



Child Protection Policy & Procedures

Version	DRAFT
Date approved by MMCS Committee	31 May 2024
Review Date	May 2025 (or before start of next show involving children)

1. INTRODUCTION

Maidenhead Musical Comedy Society ('MMCS') recognises its 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.

This document has been created to set out the policy and procedures followed by the society to ensure the protection and safeguarding of any children involved in any activity run by the society, including theatrical productions.

In this document, children are defined as anyone aged under 18. However, chaperone arrangements only relate to children up to the age of 16.

The society recognises that abuse can take many forms, whether it be physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. The society is committed to practices which protect children from harm.

The society believes 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 should be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All members and employees of the society should be clear on how to respond appropriately.

The society will ensure that:

- All children will be treated equally, and with respect and dignity.
- The duty of care to children will always be put first.
- Enthusiastic and constructive feedback will be given, and negative criticism avoided.
- Bullying will not be accepted or condoned.
- Action will be taken to stop any inappropriate verbal or physical behaviour.
- It will keep itself informed of changes in legislation and policies for the protection of children.
- It will undertake relevant development and training, where necessary.
- It will maintain a secure register of every child involved with the society, in line with its Data Protection policy, with emergency contact details available at all times in case of emergencies.

The society has a dedicated Child Protection Officer, responsible for ensuring that the child protection policy and procedures are adhered to. That person's name is **Emma Sanders**. They can be contacted on emmaseymour1983@gmail.com.

Prior to the commencement of any production or activity which involves children, the society's Committee will ensure this policy is reviewed or has been reviewed in the past 12 months.

2. Responsibilities of the Society

At the outset of any production or activity which will involve children, the society will:

- Undertake a risk assessment; risk will be monitored throughout the production process.
- Ensure that the production team (Director / Choreographer / Musical Director - as applicable) have an up to date Enhanced Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check; either undertaken by the society (via NODA) or confirmed via the DBS update service.
- Ensure any other adults that will be responsible for instructing or supervising children on a face to face, one-to-one basis will hold an appropriate chaperone licence or will have an appropriate DBS check undertaken by the society or confirmed via the DBS update service; this may include, for example, dressers / adults who accompany children on rehearsal breaks. An enhanced check will be required where an adult is expected to supervise children on more than 3 occasions in a 30 day period, whilst a standard check will be suitable where supervision is less frequent.
- Engage in effective recruitment of chaperones, including appropriate vetting (where necessary, in consultation with the local education authority).
- Ensure children are suitably supervised by Chaperones during performances and regulated rehearsals, in line with the child performance licensing and activities legislation.
- Ensure that children are suitably supervised at all times during non-regulated rehearsals, in line with the appropriate risk assessment.
- Know how to get in touch with the local authority social services, in case it needs to report a concern.
- Provide parents / carers with a copy of this policy and contact details for the society's Child Protection Officer.
- Collate and securely maintain a record of key information relating to each participating child; to include name, address, age, emergency contact information, and any relevant medical information, such as allergies, which the society should be aware of.

3. Responsibilities of Parents / Carers

Where a child is to take part in an activity run by the society, including rehearsals and performances, their parent / carer / responsible adult must:

- Provide the society with relevant information relating to their child; including name, address, age, emergency contact information, and any relevant medical information, such as allergies, which the society should be aware of.
- Register their child into the responsibility of the society at the start of any rehearsal / performance / activity.
- Be responsible for collecting (or arranging the collection of) their children after rehearsals or performances. It is not the responsibility of the society to take children home.

4. Unsupervised Contact

- The society will attempt to ensure that no adult has unsupervised contact with children.
- If possible there will always be 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, he or she may be required to undertake a DBS check.

5. Physical Contact

- All adults will maintain a safe and appropriate distance from children.
- Adults will only make physical contact with children when it is absolutely necessary - for example, where it is requested by the director to convey the script - and only where the consent of the child has been sought and gained prior to any physical contact, and the purpose of the contact made clear.

6. Managing Sensitive Information

- The society has a policy and procedures for the taking, using and storage of photographs or images of children.
- Permission will be sought from the parents for use of photographic material featuring children for promotional or other purposes.
- The society will ensure confidentiality in order to protect the rights of its members, including the safe handling, storage and disposal of any sensitive information such as criminal record disclosures.

7. 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 with responsibility for 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 Chairman or, where unavailable, another member of the Committee.
- Please make a note for your own records of what you witnessed and when, 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 from any involvement in the production until an investigation is concluded, with the individual excluded from the theatre, rehearsal rooms etc.

8. Disclosure of Abuse

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 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 social services or the 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.

9. 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.

10. Rights & Confidentiality

- If a complaint is made against a member of the society, he or she will be made aware of his rights under the society's disciplinary procedures.
- 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 right to confidentiality under the Data Protection Act 1998. Remember also that any possible criminal investigation could be compromised through inappropriate information being released.
- In criminal law the Crown, or other prosecuting authority, has to prove guilt and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

11. 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, where a designated first-aider is available they will administer first aid. Where a first-aider is not available, suitable emergency first aid will be sourced. The injury will be recorded in the society’s accident book, with parents notified at the earliest opportunity.
- If a child attends a performance / rehearsal / activity with an obvious, existing physical injury a record of this will be made in the accident book. 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.

12. Criminal Record Disclosures

- If the society believes it is in its best interests to obtain criminal record disclosures for chaperones or other personnel, it will inform the individual of the necessary procedures and the level of disclosure required. A Standard disclosure will apply for anyone with supervised access to children. An Enhanced disclosure will be required for anyone with unsupervised access.
- The society will ensure that information contained in the disclosure is not misused and is stored securely.

13. Chaperones

- 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 (eg. 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 made aware of the society’s Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- Chaperones will not usually have unsupervised access to children in their care. If unsupervised access is unavoidable, or if this is a requirement of the local authority, a criminal record disclosure will be sought.
- Where chaperones are not satisfied with the conditions for the children, they should bring this to the attention of the producer. If changes cannot be made satisfactorily, the chaperone 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 Dangerous Performances Act, 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.
- 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 their parents.
- 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 or child).
- Chaperones should have written arrangements for children after performances. If someone different is to collect the child, a telephone call should be made to the parent to confirm the arrangements.
- Children should be signed out when leaving and a record made of the person collecting.
- If a parent has not collected the child, it is the duty of the chaperone to stay with that child or make arrangements to take them home.