



Safeguarding Children and Young People's Policy

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Quick link to [Safeguarding Incident Report Form](#)

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POLICY STATEMENT

This policy is made in accordance with Open Theatre's mission and values; to develop, promote and sustain the creativity and artistry of young people with learning disabilities.

Open Theatre believes that all children and young people have the right to access the arts and the wide variety of cultural activity on offer; and we have a **responsibility to place paramount importance on the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people involved with the company and our activities.**

The full Policy Statement is available in Appendix 1 of this document.

OPEN THEATRE'S SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURE

REPORTING CONCERNS

If a child/young person tells you about abuse, or you suspect a child/young person is being abused, you must report the concern in the appropriate way:

Responding to an immediate incident

- **If a child has been seriously harmed or is at immediate risk of serious harm, call the police (999)**
- **Look after the victim (who may need emergency medical attention)**
- **If the child has been taken to hospital, be prepared to tell relevant staff about the incident and/or disclosure**

If you are working out of school:

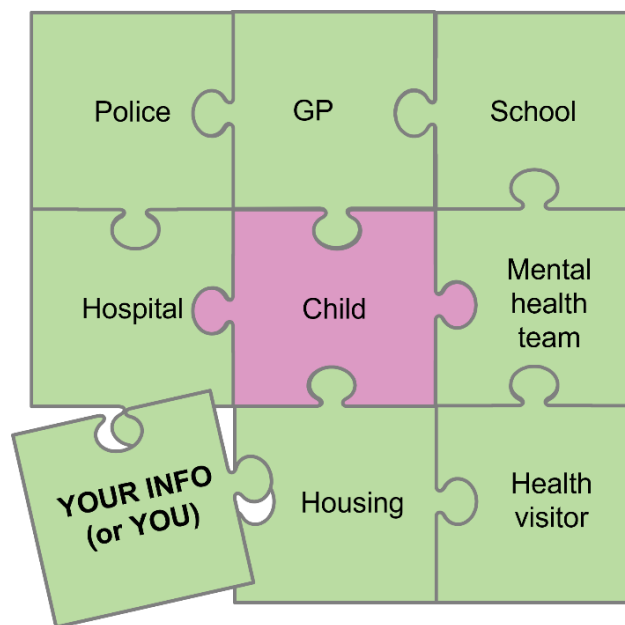
Your role is to report the information to the Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSO) for Open Theatre using the Safeguarding Incident Report Form, and also share the information with the setting you are working in, if appropriate.

If you are working in school:

Your role is to follow the Safeguarding Policy of the school and then pass the information onto the Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSO) for Open Theatre using the Safeguarding Incident Report Form.

Guidance for staff and volunteers on recognising and reporting abuse

You are not expected to make any decisions or judgements on your own. Your responsibility is simply to report any concerns following the procedures above. The Designated Safeguarding Officers hold information on the local and national Safeguarding Reporting Networks and will know what to do next.



Complaints & allegations about Open Theatre staff

If a complaint or allegation concerns another member of the Open Theatre staff team (paid or voluntary), it is important to take a note and report it at once to the Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSOs), the Director, or the Board of Trustees (whichever is appropriate). Follow [Open Theatre's Whistleblowing Policy](#) in conjunction with this policy.

DISCLOSURES

RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE

Disclosure is the process by which children and young people start to share their experiences of abuse with others. All disclosures should be taken seriously and responded to quickly and sensitively.

You should:

- Stay calm and do not show shock
- Listen and watch carefully
- If appropriate, reassure the young person and tell them that they have done the right thing by telling you and that you are treating the information seriously
- If appropriate, gain consent from the young person
- If consent is not given, or is difficult to obtain due to other barriers such as communication difficulties, or it is inappropriate to do so, and you believe the child/young person is at risk of significant harm, **you must share the information without consent**
- Write down what was said as soon as possible to ensure key information/facts are remembered
- Report the disclosure following the process outlined above

You should not:

- Press the person for details
- Promise to keep secrets
- Make promises you cannot keep (such as this will never happen to you again)
- Contact the alleged abuser
- Be judgmental or ask leading questions (e.g., why do you think this happened?)

- Pass on the information to anyone other than those with a legitimate need to know

Information Sharing & Communication

A person describing abuse they have experienced may ask for a guarantee of confidentiality before talking to you. **You cannot give a guarantee** of that kind.

You can tell the person that the policy of Open Theatre is that information may have to be shared with the main people who have responsibility for Safeguarding.

Important Note: It would contravene this policy to tell anyone who does not need to know (this includes other staff members, volunteers, Board members).

HOW DISCLOSURES HAPPEN

It takes extraordinary courage for a child to go through the journey of disclosing abuse. This can take place through a conversation (verbal or nonverbal) or disclosed over a long period of time as trust and relationships are built.

Children may disclose directly or indirectly and sometimes they may start sharing details of abuse before they are ready to put their thoughts and feelings in order.

Not all disclosures will lead to a formal report of abuse, or a case being taken to court, but all disclosures should be taken seriously.

It is vital that anyone who works with children and young people undertaking this journey is able to provide them with the support they need.

Children and young people may disclose abuse in a variety of ways, including:

Directly	making specific verbal statements about what has happened to them
Indirectly	making ambiguous verbal statements which suggest something is wrong
Behaviourally	displaying behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate)
Nonverbally	Children and young people may not always be aware that they are disclosing abuse through their actions and behaviour

Sometimes children and young people make partial disclosures of abuse. This means they give some details about what they've experienced, but not the whole picture. They may withhold some information because they:

- are afraid they will get in trouble with or upset their family
- want to deflect blame in case of family difficulties as a result of the disclosure
- feel ashamed and/or guilty
- need to protect themselves from having to relive traumatic events

BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE

Some children and young people are reluctant to seek help because they feel they don't have anyone to turn to for support.

They may have sought help in the past and had a negative experience, which makes them unlikely to do so again.

They may also:

- feel that they will not be taken seriously
- feel too embarrassed to talk to an adult about a private or personal problem
- worry about confidentiality
- lack trust in the people around them (including parents) and in the services provided to help them

- fear the consequences of asking for help
- worry they will be causing trouble and making the situation worse
- find formal procedures overwhelming

(Mental Health Foundation and Camelot Foundation, 2006).

Not all children and young people realise they have experienced abuse, for example if they have been **groomed**.

OPEN THEATRE'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Open Theatre promotes a safeguarding culture that reaches into all aspects of what we do. You can find more information about specific responsibilities below.



RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF STAFF – SAFER RECRUITMENT

Safer recruitment is a set of practices to help make sure staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and young people.

Safer recruitment is a vital part of creating a safe and positive environment and making a commitment to keep children safe from harm. It is a continuing process of improvement.

At Open Theatre:

- All new staff are required to provide two references (including one from their last employer) before a formal contract offer can be made.
- Open Theatre ensures that all current staff and Board members have been subject to an appropriate level **DBS** (formerly CRB) checks and undergo annual Safeguarding training.
- Open Theatre appoints at least two Designated Safeguarding Officers with appropriate level training and the Associate for Business and also a Lead Trustee hold responsibility for overseeing policy formulation.

OPEN THEATRE'S FURTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

We will support staff and volunteers who report suspicions of abuse even if those suspicions and allegations are later judged to be unfounded but were made at the time in good faith.

The Designated Safeguarding Officers will ensure all staff, including freelance & contract staff are offered training, advice, and guidance in relation to this policy every two years and provide regular updates as part of team meetings and Practitioner Training events.

CONCLUSION

Open Theatre takes the safeguarding of individuals (children and adults) with and without (learning) disabilities very seriously and is committed to taking all appropriate action to prevent abuse occurring and to deal with any allegations promptly and effectively.

APPENDIX 1

Open Theatre's Safeguarding of Children and Young People

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy is made in accordance with Open Theatre's mission and values to develop, promote and sustain the creativity and artistry of young people with learning disabilities.

Open Theatre believes that all children and young people have the right to access the arts and the wide variety of cultural activity on offer and we have a **responsibility to place paramount importance on the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people involved with the company and our activities.**

This policy statement should be read alongside our organisational policies, procedures, guidance, and other related documents.

Open Theatre:

- Believes that children and young people should never experience abuse of any kind. **Open Theatre is committed to work in a way that promotes the welfare of all children and young people, to keep them safe and to protect them from harm. We recognise our duty to ensure that appropriate action is taken** where a child or young person is experiencing harm or is at risk of harm.
- Will **ensure all suspicions and allegations of abuse are taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.** In relation to serious allegations, this may require a referral to children's services, social services and/or, the police.
- Will ensure that children, vulnerable adults, parents, carers, and guardians, involved with Open Theatre Company are **fully informed of how to make a complaint of abuse.**

- Will **acquire verbal or written consent** from the individual's parents/carers, the child's school or whoever is acting in loco parentis **before engaging the child in Open Theatre's Practice.**
- Will consult and **acquire written consent** from the individual's parents/carers/teacher to identify the **most appropriate method of communication to facilitate the engagement** of the child/young person.
- Will regularly **review the methods of communication with all participants** to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both participants and staff. **Staff will be provided with regular training on company policy relating to communication with children, young people, and vulnerable adults.**
- Will **acquire verbal or written consent** (as above) **to use images and stories for external communication** and ensure that participants see how their story is used in Open Theatre Company materials.
- Will **acquire consent** (as above) **to administer first aid or other medical treatments.**
- Will **record all injuries or accidents and the treatment given.**

Furthermore, Open Theatre:

- Acknowledges the value of international research indicating that **children and young people with disabilities are approximately three times more likely to be abused than nondisabled children.** [Source: Stuart and Baines (2004) p 2122]
- Is committed to raising all staff's awareness and knowledge of how to safeguard children and young people.

APPENDIX 2

Definitions and specific examples of Open Theatre's approach

DEFINITIONS

The Children Act 1989 states that a 'child' is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. References to young people are made to more appropriately address children 12yrs-17yrs.

Abuse is a deliberate act of ill-treatment that can harm or is likely to harm a person's safety, wellbeing, and development. Abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional. Abuse may not, however, fall easily into these categories and staff/associates are not expected to be experts in the field.

MAIN FORMS OF ABUSE

Physical Abuse	Hitting, shaking, slapping, pushing, kicking, throwing, poisoning, burning, or scalding, drowning, suffocating misuse of medication, restraint or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.
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 (i.e., includes non-contact activities such as grooming) whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.
Emotional Abuse	The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent effects on the child's emotional development.
Neglect	Ignoring medical or physical care needs; failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care, or educational services; the withholding of the necessities of life, such as

	medication, adequate nutrition social interaction and heating.
Bullying including Cyberbullying	Bullying is behaviour that hurts someone else. It includes name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening, or undermining someone. Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place online. Unlike bullying in the real world, online bullying can follow the child wherever they go, via social networks, gaming, and mobile phones.
Child Sexual Exploitation	Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. When a child or young person is exploited, they are given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status, and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities. Children and young people are often tricked into believing they are in a loving and consensual relationship. This is called <u>grooming</u> . They may trust their abuser and not understand that they are being abused.
Child Trafficking	Children and young people can be trafficked into or within the UK to be sexually exploited. They're moved around the country and abused by being forced to take part in sexual activities, often with more than one person. Young people in gangs can also be sexually exploited.
Domestic Abuse	Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It can seriously harm children and young people and witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse.
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)	FGM is when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. It's also known as 'female circumcision' or 'cutting', but has many other names.
Grooming/County Lines	Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit, and abuse them. County Lines is where children are used to deliver drugs. Vulnerable

	children and young people are targeted by groomers and are often 'tricked' into a cycle of continuous 'service'.
Online abuse	Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet. It can happen across any device that's connected to the web e.g., computers, tablets, and mobile phones. And it can happen anywhere online, including social media, text messages and messaging apps, emails, online chats, online gaming, live-streaming sites. Children and young people can be at risk of online abuse from people they know or from strangers. It might be part of other abuse which is taking place offline, like bullying or grooming. Or the abuse might only happen online.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

Here are some example scenarios that have arisen through our work with young people with learning disabilities (YPWLD). Here we have outlined our approach to these scenarios and how we aim to keep our participants safe, without undermining the value of building positive working relationships with YPWLD.

Drama sessions and use of touch

Open Theatre recognises that both close proximity and contact (including physical touch) are an integral part of its practice, which centres around the use of non-verbal physical theatre and has been developed over years of working with young people with learning disabilities and in special schools.

Any close contact and touch will be appropriate to the situation and will be to enable the participants' participation and enjoyment of the activity, or to keep them safe from harm. Wherever possible, consent (verbal or non-verbal) to physical contact during a session will be gained from the child or young person themselves, or if appropriate their care/support worker.

Anyone has the right to refuse any physical engagement, touch or working in close proximity during an activity and not to be challenged on this.

Open Theatre works with children and young people through activity in and out of school contexts for long periods of time (often over several years and extending into adulthood); therefore building up relationships with its participants and their staff/carers.

Relationships must remain professional and appropriate at all times; however Open Theatre staff recognise the need for close physical contact (such as a welcome hug or high five) as part of maintaining this relationship and helping participants to engage in a session. People with learning disabilities may not have the same understanding of boundaries around physical contact that might exist in a traditional professional setting, so should not be made to feel 'naughty' or 'wrong' in such a situation and Open Theatre staff should behave professionally and explain what is appropriate if this suits the individual and the situation.

Open Theatre also recognises that the lack of physical contact for a child/young person who needs it can have a detrimental effect on their mental health, wellbeing, and participation in a session.

The above sits within the context of the depth of safeguarding training Open Theatre staff receive, which allows for information giving, understanding, group discussion and use of scenarios. This is complemented by the regular training in Open Theatre's practice and ways of working in different contexts, making staff members knowledgeable of the purpose of physical contact and its appropriate use.

Transport of participants

As part of its work with people with learning disabilities, Open Theatre acknowledges that many of its participants cannot travel independently to reach a session or activity. In most cases support is provided by families, carers, and support workers but at times it may be necessary for Open Theatre to provide this travel support to enable young people and adults to participate in its activities. This could include travelling with

someone on a train or bus, providing a lift in a car or walking someone to a mode of transport.

It is best practice that any members of staff supporting a participant with travelling should not do this in isolation and therefore at least 2 members of staff are present.

If the participant is under 18 years old, there must always be 2 members of staff present and there must be verbal or written acknowledgement from their parents/carers that this is a suitable arrangement.

If a participant is over 18 years of age and therefore an adult, it is acceptable for 1 member of staff to support them with travelling to or from a session, if necessary, as long as permission is gained from the participant and where appropriate from a parent/carer too. If an Open Theatre staff member travels with an adult participant on their own, another member of the Open Theatre Company must know about this, prior to the travel taking place.

Any member of staff using their own vehicle for work-related purposes to transport participants must possess a current, full, valid driving licence and have Business Car Insurance in relation to their employment with the company.

Communication & social media

Open Theatre recognises that its participants may need to use various forms of communication to suit their needs, in order to participate in Open Theatre activities.

Open Theatre staff mobile phone numbers are made available to participants and parents/carers as needed to aid participation in activities of the company. Open Theatre staff are not expected to share their personal phone number with participants if they don't wish to and requests for work mobile phones are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

The use of text messages, phone calls and WhatsApp groups are recognised by the

company as suitable ways to communicate with some of its participants, especially those that are unable to communicate through email.

All staff using personal mobile phones for communication with participants must make their messages available to Open Theatre Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSOs) or the Director as appropriate on request. Any reports of inappropriate use of communication by participants or staff members must be reported immediately to Open Theatre's DSO's.

Open Theatre recognises that social media forms part of communication with participants and it is therefore acceptable to be linked on social media platforms with participants or parents/carers who are **over** 18 years of age. This must always remain professional and appropriate to the relationship formed between staff and participants. Staff should also never feel pressured to accept another member of staff or participant on a social media platform, this is a personal choice. It is **not** acceptable for any member of staff to be linked on social media platforms to a participant under 18 years of age.

GUIDANCE FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS ON RECOGNISING AND REPORTING ABUSE

You are not expected to make any decisions or judgements on your own. Your responsibility is simply to report any concerns following the procedures above. The Designated Safeguarding Officers hold information on the local and national Safeguarding Reporting Networks and will know what to do next.

APPENDIX 3

Accountability and the Law

ACCOUNTABILITY

Open Theatre's **Board of Trustees** is ultimately responsible for ensuring that those benefiting from, or working with the company (i.e., participants) are not harmed in any way through contact with members of the company and the activities we offer as projects and services.

We have a **legal duty** to act prudently, and this means we must take all reasonable steps within our power to ensure that this does not happen. We recognise that we have a responsibility to make ourselves aware of relevant Safeguarding Legislation and guidance:

- The Children Act 1999
- The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Care Act 2014
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019

We are committed to regular review of our practices and policies including the training of staff, practitioners and volunteers, the provision of suitable supporting resources and information and adopting best practice as far as possible. We are also working to ensure that our policies and procedures are in line with Birmingham and Coventry's Local Safeguarding Children Partnership advice & guidance and the West Midlands Regional Safeguarding procedures and guidance.

As most of our work with children takes place in partnership with other organisations such as schools, arts venues, other companies etc., where there are safeguarding concerns, we will work closely and in partnership with their Designated Safeguarding Officers/Leads to ensure that children and young people are protected from harm.

Open Theatre is fully committed to ensuring that all individuals with learning disabilities (children and adults) coming into regular contact with a paid, unpaid staff member or volunteer linked to the company and its services are protected under this Safeguarding Policy.

The **Designated Safeguarding Officers** are responsible for ensuring the implementation of this Safeguarding Policy. The **Associate staff** may deputise for the DSOs in relation to Safeguarding in their absence and support as part of the **Designated Safeguarding Team** duties. All staff have a responsibility for following the procedures in this policy.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Open Theatre regularly works in partnership with other organisations, and this is fundamental to our work and to changing perceptions of learning disability within the arts and society. Open Theatre recognises therefore that in some cases the sections above may be in conflict with partner organisations safeguarding policies and protocols. Open Theatre invites open dialogue with participants and partner organisations to ensure that the needs of those we work with remains the focus of everything we do and understands that policies and protocols may need to be negotiated when working together. Any changes must be clearly communicated to all parties.

DELIVERING OPEN THEATRE'S PRACTICE ONLINE

The principle at play here is that despite not being with the child or young person physically, we still owe the children a duty of care, and the same level of safeguards need to be taken that would have been applicable had the children been physically present at their setting. Moreover, this safety is not only limited to keeping the children safe from adult content. Practitioners who come into contact with the children/young people via a digital method must look out for the signs that may indicate abuse and follow the protocol outlined in this policy.

What measures can be taken to increase security online?

- To keep the virtual experience safe for both the Practitioners and students, the Company will ensure consent is gained for all online activity as it would be for a physical session. Practitioners will follow protocols and procedures put in place by the school or setting hosting the session.
- If Open Theatre are hosting sessions, we will use appropriate platforms with inbuilt security to ensure that connections are encrypted, and no security breach is possible. Contingency plans will be written into risk assessments to ensure that if something goes wrong, there is a plan in place. All risk assessments carried out should also include reference to any material that is to be sent out or shared via recording with the participants.
- The mediums of communication need to be regulated, and the use of personal social media accounts for such purposes should not be used with children and young people. One-to-one sessions are not permitted, especially for underage children without the presence of an adult guardian and all sessions should be conducted in a well-lit place without any pictures or personal materials in the background.

Safeguarding Children Remotely, The Law

The two statutory pieces of guidance act as the principal legislation regarding safeguarding children online - **Keeping Children Safe in Education** and **Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance**. The Department for Education published the Safeguarding and Remote Education During Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance. The key takeaway stressed was: **the same rules govern online education as face-to-face teaching**. The DoE stressed that as **digital learning was a new frontier, both teachers and students understand how to approach safeguarding procedures online. Furthermore, teachers should also coordinate with parents to ensure that age-appropriate parental controls are set on all devices**. Any or all of these types of abuse may be perpetrated as the result of deliberate intent, negligence, or ignorance.

For any comments/corrections to this policy, please contact: Michelle Bould (Associate Business) at michelle@opentheatre.co.uk.