

SAFEGUARDING (including CHILD PROTECTION) POLICY

About this policy

This Policy applies to all staff, members and volunteers of the Bridge Musical Theatre (**Society or we**) including creative contractors, committee, members, performers and all other volunteers.

We recognise our 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.

We recognise that safeguarding is a key governance priority and that abuse can take many forms, whether it be physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. We are committed to practice which protects children and vulnerable adults (including those at risk from age, illness or disability) from harm.

We all accept and recognise our responsibilities to remain alert and aware of possible safeguarding risks and, in providing our activities we will endeavour at all times to ensure that everyone is as safe as we can make them.

We have a duty to act on reports or suspicions of abuse and we adopt a “zero-tolerance” to abuse in the Society.

Safeguarding Lead:

Any question or concern about the welfare of children or vulnerable adults should be shared swiftly and appropriately with our Safeguarding Lead (or, in their absence, another committee member):

Name...Dan Curtis

Email...info@bridgesmt.org.uk

Phone...07702 385757

Children

We believe that:

- The welfare of the child is paramount;
- All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, appearance, racial origin, religious belief and/or gender identity have the right to protection from abuse or harm;
- Harm can be caused by accidents, deliberate abuse (physical, psychological, sexual, emotional, financial), neglect (deliberate or not) or factors such as bullying, prejudicial attitudes, or a failure to enable a person to participate in activities that are open to most of their peers. It can also include abuse via use of ICT facilities including the internet).
- All our staff, members and volunteers should understand the importance of safeguarding and protecting children and how to respond to issues appropriately.

We will ensure that:

- All children will be treated equally and with respect and dignity;
- Our duty of care to children will always be put first;
- A balanced relationship based on mutual trust will be built which empowers the children involved with the Society to share in decision making processes;
- Enthusiastic and constructive feedback will be given to children rather than negative criticism;
- Bullying will never be accepted or condoned (we know that children can face harm from their peers);

- All adult members of the society provide a positive role model, acting appropriately in the presence of children;
- Any inappropriate or harmful behaviour towards or in the presence of children by any adult member will be challenged;
- We keep up-to-date with legislation and guidance relating to the protection of children and undertake relevant development and training;
- We maintain a record of every child (and person with parental responsibility for them) presently involved with the Society with their consent, to be accessible in case of emergencies;
- All personal information we may collect relating to children will be processed and stored in accordance with [our] data protection policy and with the UK GDPR principles.
- The Society has child protection procedures which will accompany this Policy.

CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

Responsibilities of the Society:

At the outset of any production involving children (and in any case before the auditioning/casting process) we will:

- Undertake child focussed risk assessments and monitor and record risk throughout the life of the production. This will include risk assessments in relation to the performance venue/s with reference to its safety and suitability for children. Where any activities are to take place at other locations we will also carry out a further risk assessment;
- Identify at the outset the person within the Society who holds responsibility for overseeing child protection;
- Ensure effective engagement of qualified chaperones (best practice being those approved by the local authority) and other individuals with responsibility for children, including appropriate checks (e.g. DBS) if necessary;
- Ensure that children are properly supervised at all times;
- Know how to contact local authority social services, in case we need to report a concern.
- Parents & Carers
- We believe a partnership between those with parental receptibility for the child and the Society is important. We encourage parents or carers to be involved in the activities of the Society and to share responsibility for the care of children. They will be given a copy of our Safeguarding (Child Protection) Policy and Procedures.
- All parents or carers have the responsibility to collect (or arrange collection of) their children after rehearsals or performances. We cannot accept responsibility for taking children home.
- Unsupervised Contact
- We will endeavour to ensure that no unqualified adult has unsupervised contact with children.
- There should always be at least 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, we may require a DBS check.

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:

- We have a policy and procedure for the taking, using and storage of photographs or images of children.
- We will ask permission from those with parental responsibility to make and use photographic material featuring children for promotional or other purposes.
- Our web-based materials and activities will be carefully monitored for inappropriate use.
- We will ensure confidentiality in order to protect the rights of all our members, including the safe handling, secure storage and reliable and timely disposal of any personal data or sensitive information. 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 who holds responsibility for overseeing 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 most senior member of the committee immediately available.
- Please record 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.

Reporting Procedure

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 interrogate or 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 the local authority or 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 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 Society, they will be informed properly in a formal meeting of the particulars of the allegations, made aware of their rights under the Society's disciplinary procedures and the relevant next steps to be taken.

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 legal right to confidentiality. Remember also that any possible criminal investigation could be compromised through inappropriate information being released.

Anyone who has allegations made against them will be treated fairly. All enquiries, investigations and decisions taken will be just and fair with the safety of any child concerned at the heart of the process.

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.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks and Reporting

If we believe it is in the Society's best interests to obtain DBS checks for chaperones or other personnel, we will inform the individual of the necessary procedures and the level of disclosure required. A Standard disclosure will usually apply for anyone with supervised access to children. An Enhanced disclosure may be required for anyone with unsupervised access.

We will have a written code of practice for the handling of disclosure information and we will ensure that information contained in the disclosure is not misused.

Chaperones

- The chaperone is a key person who protects, safeguards and supports the child. They are the point of safety a child can turn to and rely on should the need arise. The chaperone is the child's "champion", playing a major part in making their experience enjoyable and beneficial.
- The chaperone's first duty is to look after the children in their care and they must not undertake any other duty (e.g. they cannot be involved in technical aspects of the production, direction or be taking part in the production).
- 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 (e.g. 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 given our Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

- Chaperones will not usually have unsupervised access to children in their care. If unsupervised access is unavoidable, or a requirement of the local authority, a DBS check will be sought.
- Where chaperones are not satisfied with the conditions for the children, they should bring this to the attention of the Chairperson or most senior member of the committee available. If changes cannot be made satisfactorily, the chaperone must act in the child's best interests and 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 **Children and Young Persons Act 1933**, 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 (e.g. on a "daily record sheet").
- 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 those who have parental responsibility for them.
- 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, carer or child).
- Chaperones should have written arrangements for children after performances. If someone different is to collect the child, a phone call should be made to the parent or carer to confirm the arrangements.
- Children should be signed out when leaving and a record made of the person collecting.
- If a parent / carer has not collected the child, it is the duty of the chaperone to stay with that child or make arrangements to take them home.

Review

This [revised] Safeguarding Policy was approved by the Society's Committee on 8th September 2024 and comes into effect on that date.

The Committee will, as appropriate, monitor and enforce this Policy and will review it regularly:

Date of next review: September 2025