

# Child Protection Policy Procedures and Best Practice



## **Overview**

Rubber Chicken Theatre prides itself on being first and foremost a performing arts family. When the younger children in our family are feeling tired, they seek out the older ones for a hug. When the older ones are having a crisis of confidence, the adults are there to support them. It is a relaxed approach to caring for one another and suits us as an organisation well.

However, as a company that works primarily with children and young people, we have duty of care to protect those we work with from harm. We are lucky that 'after the fact' child protection concerns are very few and far between within the organisation. However that fact should not breed complacency and reactive procedures should be robust and clear to ensure that if they are called upon, they help those in need and do not hinder keeping children and young people safe. In hand with that, it is important that we implement common sense best practice to protect everyone involved with our activities and productions.



### **Our Guiding Principles**

**We believe everyone has the right to perform and express themselves free from harassment, bullying and harm.**

**We believe everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and young people, to keep them safe and to practise in a way that protects them.**

**We will make sure that all children and young people have the same protection regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.**

## **About this Document**

This document was created in Oct 2018 by Leigh Austin (Operations Officer) and approved for use in the company by Pamela Mackie (Creative Director) in Oct 2018. It is to be reviewed in Oct 2021.

## **Out of Scope Incidents**

Where an incident occurs that may have child protection implications but is not covered in this document, the named Child Protection Officers should use their knowledge, skills and experience to resolve the incident in the best interests of the child(ren) concerned. They should, if necessary, contact the NSPCC adult helpline for advice and support.

## **Priority Review**

A priority review of and if necessary, an amendment to, this document may take place at any time before its review date under instruction from the Creative Director or where an Out of Scope Incident occurs.

## **Review / Amendment History**

Oct 2018 – Document creation and sign off.

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# **Part 1 – Raising and Responding to Child Protection Concerns**

## **Child Protection Officers (CPO)**

The child protection officers are the first point of contact for any concerns regarding the wellbeing of a young person. They are:

- **Pamela Mackie**
- **Leigh Austin**
- **Gillian Gray**

The CPO's may share information with each other (unless it involves one of the officers directly). If a person wishes to raise a concern about one of the officers, they should either contact one of the other officers or phone the NSPCC adult helpline.

## **The NSPCC Adult Helpline**

Anyone can contact the NSPCC adult helpline to raise a concern about the welfare of a young person and we would encourage a person to do so if they were not comfortable sharing information with one of the RCT CPOs.

The NSPCC helpline is a place adults can contact by phone or email to get advice or share their concerns about a child, anonymously if they wish. It's staffed by professional practitioners with backgrounds in jobs like teaching, healthcare and social work, who know how to spot the signs of abuse and what to do to help.

When a person contacts the helpline, the NSPCC will take some details and then either offer helpful advice or if necessary, refer the matter to statutory authorities, such as children's services or the police.

If there is an immediate threat to a child's safety, the police should be contacted without delay using 999.

# **Talk to the NSPCC**

For advice and support about a child,  
or to report a concern, talk to us.  
It's free and you don't have to say who you are.

**0808 800 5000**

**[help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)   [nspcc.org.uk/helpline](https://nspcc.org.uk/helpline)**

## **Disclosure Procedure**

This procedure should be followed if a child discloses an event that indicates they may have been harmed or are at risk of harm.

### **Procedure**

- If a child wishes to tell you something, do not promise to keep it a secret. If you have to break this promise, it can be a major breakdown in trust and the child may be unwilling to share information with other services in the future.
- Listen to the child and make concise notes about:
  - the child's details (name, age, address)
  - what the child said or did that gave you cause for concern (if the child made a verbal disclosure, write down their exact words)
  - any information the child has given you about the alleged abuser.
- Reassure the child.
- If there is an obvious and immediate threat to a child's safety, the police should be contacted using 999.
- Immediately inform one of the child protection officers. Do not speak to anyone else about the matter unless being questioned / interviewed by police or statutory services etc.

### **Advice from the NSPCC:**

**Show you care, help them open up:** Give your full attention to the child or young person and keep your body language open and encouraging. Be compassionate, be understanding and reassure them their feelings are important. Phrases such as 'you've shown such courage today' help.

**Take your time, slow down:** Respect pauses and don't interrupt the child – let them go at their own pace. Recognise and respond to their body language. And remember that it may take several conversations for them to share what's happened to them.

**Show you understand, reflect back:** Make it clear you're interested in what the child is telling you. Reflect back what they've said to check your understanding – and use their language to show it's their experience.

## **Spotting Signs of Abuse and Raising Concerns**

Children and young people who have been abused may want to tell someone, but not have the exact words to do so. They may attempt to disclose abuse by giving adults clues, through their actions and by using indirect words. It is therefore important that everyone is constantly vigilant for potential signs of abuse. There is a detailed and comprehensive guide from the NSPCC which is included as an appendix to this document which details potential warning signs.

### **If you spot potential signs of abuse and are concerned:**

- Make a note of the signs you have spotted along with details about the child. If they signs were verbal, write down the exact words used.
- Immediately inform one of the child protection officers. Do not speak to anyone else about the matter unless being questioned / interviewed by police or statutory services etc.
- If there is an obvious and immediate threat to a child's safety, the police should be contacted using 999.

## **What Happens Next?**

When you inform one of the CPOs about a disclosure or a concern, they will ask you to write it down on a form – this is why it is important to keep accurate notes. The form, along with your notes, will then be held securely at Rubber Chicken Theatre HQ in a locked cabinet.

The CPO you have reported it to will discuss the matter with at least one of the other CPOs and may contact the NSPCC adult helpline for advice before making a decision about what to do.

They may:

- Store the information on file.
- Share the information with Stirling Council's Children's Services.
- Share the information with the police.

You will be told what has happened with the information.

If the information is stored on file, this does not mean that the CPOs don't believe the child or you. It may be that other people have raised a concern and they are pulling together a file of evidence to pass on.

## **Part 2 – Operational Best Practice**

## **PVG Registration**

At RCT, it is our policy to register all adults over the age of 18 who regularly come into contact with children within the organisation with the PVG scheme. In addition, we may register young adults (aged 16 / 17) with the PVG scheme if they regularly support and assist with child based activities within the organisation. There is not a formal test for determining what constitutes regular contact / support and these decisions are made on a case by case basis by the CPOs.

## **Application Handling, Processing & Storage**

There are two people that can countersign PVG applications. They are:

- **Pamela Mackie**
- **Leigh Austin**

The applications are processed on behalf of RCT by Volunteer Scotland. RCT will cover the costs of all PVG applications for those in paid roles. Those who volunteer for the organisation have their applications paid for the by the Scottish Government. Completed applications and PVG certificates are kept in locked storage at RCT HQ.

## **Pending Applications**

Those with pending PVG applications may start work with RCT if:

They are a professional actively working with children (eg. Teacher / coach) and are already members of the PVG scheme.

Or

They are a young adult who has already been assisting with activities as a junior volunteer and have recently turned 16.

Or

They can undertake tasks in the meantime that do not bring them into regular contact with children.

## **PVG Requirement for Body of Persons Licence Application**

It may be necessary for us to share personal details of those with PVG membership including name, PVG membership number and PVG certificate with Stirling Council or other government body when we apply to them for a Body of Persons Licence. These applications are normally made for shows in which children perform to a paying audience; information will only be shared with the person's consent and if they are involved in a production for which we are applying for a licence.

## **Young Adults**

In most mainstream theatre companies, those over the age of 16 are considered adults, a view supported by the The Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act 1991. In contrast, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 refers to an adult as someone over the age of 18.

To solve this conflict of terms, we consider those aged 16 and 17 within the company as young adults - they are afforded the status of an 'adult' within the company but still fall under its child protection policy.

## **Young Adults and Disclosures / Concerns**

If a person wishes to raise a child protection concern or receives a disclosure from a young adult, they should report it using the same procedures contained in Part 1 of this document.



## **Chaperones and Ratios**

RCT operates a variable ratio policy, as various factors such as age of the participants, activity being undertaken and location will determine how much supervision is required. This decision is taken as part of the activity risk assessment.

However, as a guide, a ratio of 1 adult to 10 children or 2 young adults to 10 children is expected and this is the ratio used during production rehearsals and performances.

## **Chaperones**

Chaperones are required for all production performances at the recommended ratio of 1 to 10. The responsibility of the chaperone is to supervise the children in their care, assist with changing if necessary, help with break times and monitor the child's overall wellbeing.

## **Authority of the Lead Chaperone**

In each performance, a lead chaperone will be appointed. They hold ultimate responsibility for the care of the children in the performance and as such has the authority to remove a child from the performance in part or in whole if they consider it would not be beneficial to the child. Their decision is final and cannot be challenged.

## **Changing**

For the majority of children participating in RCT shows, the system of base costumes ensures that no child is ever nude whilst changing. Base costumes are worn to and from the venue and other costumes are only ever placed on top. If for any reason, a base costume needs to be removed or it is not suitable for a child to wear one, chaperones should create a private space to allow a child to change. Ideally, identification and creation of this space should be undertaken as part of the risk assessment.

Young adults may share changing space with adults. If it unavoidable and necessary for a child to share changing space with an adult, consent must be obtained from both the child and the parent. In these rare situations, there must always be a second adult in the room. The lead chaperone should check in with the child at regular intervals.

## **Adult Themes / Content**

It is part of the Creative Director's remit to select productions for performance that are suitable for children and young people to participate in. However it may be that some productions in part rely on adult themes such as relationships, violence, sexual references, substance use, and foul language. In these situations, the Creative Director will make a common sense, on merit decision about its inclusion. This decision in part relies on but not limited to licensing options, casting, parent and child consent, ability of the production team to direct the scenes, costuming and confidence of the child(ren) involved. Where scenes are included, the Creative Director will work with the production team and cast to ensure they remain comfortable performing such scenes and actively suggest alternatives throughout.



## **Training**

The majority of our staff and volunteers receive appropriate child protection training through the course of their professional working lives. However, where training needs are identified, the operations officer will ensure appropriate provision is made available. This may be in-house or external training depending on the needs.