian acting as chaperone will not consume alcohol or any other awareness altering substance, while entrusted with a child in rehearsals or productions.

Children should be signed out when leaving and a record made of the parent/guardian with whom they depart. A chaperone or parent/guardian acting as chaperone who is caring for a child, must prioritise the supervision, safety, and well-being of that child above all else.

If a chaperone is caring for the child, and the parent has not collected the child at the end of the rehearsal or show, it is the duty of the chaperone to report the matter to the senior production team and to remain with the child until such time as it is collected by the parent/guardian or other appropriate authority.

Chaperones or parents/guardians acting as chaperones are expected to abide by the same production policies as all other cast and crew in our company, including excellent international theatre industry standard professional conduct, pleasant behaviour to audiences, other cast and crew, observance of intellectual property rules, and company production policies as given on our website. They are also required to ensure that the child also follows the same requirements, as per the child's performance contract with our company.

Unauthorised photography of rehearsals, performances or auditions, is not permitted.

Laura Jury
Company Director
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