**THE COURTYARD**

**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

**Policy Statement**

The Courtyard has a duty of care to safeguard all children/vulnerable adults involved in activities run at the establishment, or under the auspices of its name, from abuse.

**Definitions**

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

Safeguarding is a term which is broader than ‘child protection’ and relates to the action taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility. Safeguarding is defined in Working together to safeguard children as:

Protecting Children from Maltreatment

Preventing impairment of children’s health and development

Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective case

Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes

(Safe Guarding Children and Young People 2014)

Vulnerability is not a rigid, legally-defined concept and should be considered in the context of an individual's capacity and can apply to a wide range of disabilities and situations.

**Recognition and Identification of Abuse**

*Taken from Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 Appendix A*

**What do we mean by the term Abuse?**

The policy uses the term “**abuse**” to encompass either physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and/or sexual abuse.

**What is Abuse?**

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger for example, via the internet. They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children. Indicators of Abuse Caution should be used when referring to lists of signs and symptoms of abuse. Although the signs and symptoms listed below may be indicative of abuse there may be alternative explanations. In assessing the circumstances of any child any of these indicators should be viewed within the overall context of the child's individual situation including any disability.

**What is Emotional Abuse?**

Emotional Abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.

Emotional Abuse is difficult to: define, identify/recognise and prove.

**Signs to be aware of**: Physical, mental and emotional development lags, sudden speech disorders, continual self-depreciation, overreaction to mistakes, being withdrawn, emotionally flat, unusual physical behaviour such as rocking and self-mutilation.

**What is Neglect?**

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment), failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger, failure to ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers) or failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs. There are occasions when nearly all parents find it difficult to cope with the many demands of caring for children. But this does not mean that their children are being neglected. Neglect involves ongoing failure to meet a child's needs.

Neglect can often fit into six forms, which are: medical, emotional, nutritional, educational, physical and lack of supervision and guidance.

**Signs to be aware of**: no social relationships, compulsive scavenging, destructive tendencies, absent from lessons, often left alone or in charge of young brothers and sisters, delayed development, difficult or challenging behaviour.

**What is Physical Abuse?**

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of or deliberately induces illness in a child.

**Signs to be aware of:** bite marks, bruising and bruising patterns, bald patches, black eyes, broken bones, injuries to parts of the body where accidents are unlikely too happen such as thighs, back, abdomen. General appearance and behaviour of the child may include concurrent failure to thrive, wearing cloths to cover injuries, even in hot weather, refusal to undress in a dressing room setting for going on stage, fear of medical help, fear of physical contact, excessive compliance and low self-esteem.

**What is Sexual Abuse?**

Sexual Abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration or non-penetrative acts such as kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).

Sexual abuse is usually perpetrated by people who are known to and trusted by the child – e.g. relatives, family friends, neighbours, people working with the child or through other activities.

**Signs to be aware of**: extreme behavioural changes, running away, personality changes such as becoming insecure, sudden loss of appetite or compulsive eating, medical problems such as chronic itching, pain in the genitals, stomach pains or discomfort walking, STI’s and the use of extremely sexually explicit behaviour and language particularly if the behaviour and language or language is not appropriate for their age.

**Additional Areas of Concern that could affect a Childs safety**

In light of the 4 areas of abuse previously mentioned The Courtyard will also seek to prevent and protect any child it interacts with that a member of staff believes is in danger surrounding the following areas: radicalisation, Honour based violence, FMG, Sexting, Child on Child abuse, child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation and County Lines.

**What is meant by these terms:**

**Radicalisation**: is the process through which an individual or group develops extreme political, social or religious beliefs. Violent extremism is when a person or group uses fear, terror or violence to try and achieve a change.

**Honour based violence:** is a term describing an incident or crime involving violence, threats, intimidation, coercion or abuse which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family or community for alleged or perceived breaches

**Upskirting**: this is where someone takes a picture under a person’s clothing (not necessarily a skirt) without their permission and or knowledge with intention of viewing their genitals to obtain gratification or cause the victim humiliation, distress or alarm.

**Female Genital** **Mutilation** (FMG): compromises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

**Sexting**: the action or practise of sending sexually explicit photographs or messages via technology but predominantly via phones, as an video or picture.

**Child Sexual Exploitation** (CSE): this is where children are exploited by being given things like money, toys, drugs, status and affection in exchange for performing sexual activities. Children are trafficked into and within the UK to be sexually exploited.

**Child Criminal Exploitation:** is child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes.

**Child on Child Abuse:** children are also vulnerable to abuse from their peers this refers to abuse from one child to another in the form of bullying including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying.

**County Lines**: this is a very serious issue where criminal gangs set up a drug dealing operation in a place outside their usual operating area. Gangs will move their drug dealing from big cities to smaller towns in order to make more money.

**It is not the responsibility of The Courtyard staff to investigate welfare concerns or determine the truth of any disclosure or allegation. All staff, however, have a duty to recognise concerns and pass the information on in accordance with the procedures outlines in this policy.**

**Policy Aims**

The aim of the Courtyard Child Protection Policy is to promote good practice and to:

* Demonstrate that the welfare of children and young people is paramount.
* Provide children and young people with appropriate protection whilst in our care.
* Allow all employees and volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.
* Equip employees and volunteers with guidelines for behaviour that will help to minimise the risk of false allegations being made against them.

For the purpose of this policy, the term “employees” is deemed to include all staff, freelance workers and volunteers.

**The Courtyard will endeavour to ensure the safety and protection of all children involved in its activities by:**

1) Ensuring all relevant staff are aware of, and adhere to, the Child Protection Good Practice Guidelines detailed below and that they sign a register to confirm that they have attended an awareness-raising session.

2) Ensuring that we undertake Disclosure & Barring Service Enhanced Disclosure checks on all employees who work in sole charge of, or whose work may at some stage involve, unsupervised contact with these groups (ie members of the education department and chaperones). As part of the safer recruitment process any staff who will have direct access to children and young people will have their suitability, including verification of their identity, qualifications and right to work in the UK, checked which all forms part of The Courtyard’s recruitment policy; and undertake specific training that relates to their roles in keeping children safe.

3) Ensuring all employees who regularly work with children are given copies of the child protection & vulnerable adult policy.

4) Raising awareness of current policies and issues of child protection during departmental meetings (as and when appropriate) to ensure that staff are aware of issues and operate within best practice guidelines.

5) Renewing DBS checks for relevant employees every three years (or as often as is currently recommended by the majority of advisory bodies), whichever amounts to the most frequent.

6) Ensuring all visiting companies using The Courtyard who work with young people adhere to the Child Protection Policy whilst in and around the building, and that all companies using The Courtyard have their own safeguarding policies in place.

**Good Practice Guidelines for Employees working with Children and Young People**

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.

* Treat all young people equally, with respect and dignity.
* Promote a culture wherein young people treat each other with respect and dignity.
* Treat the possessions of young people with respect at all times.
* Respect the privacy of young people. For example, employees should knock before entering dressing rooms where young people are changing.
* Where possible, always work in an open environment, avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication.
* Give enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism.
* It is understood that creative work in the rehearsal room may potentially bring adults and young people into direct physical contact. Physical contact should be kept to an appropriate level - what that level is in relation to a specific piece of work needs to be discussed by the adults concerned in advance of carrying out the work. The agreement of the participant should always be gained prior to any physical contact. It is understood that there may be emergency situations (eg when administering First Aid), when this may not be possible. In such situations, First Aiders should ensure that they talk the patient through the procedure and (if possible) avoid administering First Aid in an unobserved environment – however, it is accepted that ultimately the health of the patient is the priority.
* Ensure disabled participants are informed of, and comfortable with, any necessary physical contact.
* Ensure that theatre games and workshop/rehearsal activities are appropriate to the age group of the participants with reference to content, the risk of physical harm or the issues/ideas being explored.
* Report any suspicion that a child is the victim of/at risk of abuse to the Child Protection Officer immediately (currently the Associate Director). **Under current legislation, it is the duty of all citizens in the UK to report suspected child abuse to either the police/social services/NSPCC. The Child Protection Officer (or in his absence, the Chief Executive & Artistic Director) will always report instances of actual or suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities.**
* If an employee feels uncomfortable about approaches made to him/her by a young person, vulnerable adult or disabled person they should discreetly make the person aware of their discomfort and should inform the Child Protection Officer of the situation.

**Practices to be avoided where possible**

* Avoid spending excessive amounts of time alone with a child away from others. If for any reason an employee is supervising a young person on a one-to-one basis, this should ideally be done in a public area such as the foyer or canyon. It is accepted that this will not always be possible, and in such cases the door to the room should be kept open. If possible, the senior manager for the department (or another member of staff) should be made aware that such one-to-one supervision is taking place.

In the case of Senior Youth Theatre, young people may be offered one-to-one tutorials to discuss their progression and/or rehearse pieces in a confidential environment. It is recognised that these tutorials are a valuable tool for the development of the young person’s skills, but they remain voluntary and any young person has the right to choose not to take up this opportunity or to ask for another adult to be present should they wish.
* Employees should put young people in a taxi rather than take them home in their car if the young person has no other way of getting home – unless express parental consent has been gained in advance. If the young person is under 14 years of age, the employee should accompany the young person in the taxi, unless express parental consent has been given for the young person to travel unaccompanied.
If calling a taxi is not possible, and the employee does take the young person home in their vehicle, the employee should inform another person of the time they leave and where they are going. If only one young person is being transported, they should sit in the back of the vehicle.

**Practices never to be sanctioned**

* Never allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching.
* Never allow children to use potentially offensive language unchallenged.
* Never make sexually suggestive comments to a child/vulnerable adult, even in fun.
* Never allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon. Employees should not enter into agreements with a child or young person to keep disclosed information secret, but should inform the young person they will inform an appropriate employee (ie the Child Protection Officer – currently the Associate Director).

Employees in a position of trust should not enter into inappropriate relationships (i.e. relationships of an intensely personal or sexual nature) with young people involved in the work of The Courtyard. No relationships between employees in a position of trust and members of any Courtyard client groups involving young people are acceptable even though such members may be over the age of consent. Please note, pre-existing relationships are exempt (please see the document *Working within the Sexual Offences Act 2003*, stored on the G drive in The Child Protection Policy File for further guidance).

A “client group” in this context is deemed to mean any young person falling within the work of the education and outreach department, members of youth theatre and other young people’s groups, students on placement or work experience – although this list is not exhaustive**. It should be noted that a young person over the age of consent (ie 16) is still protected by the Children’s Act, and hence by the guidelines laid down in this policy, until they reach the age of 18.**A “position of trust” in this context is deemed to mean an adult who has direct responsibility for the members of the client group or whose position means that they are likely to be perceived by young people as a “role model” or “teacher”. Examples would be:

* All members of the Education and Outreach department
* Chief Executive and Leadership Team
* Directors, choreographers, musical directors and performers working on productions involving these groups.

**In-House Productions**

A separate document exists with guidelines for the chaperoning of in-house productions recommends a ratio of 1:10, but it is recognised that the age and needs of the participants needs to be taken into account. See guidelines for details.

**Responsibilities of Staff and Volunteers**

Once appointed, all staff and volunteers (whether permanent or contractual) should:

1) Analyse their own practice against the guidelines laid out in this policy in order to minimise the risk of false allegation.

2) Recognise that their position as a responsible adult requires them to report any concerns about suspected poor practice or possible abuse to the Child Protection Officer (currently the Associate Director). These concerns will always be taken seriously and the appropriate course of action followed.

3) Draw attention to any situations in which they feel there could be improvement with regards to the emotional or physical health and safety of children/young people/vulnerable adults. Suggestions regarding such situations will be welcomed and, wherever practicable and appropriate, directly addressed.

4) Respond to concerns expressed by a child/young person by informing the Courtyard Child Protection Officer (currently the Associate Director) *immediately*. If the concerns are regarding the Child Protection Officer, the Chief Executive should be informed.

Employees should not enter into agreements with a child or young person to keep disclosed information secret, but should inform the young person that they will inform an appropriate employee (ie the Child Protection Officer – currently the Associate Director).

**Management of Sensitive Information**

All registration forms for participatory classes at The Courtyard request permission for the taking of photographs and video photography for promotional, educational or merchandising purposes for the duration of their membership. Any parent or guardian wishing to request a copy of the Child Protection Policy is prompted at this stage to do so, should they require further information.

Parents have the right to refuse (or later withdraw) consent and in these circumstances the workshop leader will be informed that the child should not be included (in a recognisable fashion) in any photography or videoing that takes place.

With regard to the usage and storing of such photographs/images, it is The Courtyard’s policy that:

* Digital photography (in workshop situations etc) or video photography will be taken only by members of staff who have enhanced DBS status or (in the case of productions, for example) by a Courtyard-approved professional photographer.
* The only exception to this may be when videoing takes place by other children (aged 7 –11) as part of The Courtyard’s Film Making club programme. Film Making Club is supervised by a director with enhanced DBS status. In this instance, the footage will be stored on equipment kept in a locked cupboard.
* Where express parental permission has been granted for the child/young
person’s image to be used, The Courtyard may choose to video
in -house productions which may be sold to parents as a memento of the production.
* Photographs will be stored in a password protected folder on the server, with access limited to a small number of DBS-checked employees.

**Social Networking Sites**

Employees and volunteers are advised not to ‘add’ a young person they know through the organisation (eg Youth Theatre or productions) as a ‘friend’ on social networking sites (such as Facebook), unless they are a relative or would be considered a family friend.

For social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat where a person can ‘follow’ you without requesting, employees and volunteers are advised to ‘block’ the young person.

It is advised that staff that are in regular contact with young people (ie Education Officers and Youth Theatre Leaders, production chaperones etc) should briefly discuss that they have been advised by The Courtyard not to ‘add’ them as a friend. It is also the responsibility of the production chaperones to ask the young people to not add any cast members or production team for the same reason.

It is also advised that during rehearsals in which young people will be working with adults ie panto rehearsals or pro-am productions that no filming or taking photographs on phones is ever undertaken. It is acknowledged that for the purposes of learning dance rehearsals that some dances will be filmed but this will only ever be for the purpose of the cast and deleted afterwards and not shared on any social media sites.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of March 2020, many platforms are now in use for the delivery of sessions and class online. This Courtyard now delivers sessions to both youth theatres and schools. All sessions are delivered by DBS Checked practitioners in a secure location with a neutral background and no personal information is ever shown. Throughout sessions a second practitioner is always present to help monitor the class and give support to the practitioner leading the session. Good practise is always observed, and recent NSPCC Training was undertook by members of the Education Department to promoter best practise.

Some of the online sessions can be delivered into people’s homes and as such all practitioners at the beginning of the session go over the house keeping rules.

**Review and Evaluation of Policy**

The policy is a working document enabling The Courtyard to respond to Child Protection issues as and when they arise and as such is subject to ongoing amendment.

**GUIDELINES FOR THE CHILD PROTECTION OFFICER**

**(OR, IN THEIR ABSENCE, THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR)**

**Responding to Allegations or Suspicions**

**It is not the responsibility of any individual working at The Courtyard to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However, it is everyone’s responsibility to act on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities.**

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

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

* A criminal investigation
* A child protection investigation
* A disciplinary or misconduct investigation

**Actions if there are concerns**

1. Concerns about poor practice:

* If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice, The Courtyard Child Protection Officer (currently Associate Director) will deal with it as a misconduct issue.
* If the allegation is about poor practice by the Courtyard Child Protection Officer (currently Associate Director), or if the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, it should be reported to the Chief Executive & Artistic Director who will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether or not to instigate disciplinary proceedings.

2. Concerns about suspected abuse:

* Any suspicion that a child has been abused by a member of staff should be reported to the Courtyard Child Protection Officer (Associate Director), who will take such steps as may be necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
* The Courtyard Child Protection Officer will refer the allegation to the social services department, who may involve the police, or go directly to the police if out of hours or if a child is considered in immediate danger.
* The parents/carers of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the social services department.
* If the Courtyard Child Protection Officer is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report must be made to the Chief Executive & Artistic Director.

**Confidentiality**

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned and information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with data protection laws.

The Courtyard Child Protection Officer should seek Social Services advice on who should approach the alleged abuser.

There are legal whistle-blowing guidelines/procedures to protect anybody who reports suspected abuse and their identity remains confidential where possible.

**Internal Enquiries and Suspension**

* The Courtyard Child Protection Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive & Artistic Director, 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 and police inquiries, the Courtyard Disciplinary Committee will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. The welfare of the individual should remain of paramount importance throughout.

**Procedural Guidelines on Receipt of a Disclosure from a Child/Young Person**

1) If the alleged abuse is of a nature requiring the involvement of Social Services or police, do so immediately.

2) When collecting information for Social Services or the police about suspected abuse, ensure that a detailed record is made at the time of the disclosure/concern.
Where possible, include the following:

* The individual’s name, age and date of birth.
* The individual’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, if relevant, or any indirect signs of abuse, such as behavioural changes.
* Details of any witnesses to the incident(s).
* The individual’s account, if it can be given, of what has happened.
* A record of whether the parents have been contacted and, if so, what has been said.
* A record of whether anyone else has been consulted and, if so, what has been said.
* A record of who has been alleged to be the abuser, if this has been specified.

3) Ensure that advice is sought from Social Services about who should approach the alleged abuser.

4) 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.

Further guidance is available from the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or Childline 0800 1111. Or you can call The Herefordshire Multi Agency Referral Team on 01432 260800.

**Recruitment of Staff and Volunteers**

The Courtyard recognises that anyone may have the potential to abuse children/vulnerable adults in some way and that all reasonable steps should be taken to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with them.

* **Pre-appointment checks for permanent or contractual staff (whether paid or voluntary) who may, either frequently or occasionally, have unsupervised access to children will include the following steps**:
1. The applicant will complete an application form which will elicit information about the applicant’s past, including a responsibility to declare any criminal record.
2. Consent will be obtained from an applicant to seek information from the Disclosure & Barring Service and an Enhanced Disclosure check will then be undertaken. Applicants will provide evidence of identity (passport or photo driving licence) and address as part of the Enhanced Disclosure check process.
3. The applicant will provide two confidential references regarding previous work with children. These references will be taken up and confirmed through telephone contact and followed up in writing.

	* **For permanent appointments where unsupervised access to children is not anticipated to be likely, the pre-appointment checks will include the following steps:**

1) The applicant will complete an application form which will elicit information about the applicant’s past, including a responsibility to declare any criminal record.

2) The applicant will provide two confidential references.

3) Successful applicants will provide evidence of identity (passport or photo driving licence) and address.

* **For cast members and crew of in-house productions featuring children:**

1) A self-declaration about any criminal record regarding children/vulnerable adults will be requested.

2) Procedures to make sure that artists do not find themselves alone with children or vulnerable adults should be a standard part of production planning. Children will be assigned a DBS-checked chaperone who will be responsible for them from the point of signing in for each performance.

3) At the start of the rehearsal process, the Child Protection Officer will equip the cast members with a copy of the Child Protection Policy and discuss the good practice guidelines highlighted therein.

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