

Phoenix Theatre Group

Child Protection Policy

This policy forms the basis of a Child Protection Policy, which will be used as a guide.

This policy aims to make provision for children and young people and ensures 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 will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- + All staff, members (paid/unpaid) working in or on behalf of the theatre group have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate officer.

Child Protection Policy Statement

Phoenix Theatre Group has a duty of care to safeguard all children involved in the group's activities from harm. All children have a right to protection, and the needs of disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable will be taken into account.

Phoenix Theatre Group will ensure the safety and protection of all children involved in the group's activities through adherence to the Child Protection guidelines.

A child is defined as a person under the age of 18 (The Children Act 1989).

Policy aims

The aim of this Child Protection Policy is to promote good practice:

- + Providing children and young people with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care of Phoenix Theatre Group.
- + Allow all senior members/volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.

Promoting good practice

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgement about the appropriate action to take.

Abuse can occur within many situations including the home, school and other environments. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people in order to harm them. A coach, instructor, teacher, official or volunteer will have regular contact with young people and be an important link in identifying cases where they need protection. All suspicious cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document.

When a child enters the group having been subjected to child abuse outside this environment, theatre can play a crucial role in improving the child's self-esteem. In such instances the group must work with the appropriate agencies to ensure the child receives the required support.

Good practice guidelines

All personnel should be encouraged to demonstrate exemplary behaviour in order to protect themselves from false allegations. The following are common sense examples of how to create a positive culture and climate.

Good practice means:

- + Always working in an open environment avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication.
- + Treating all young people/disabled adults equally with respect and dignity.
- + Always putting the welfare of each young person first.
- + Maintaining a safe and appropriate distance with members (eg it is not appropriate for members or volunteers to have an intimate relationship with a child or to share a room solely with them, other than a dressing room that is adequately occupied in sufficient numbers).
- + Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust and empowering children to share in decision making.
- + Making theatre fun, enjoyable and promoting fair play.
- + Ensuring that if any form of manual/physical support is required, it should be provided openly and according to guidelines provided by an Education Programme. If it is difficult to maintain hand positions when the child is constantly moving, young people should always be consulted and their agreement gained. Some parents are becoming increasingly sensitive about manual support and their views should always be carefully considered.
- + Keeping up to date with technical skills, qualifications and insurance.
- + Involving parents/carers wherever possible. For example, encouraging them to take responsibility for their children in the changing rooms. If groups have to be supervised in the changing rooms, always ensure members, parents, teachers or officials work in pairs.
- + Ensuring that if mixed teams are taken away for the day or night, they should always be accompanied by a male and female member of staff. However, remember that same gender abuse can also occur.
- + Ensuring that at residential events, adults should not enter children's rooms or invite children into their rooms.
- + Giving enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
- + Recognising the developmental needs and capacity of young people and disabled adults – avoiding excessive training or competition and not pushing them against their will.
- + Securing parental consent in writing to act in loco parentis, if the need arises to administer emergency first aid and/or other medical treatment.
- + Keeping a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given.
- + Requesting written parental consent if members are required to transport young people in their cars.

Practices to be avoided

The following should be **avoided** except in emergencies. If a case arises where these situations are unavoidable (eg the child sustains an injury and needs to go to hospital, or a parent fails to arrive to pick a child up at the end of a session), it should be with the full knowledge and consent of someone in charge in the group or the child's parents.

Otherwise, **avoid**:

- + Spending excessive amounts of time alone with children away from others.
- + Taking or dropping off a child to an event.

Practices never to be sanctioned

The following should **never** be sanctioned. You should **never**:

- + Engage in rough physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- + Share a room with a child.
- + Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching.
- + Allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged.
- + Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun.
- + Reduce a child to tears as a form of control.
- + Allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon.
- + Do things of a personal nature for children or disabled adults that they can do for themselves.
- + Invite or allow children to stay with you at your home unsupervised.

NB It may sometimes be necessary for members or volunteers to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are young or are disabled. These tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of parents and the members involved. There is a need to be responsive to a person's reactions. If a person is fully dependent on you, talk with him/her about what you are doing and give choices where possible. This is particularly so if you are involved in any dressing or undressing of outer clothing, or where there is physical contact, lifting or assisting a child to carry out particular activities. Avoid taking on the responsibility for tasks for which you are not appropriately trained.

Incidents that must be reported/recorded

If any of the following occur you should report this immediately to another colleague and record the incident. You should also ensure the parents of the child are informed:

- + if you accidentally hurt a child
- + If he/she seems distressed in any manner
- + if a child appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- + if a child misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

Use of photographic/filming equipment at events

There is evidence that some people have used events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young and disabled people in vulnerable positions. All clubs should be vigilant and any concerns should be reported to the Child Protection Officer.

Video as a coaching aid: there is no intention to prevent authorised members using video equipment as a legitimate coaching aid. However, performers and their parents/carers should be made aware that this is part of the groups programme and such films should be stored safely.

Recruitment and training of members and volunteers

Phoenix Theatre Group recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children.

Pre-selection checks must include the following:

- + All volunteers/members should complete an application form. The application form will elicit information about an applicant's past and a self-disclosure about any criminal record.
- + Consent should be obtained from an applicant to seek information from the Criminal Records Bureau.
- + Evidence of identity should be provided (eg passport or driving licence with photo).

Responding to allegations or suspicions

It is not the responsibility of anyone within Phoenix Theatre Group, members or volunteers, to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However, there is a responsibility to act on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities.

Phoenix Theatre Group will assure all members/volunteers that it will fully support and protect anyone who in good faith reports his/her concern that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a child.

Where there is a complaint against a member there may be three types of investigation:

- + a criminal investigation
- + a child protection investigation
- + a misconduct investigation.

The results of the police and child protection investigation may well influence the misconduct investigation, but not necessarily.

Action

1. Concerns about poor practice:

- + If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice, the Child Protection Officer will deal with it as a misconduct issue.
- + If the allegation is about poor practice by the Child Protection Officer, or if the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, it should be reported to the relevant officer who will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether or not to initiate removal proceedings.

2. Concerns about suspected abuse:

- + Any suspicion that a child has been abused by either a member or a volunteer should be reported to the Child Protection Officer, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
- + The Child Protection Officer will refer the allegation to the social services department which may involve the police, or go directly to the police if out-of-hours.
- + The parents or carers of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the social services department.
- + The Child Protection Officer should also notify the committee who in turn will deal with any media enquiries.
- + If the Child Protection Officer is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report must be made to the appropriate Head of committee or in his/her absence another member of the committee who will refer the allegation to social services.

Confidentiality

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only.

This includes the following people:

- + the Child Protection Officer
- + the parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused
- + the person making the allegation
- + social services/police
- + the committee
- + the alleged abuser (and parents if the alleged abuser is a child).

Seek social services advice on who should approach the alleged abuser.

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws (eg that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

Internal enquiries and suspension

- + The Child Protection Officer will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further police and social services inquiries.
- + Irrespective of the findings of the social services or police inquiries the Disciplinary Committee will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision, particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases, the Disciplinary Committee must reach a decision based upon the available information, which could suggest that on a balance of probability; it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child should remain of paramount importance throughout.

Support to deal with the aftermath of abuse

- + Consideration should be given to the kind of support that children, parents and members of staff may need. Use of help lines, support groups and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process. The British Association for Counselling Directory is available from The British Association for Counselling, 1 Regent Place, Rugby CV21 2PJ, Tel: 01788 550899, Fax: 01788 562189, Email: bac@bacp.co.uk, Internet: www.bacp.co.uk
- + Consideration should be given to what kind of support may be appropriate for the alleged perpetrator.

Allegations of previous abuse

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (eg by an adult who was abused as a child or by a member who is still currently working with children).

Where such an allegation is made, the club should follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social services or the police. This is because other children, either within or outside the group, may be at risk from this person. Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences related to abuse is automatically excluded from working with children. This is reinforced by the details of the Protection of Children Act 1999.

Action if bullying is suspected

If bullying is suspected, the same procedure should be followed as set out in 'Responding to suspicions or allegations' above.

Action to help the victim and prevent bullying:

- + Take all signs of bullying very seriously.
- + Encourage all children to speak and share their concerns (It is believed that up to 12 children per year commit suicide as a result of bullying, so if anyone talks about or threatens suicide, seek professional help immediately). Help the victim to speak out and tell the person in charge or someone in authority.
- + Investigate all allegations and take action to ensure the victim is safe. Speak with the victim and the bully(ies) separately.
- + Reassure the victim that you can be trusted and will help them, although you cannot promise to tell no one else.
- + Keep records of what is said (what happened, by whom, when).
- + Report any concerns to the Child Protection Officer or the school (wherever the bullying is occurring).

Action towards the bully(ies):

- + Talk with the bully(ies), explain the situation, and try to get the bully(ies) to understand the consequences of their behaviour. Seek an apology to the victim(s).
- + Inform the bully(ies)'s parents.
- + Insist on the return of 'borrowed' items and that the bully(ies) compensate the victim.
- + Provide support for the victim.
- + Impose sanctions as necessary.
- + Encourage and support the bully(ies) to change behaviour.
- + Hold meetings with the families to report on progress.
- + Inform all organisation members of action taken.
- + Keep a written record of action taken.

3. Concerns outside the immediate environment (eg a parent or carer):

- + Report your concerns to the Child Protection Officer, who should contact social services or the police as soon as possible.
- + See 4. below for the information social services or the police will need.
- + If the Child Protection Officer is not available, the person being told of or discovering the abuse should contact social services or the police immediately.
- + Social services and the Child Protection Officer will decide how to involve the parents/carers.
- + Maintain confidentiality on a need to know basis only.
- + See 4. below regarding information needed for social services.

4. Information for social services or the police about suspected abuse:

To ensure that this information is as helpful as possible, a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern, which should include the following:

- + The child's name, age and date of birth of the child.
- + The child's home address and telephone number.
- + Whether or not the person making the report is expressing their own concerns or those of someone else.
- + The nature of the allegation. Include dates, times, any special factors and other relevant information.
- + Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
- + A description of any visible bruising or other injuries. Also any indirect signs, such as behavioural changes.
- + Details of witnesses to the incidents.
- + The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred.

- + Have the parents been contacted?
- + If so, what has been said?
- + Has anyone else been consulted? If so, record details.
- + If the child was not the person who reported the incident, has the child been spoken to? If so, what was said?
- + Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record details.
- + Where possible referral to the police or social services should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours and the name of the contact who took the referral should be recorded.

If you are worried about sharing concerns about abuse with a senior colleague, you can contact social services or the police direct, or the **NSPCC Child Protection Helpline on 0808 800 5000**, or **Childline on 0800 1111**.

Declaration

On behalf of Phoenix Theatre Group, we, the undersigned, will oversee the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and take all necessary steps to ensure it is adhered to.

Signed:

 (nb One of the signatories should be the Child Protection Officer)

Name:

Name:

Position within Phoenix Theatre Group:

Position within Phoenix Theatre Group:

Date:

Date:
