

awen productions community interest company inspiring media for social change

Child Protection Policy

It is widely accepted that it is the responsibility of every adult to protect children from abuse. It follows therefore that all organisations which may work with children have a moral and legal obligation to ensure they provide a standard of protection for children in their care. Those who have regular contact with children can be an important link in identifying cases where a child may be in need of protection.

Abuse can occur in the home, school and the recreational environment. Everyone working in the arts with children, whether it be in a paid, or voluntary, capacity has a role to play in safeguarding the welfare of the children in their care and preventing their abuse.

Child abuse can arouse strong emotions within people charged with caring for young people and it is important to understand these feelings.

It has been known for some individuals to actively seek employment or voluntary work with children in order to harm them.

The following guidelines have been developed in order to help staff and volunteers to:

- Identify their responsibilities with regard to child protection by safeguarding and promoting the interests and well-being of children with whom they are working
- Understand and implement procedures which will offer safeguards to children, members of staff and volunteer workers,
- Protect themselves against allegations of abuse

The guidance in the procedures is based on the following principles:

- The child's welfare is paramount.
- All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.

Working in partnership with children and their parents/carers is essential for the protection of children. Arts workers should also recognise that it is the statutory responsibility of the Social Service Department to ensure the welfare of children by investigating reported incidents of abuse.

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The Policy

awen productions community interest company (awen) runs media projects for people of all ages and abilities in a variety of community settings. In the course of their work practitioners are at times in contact with children, young people. **awen** will take every reasonable step to ensure that project participants are protected from physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

We believe that:

- the welfare of the child or young person is paramount;
- all children, young people regardless of 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 will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately;

Policy aims

The aim of this Child Protection Policy is to promote good practice to

- ensure children and young people are protected during **awen** project activities; and to
- allow all staff/freelance workers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.

Good practice guidelines

- always work in an open environment
- avoid private or unobserved situations and encourage open communication with no secrets
- act as a good role model and treat all children and young people with respect and dignity
- where possible, always ensure that someone in authority from the school/educational establishment, youth organisation or community group is present at workshops and other events
- secure parental consent in writing to act in loco parentis
- maintain a safe and appropriate distance from participants and only engage in physical contact when necessary
- keep a written record of any injury that occurs, along with the details of any treatment given
- avoid taking or dropping off a child or young person to an event, unless with prior parental consent

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Practices never to be sanctioned

The following should never be sanctioned. You should never:

- engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- share a room with a child or young person
- allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- make sexually suggestive comments to a child or young person even in fun
- reduce a child or young person to tears as a form of control
- allow allegations made by a child to go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon
- invite or allow children or young people to stay with you at your home unsupervised

Recruitment of staff and freelance workers

All staff and freelance artists employed by **awen productions Community Interest Company** to work in a situation that brings them into contact with children or young people will be required to provide an Enhanced Disclosure check with the Criminal Records Bureau no more than 3 years old or otherwise to undergo such a check before they start work.

Disclosures provide details of a person's criminal record and will inform recruitment decisions in accordance with **awen productions Community Interest Company** Code of Practise. (A criminal record is not necessarily a bar to obtaining a position with **awen**).

Responding to Concerns

If a child discloses to a worker, or the worker sees visible signs of suspected abuse the worker should;

1. Objectively listen and retain the information given by the child (write this down as soon as possible). Observations made, along with any information offered by the child should be recorded – it is important that workers stick to facts, not suppositions. All records must be handled confidentially and appropriately.
2. Any obvious physical injuries should be dealt with by a qualified first aider and noted in the accident book

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3. **awen productions Community Interest Company** has a commitment to work in partnership with parents/carers, where there are concerns about their children. In most circumstances it would be important to talk to parents/carers, to help clarify any initial concerns. For example, if a child seems withdrawn, he, or she, may have suffered bereavement in the family. Again the checking with the parent should be undertaken with care and objectivity. Workers should be aware that there are circumstances in which a child might be placed at even greater risk if such concerns were shared with parents/carers. In these cases the next steps should be taken without consultation with parents/carers.
4. Where a worker has received evidence of information which leads them to suspect abuse of a child the nominated person (**Denzil Monk**) should be immediately informed.
5. Where this is not possible and the worker feels that the indications are conclusive or lead to strong concern for the child's safety and well being they will inform Social Services immediately. If you are not sure what to do, you can also obtain advice by telephoning the NSPCC 24 hour freephone helpline on **0800 800 500**
6. Where the nominated person has been informed of a potential abuse situation they will inform Social Services or other relevant organisation and maintain confidential records of both the incident and the reporting conversation. Wherever possible, referrals telephoned to the Social Services Department should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours. A record should be made of the name and designation of the Social Services member of staff to whom the concerns were passed, together with the time and date of the call, in case any follow-up is needed.

Information passed to the Social Services Department must be as helpful as possible, hence the necessity for making a detailed record. Information should include the following:

- Nature of the allegation.
 - A description of any visible bruising or other injuries occurred.
 - The child's account if it can be given of what has happened and how any bruising or other injury occurred.
 - Any times, dates or other relevant information.
 - A clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
7. Once Social Services departments have been informed of suspected child abuse they have a 'duty' to investigate the incident. The source of that information may or may not be disclosed.

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Complaints of abuse against workers.

Where there is a complaint of abuse against a member of staff or volunteer, there may be three types of investigation:

- A criminal investigation.
- A child protection investigation
- A Disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The results of the police and Social Services investigation may well influence the disciplinary investigation, but not necessarily.

What to do if there are concerns:

- If, following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor practice, the person in charge will deal with it as a misconduct issue.
- Any suspicion that a child has been abused by either a member of staff or volunteer worker should be reported to a member of the management committee, who will take such steps as is necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
- The 'nominated person' will refer the allegation to the Social Services Department (who may involve the police).
- The parent/carers of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the Social Services Department.
- The nominated person should also notify a member of the executive committee and they should decide who would deal with any media enquiries.
- Every effort should be made to ensure confidentiality is maintained for all concerned
- The executive committee or director, whichever is appropriate, will make an immediate decision about suspending any individual accused of abuse pending further police and Social Services inquiries.
- Irrespective of the findings of the Social Services or police inquiries, the Board must assess all cases under the appropriate misconduct/disciplinary procedure, to decide whether a member of staff or a volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision, particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases those concerned must reach a decision based upon the information

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available which could suggest that on a balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of children must always be paramount.

- Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to children, parents, members of staff and volunteer workers.

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (eg by an adult who was abused as a child by a member of staff or volunteer worker who is currently working with children). Where such an allegation is made the organisation should follow the normal organizational procedure and report the matter to the Social Services Department.

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Child Abuse Information Sheet

There are normally taken to be 5 categories of abuse;

Neglect: The persistent or severe neglect of a child or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child's health or development.

Physical Injury; Where adults physically hurt or injure children by hitting, shaking, squeezing, burning and biting, or by giving children alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison. Attempted suffocation or drowning also comes within this category. In physically active situations, physical abuse might occur when the nature and intensity of training exceeds the capacity of the child's immature and growing body.

Sexual Abuse: Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent. Girls and boys are abused by adults ... both male and female ... who use children to meet their own sexual needs. Activities which involve physical contact with children could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. The power of the coach over young performers, if misused, may also lead to abusive situations developing.

Emotional Abuse; Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioural development of a child caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection. Persistent lack of love and affection, where a child may be constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted which may make the child very nervous and withdrawn. Emotional abuse may also occur when there is constant overprotection (which prevents children from socialising), or there is neglect, physical or sexual abuse. Emotional abuse in the Arts context might occur if children are subjected to constant criticism, bullying or unrealistic pressure to perform to high expectations consistently. (All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment. This category should be used where it is the main or sole form of abuse).

Indications that a child may be being abused include the following:

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruising, cuts or burns, particularly if situated on a part of the body not normally prone to such injuries.

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- An injury for which the explanation seems inconsistent.
- The child describes what appears to be an abusive act involving him, or her.
- Someone else (a child or an adult) expresses concern about the welfare of another child.
- Unexplained changes in behaviour (eg becoming very quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outburst of temper).
- Inappropriate sexual awareness.
- Engaging in sexually explicit behaviour.
- Distrustful of adults, particularly those with whom a close relationship would normally be expected.
- Has difficulty in making friends.
- Is prevented from socialising with other children.
- Displays variations in eating patterns including overeating or loss of appetite.
- Lose weight for no apparent reason.
- Becomes increasingly dirty and unkempt.

It should be recognised that this list is not exhaustive and the presence of one, or more, of the indicators is not proof that abuse is actually taking place. It is not the responsibility of those working in the Arts context to decide that child abuse is occurring but it is their responsibility to act on any concerns.

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Staff Guidelines on Handling a Disclosure

As an arts worker working with children on a regular basis you may be the first person to sense that something is wrong with that child, or you may be the person to whom a child decides to confide about abuse. It is therefore important that you know what to do if you suspect abuse.

If a child discloses to you as an arts worker;

1. **STAY CALM.** Try not to transmit your anger, shock or embarrassment to the child. Remaining calm will help lessen the effect of the trauma and will help and reassure the child.
2. **LISTEN TO THE CHILD WITH AN OPEN MIND.** Children rarely lie about abuse.
3. **DO NOT PROMISE TO KEEP THE DISCLOSURE A SECRET.** Children may well ask you to do this. You cannot and it would be wrong to deceive the child. Explain as simply as you can what and who you will have to tell. A child may beg you not to say anything because they are frightened, but they would not have said anything unless they wanted the abuse to stop.
4. **ALLOW THE CHILD TO TALK BUT DO NOT PRESSURISE.** Remember it is better if the child does not have to repeat the story over and over again. Do not question the child about what he/she is saying, and certainly do not use any leading questions. Make a full written record as soon as possible after the child has spoken to you.
5. **REPORT THE INCIDENT ACCORDING TO THIS POLICY.**
6. **AFTER THE INCIDENT SEEK OUT SOMEONE TO TALK TO IF YOU NEED TO.** You may need to unburden yourself and come to terms with the emotions and feelings you have been experiencing.

ABOVE ALL, DON'T PANIC, ENSURE YOU ARE AWARE OF THE PROCEDURE, AND USE IT TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION AS EFFECTIVELY AND QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. NO-ONE CAN HANDLE THIS TYPE OF SITUATION ALONE EFFECTIVELY – SEEK SUPPORT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Your contact for support is: **Denzil Monk 07886 723896**