

Child Protection Policy

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1.1	Some minor amendments to wording throughout and insertion of paragraph regarding adults in rehearsal spaces.	14/08/23	Leigh Austin

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that we provide a safe place for children and young people to participate in performing arts and other associated activities.

Where an incident occurs that may have child protection implications but is not explicitly 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.

Child Protections Officers

The companies named Child Protection Officers (CPOs) 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.

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 phone number is: 0808 800 5000.

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.

People Receiving a Disclosure from a Young Person

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

- 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) and any information the child has given you about the alleged abuser.
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling you.
- 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 CPOs. Do not speak to anyone else about the matter unless being questioned / interviewed by police or statutory services etc.

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 the 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 When You Report a Concern

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.

Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme (PVG)

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.

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 by the Scottish Government.

Those with pending PVG applications may start work with RCT if any of the following apply:

- They are a professional actively working with children (eg. Teacher) and are already members of the PVG scheme.
- They are a young adult who has already been assisting with activities as a junior volunteer and have recently turned 16.
- They can undertake tasks in the meantime that do not bring them into unsupervised contact with children.

Access to Activities / Production Spaces

During activities and productions, only RCT staff, volunteers and subcontractors are permitted to be in the activity / rehearsal space (or backstage during a performance). In some cases, venue staff may also be permitted access. Parents / Carers are permitted access at the start and end of a session (or by other invite) but are not typically allowed to stay during the activity / rehearsal.

During performances, access to changing spaces is strictly controlled, only cast and crew are allowed access.

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.

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 this document.

Ratios

RCT operates a variable ratio approach to its activities, 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 12 children or 2 young adults to 12 children is most likely to be followed.

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 children's overall wellbeing.

For 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 most 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 identify 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 is 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 at least two adults in the room and a chaperone should check in with the child at regular intervals.

Shows with Adult 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 maturity / experience of the child(ren) involved. Where such scenes are included, the Creative Director will work with the production team and cast to ensure they remain comfortable performing such scenes and provide alternatives should a scene be too uncomfortable for a child or young adult to perform.

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 admin officer will ensure appropriate provision is made available. This may be in-house or external training depending on the needs identified. A record will be kept of all training undertaken.