

COMPANY OF FOUR **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

Introduction

The Company of Four 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.

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

The company of four 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 company of four should be clear on how to respond appropriately.

The company of four will ensure that:

- All children will be treated equally and with respect and dignity;
- The welfare of each child 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 of four 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 company of four and will retain a contact name and number close at hand in case of emergencies.

The company of four has child protection procedures which accompany this policy. This policy should also be read in conjunction with the company of four's Health & Safety Policy.

The company of four has a dedicated Child Protection Lead, who is in charge of ensuring that the child protection policy and procedures are adhered to. That person's name is Paul Leech and he can be contacted on 07718997517.

This policy will be regularly monitored by the company of four management committee and will be revised as appropriate.

COMPANY OF FOUR **CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES**

Responsibilities of the Company of four

At the outset of any production involving children the company of four 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;
- Ensure that children during performances are only supervised by licensed chaperones or that child's parent.
- know how to get in touch with the local authority social services, in case it needs to report a concern.

Parents

- The company of four believes it to be important that there is a partnership between parents and the company of four. Parents are encouraged to be involved in the activities of the company of four and to share responsibility for the care of children. All parents will be given a copy the company of four'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 company of four to take children home.
- All parents have the responsibility to make sure they ensure that their child is adequately supervised at all times during rehearsals.
- All parents have the responsibility to make sure they report any child protection issues to the company's child protection lead in a timely manner, unless they feel that the child protection lead is the source of the problem, they should then make their concerns know to the company Chairman or an appropriate member of the company's management committee.

Members

- All members have the responsibility to make sure they report any child protection issues to the company's child protection lead in a timely manner, unless they feel that the child protection lead is the source of the problem, they should then make their concerns know to the company Chairman or an appropriate member of the company's management committee.
- All members should not:
 1. Leave a child alone with someone else.
 2. Be alone with the child in a changing/dressing room.
 3. Treat a child for an injury alone and away from others.
 4. Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
 5. Let allegations a child makes go unreported and/or unrecorded.
- As a general rule it is not sensible for members to:
 1. Spend time alone with children away from others.
 2. To take children alone on a car journey, however short.
 3. Take children to their own home.

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adapted from the NODA Model Child Protection Policy, May 2005*

Where such occasions arise and when it is unavoidable, they should occur with the full knowledge and consent of the child's parent/guardian.

Child Protection Lead

- The child protection lead has the responsibility to deal with any child protection issues, in a fair and reasonable way, under the terms of the company's child protection policy and procedure.
- The child protection lead is responsible for liaising with the relevant authorities, which may include the social services, the police, the local safeguarding board, and the local authority child employment office.
- In times when a disclosure of an allegation of abuse has been made, the child protection lead is to ensure that the "discloser" is supported and kept informed about what will happen next, so they can be reassured about what to expect.

Unsupervised Contact

- The company of four 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 company of four 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 company of four's web-based materials and activities will be carefully monitored for inappropriate use.
- The company of four 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 company of four, 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 company of four, 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:
 1. Remain calm and in control but do not delay taking action.
 2. 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.
 3. Do not 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.
 4. Reassure the child that 'they did the right thing' in telling someone.
 5. Tell the child what you are going to do next.
 6. 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.
 7. 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 e.g. 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 company of four he or she will be made aware of his rights under the company of four'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.

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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 of four, a designated first-aider will administer first aid and the injury will be recorded in the company of four's accident book. This record will be counter-signed 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 counter-signed 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 company of four 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 company of four will have a written code of practice for the handling of disclosure information.
- The company of four will ensure that information contained in the disclosure is not misused.

Chaperones

- Chaperones will be licensed by the Local Education Authority child employment office and be appointed by the company of four 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 company of four. 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 company of four'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 company of four.
- 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.

The company's Child Protection Procedures will be regularly monitored by the company of four management committee and will be revised as appropriate.

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