



Aldridge Youth Theatre (AYT) believes that it is always unacceptable for a child or young person to experience abuse of any kind and recognises its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children and young people, by a commitment to a practice, which protects them.

We recognise that:

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount
- all children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse
- working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, carers and their agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.

The purpose of the policy:

- To provide staff and volunteers with guidance on procedures they should adopt in the event that they suspect a child or young person may be experiencing, or be at risk of harm.
- This policy applies to all volunteers, helpers, session workers, students, Elected Members or anyone else working on behalf of the AYT.

We will seek to safeguard children and young people by:

- valuing them, listening to and respecting them
- adopting child protection guidelines through procedures and a code of conduct for staff and volunteers
- recruiting staff and volunteers safely, ensuring all necessary checks are made
- sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents and children appropriately
- providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support and training.

## **Child Protection Code of Conduct**

### **1. Introduction**

Everyone who participates in Aldridge Youth Theatre is entitled to do so in an enjoyable and safe environment. AYT has a moral and legal obligation to ensure that, when given responsibility for young people, volunteers provide them with the highest possible standard of care.

AYT is committed to devising and implementing policies so that everyone at the club accepts their responsibilities to safeguard children from harm and abuse. This means to follow procedures to protect children and report any concerns about their welfare to appropriate authorities.

The aim of the code of conduct is to promote good practice, providing children and young people with appropriate safety/protection whilst in the care of AYT and to allow staff and volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.

The Children Act 1989 defines a child as "*a person under the age of 18*" The management of Health and Regulations 1999 regards a child as "*a person who is not over the minimum school leaving age*" and a young person as "*a person who has not yet attained the age of 18*". For the

purpose of this document, a child is under 16 and a young person is over 16 but under 18.

## 1.1 Statement

Aldridge Youth Theatre is committed to the following:

- the welfare of the child is paramount
- All children, whatever their age, culture, ability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity should be able to participate in AYT activities in a fun and safe environment
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children from harm, discrimination and degrading treatment and to respect their rights, wishes and feelings
- all suspicions and allegations of poor practice or abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- all AYT leaders and volunteers who work with children will be recruited with regard to their suitability for that responsibility, and will be provided with guidance and/or training in good practice and child protection procedures
- working in partnership with parents and children is essential for the protection of children

## 1.2 Monitor and review the code of conduct and procedures

The implementation of procedures should be regularly monitored and reviewed. The welfare officer should regularly report progress, challenges, difficulties, achievements gaps and areas where changes are required to the management committee. The code of conduct should be reviewed every 3 years or whenever there is a major change in the organisation or in relevant legislation.

## **General Information and Guidance**

### **Legislation and Government Guidance**

There is a considerable body of legislation designed to ensure that children/young people are protected and it is important to understand that everyone is responsible for the safety of children. These can be accessed to provide further information and guidance

The main Acts include:

The Children Act 1989

Working together to safeguard children

Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education 2007

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1979

Health and Safety at Work Act 1979

Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999

Other useful contacts include:

NSPCC helpline  
0800 800 5000  
[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Criminal Records Bureau  
[www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

Every Child Matters  
[www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)

Ofsted  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## 2. Promoting Best Practice

### 2.1 Introduction

To provide children with the best possible experience and opportunities in the theatre everyone must operate within an accepted ethical framework.

It is not always easy to distinguish poor practice from abuse. It is therefore NOT the responsibility of employees or participants in the club to make judgments about whether or not abuse is taking place. It is however their responsibility to identify poor practice and possible abuse and act if they have concerns about the welfare of the child, as explained in section 4.

This section will help you identify what is meant by good practice and poor practice.

### 2.2 Best Practice

All personnel should adhere to the following principles and action:

- always work in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets)
- make the experience of the theatre fun and enjoyable: promote fairness, confront and deal with bullying
- treat all young people equally and with respect and dignity
- put the welfare of the young person first
- maintain a safe and appropriate distance with participants of activities (e.g. it is not appropriate for staff or volunteers to have an intimate relationship with a child or to share a room with them)
- Avoid unnecessary physical contact with young people. Where any form of manual/physical support is required it should be provided openly and with the consent of the young person. Physical contact can be appropriate so long as it is neither intrusive nor disturbing and the young person's consent has been given
- Involve parents/carers wherever possible, e.g. where young people need to be supervised, encourage parents to take responsibility for their own child. If groups have to be supervised in changing rooms always ensure parents, volunteers etc. work in pairs
- request written parental consent if club officials are required to transport young people in their cars
- gain written parental consent for any significant travel arrangements
- be an excellent role model, this includes not smoking or drinking alcohol in the company of young people
- always give enthusiastic and constructive feedback rather than negative criticism
- recognising the developmental needs and capacity of the young person and do not risk sacrificing welfare in a desire for club or personal achievements.
- secure written parental consent for the theatre to act in loco parentis, to give permission for the administration of emergency first aid or other medical treatment if the need arises
- keep a written record of any injury that occurs, along with details of any treatment given

## 2.3 Practices to be avoided

The following are regarded as poor practice and should be avoided by all personnel:

- unnecessarily spending excessive amounts of time alone with a child/young person away from others
- taking a child/young person alone in a car on journeys, however short
- saying anything that may make a child/young person feel uncomfortable or debased
- saying anything that might be interpreted as aggressive, hostile or impatient

When a case arises where it is impractical/impossible to avoid a certain situation e.g. transporting a young person in your car, the tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of the parent/carer and the young person involved. If during your care you accidentally hurt a young person, the young person seems distressed in any manner, appears to be sexually aroused by your actions and/or if the young person misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done, report any such incidents as soon as possible to another colleague and make a written note of it. Parents should also be informed of the incident.

## Practices never to be sanctioned

The following should never be sanctioned.

You should never:

- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child/young person
- Reduce a child/young person to tears as a form of control
- Promise a child/young person that their confidences will be kept secret
- Allow allegations made by a child/young person to go unrecorded or not acted upon
- Invite or allow a child/young person to stay with you at your home unsupervised
- Taking a child/young person to your home where they will be alone with you
- Engaging in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- Allowing a child/young person to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- Do things of a personal nature that the child/young person can do for themselves

## 3. Defining Child Abuse

### 3.1 Introduction

Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that leads to injury or harm, it commonly occurs within a relationship of trust or responsibility and is an abuse of power or a breach of trust. Abuse can happen to a young person regardless of their age, gender, race or ability.

There are four main types of abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. The abuser may be a family member, someone the young person encounters in residential care or in the community, including sports and leisure activities. Any individual may abuse or neglect a young person directly, or may be responsible for abuse because they fail to prevent another

person harming the young person.

Abuse in all of its forms can affect a child/young person at any age. The effects can be so damaging that if not treated may follow the individual into adulthood

A child/young person with disabilities may be at increased risk of abuse through various factors such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, isolation and a powerlessness to protect themselves or adequately communicate that abuse had occurred.

### 3.2 Types of Abuse

**Physical Abuse:** where adults physically hurt or injure a child/young person e.g. hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, biting, scalding, suffocating, drowning. Giving a child/young person alcohol or inappropriate drugs would also constitute child abuse.

This category of abuse can also include when a parent/carer reports non-existent symptoms or illness deliberately causes ill health in a child/young person they are looking after. This is called Munchausen's syndrome by proxy.

Physical abuse may occur when the nature and intensity of training/activity disregard the capacity of the child's/young person's immature and growing body

**Emotional Abuse:** the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child/young person, likely to cause severe and lasting adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve telling a child/young person they are useless, worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued in terms of only meeting the needs of another person. It may feature expectations of a child/young person that are not appropriate to their age or development. It may cause a child/young person to be frightened or in danger by being constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted which may make the young person frightened or withdrawn.

Ill treatment of children, whatever form it takes, will always feature a degree of emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse may occur when a child/young person is constantly criticised, given negative feedback, expected to perform at levels that are above their capability. Other forms of emotional abuse could take the form of name calling and bullying.

*Bullying may come from another young person or an adult. Bullying is defined as deliberate hurtful behavior, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. There are three main types of bullying. It may be physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, slapping), verbal (e.g. racist or homophobic remarks, name calling, graffiti, threats, abusive text messages), emotional (e.g. tormenting, ridiculing, humiliating, ignoring, isolating from the group), or sexual (e.g. unwanted physical contact or abusive comments).*

*Neglect occurs when an adult fails to meet the young person's basic physical and/or psychological needs, to an extent that is likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. For example, failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect from physical harm or danger, or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.*

*Sexual Abuse occurs when adults (male and female) use children to meet their own sexual needs. This could include full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, anal intercourse and fondling. Showing young people pornography or talking to them in a sexually explicit manner are also forms of sexual abuse. Activities which might involve physical contact with young people could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed.*

## Indicators of Abuse

Even for those experienced in working with child abuse, it is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place. Most people are not experts in such recognition, but indications that a child is being abused may include one or more of 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
- an injury for which an explanation seems inconsistent
- the young person describes what appears to be an abusive act involving them
- another young person or adult expresses concern about the welfare of a young person
- unexplained changes in a young person's behavior e.g. becoming very upset, quiet, withdrawn or displaying sudden outbursts of temper
- inappropriate sexual awareness
- engaging in sexually explicit behavior
- distrust of adult's, particularly those whom a close relationship would normally be expected
- difficulty in making friends
- being prevented from socialising with others
- displaying variations in eating patterns including over eating or loss of appetite
- losing weight for no apparent reason
- becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt

Signs of bullying include:

- behavioral changes such as reduced concentration and/or becoming withdrawn, clingy, depressed, tearful, emotionally up and down, reluctance to go training or competitions
- an unexplained drop off in performance
- physical signs such as stomach aches, headaches, difficulty in sleeping, bed wetting, scratching and bruising, damaged clothes, bingeing e.g. on food, alcohol or cigarettes
- a shortage of money or frequents loss of possessions It must be recognised that the above list is not exhaustive, but also that the presence of one or more of the indications is not proof that abuse is taking place.

It is NOT the responsibility of those working at AYT to decide that child abuse is occurring. It IS their responsibility to act on any concerns.

### 3.3 Use of Photographic/Filming Equipment at events

There is evidence that some people have used group events as an opportunity to take inappropriate photographs or film footage of young people. All personnel should be vigilant and any concerns should be reported to the Child Protection Officer.

## **4. Responding to Suspicions and Allegations**

### 4.1 Introduction

It is not the responsibility of anyone working at Aldridge Youth Theatre in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However there is a responsibility to act on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities so that they can then make inquiries and take necessary action to protect the young person. This applies BOTH to allegations/suspicions of abuse occurring within AYT and to allegations/suspicions that abuse is

taking place elsewhere. This section explains how to respond to allegations/suspicions.

#### 4.2 Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only. This includes the following people:

- The Child Protection Officer
- The Chairperson of the Management Committee
- The parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused
- The person making the allegation
- Social Services/Police
- The alleged abuser (and parents if the alleged abuser is a child).

#### 4.3 Receiving Evidence of Possible Abuse

We may become aware of possible abuse in various ways. We may see it happening, we may suspect it happening because of signs such as those listed in section 3 of this document, it may be reported to us by someone else or directly by the young person affected.

In the last of these cases, it is particularly important to respond appropriately. If a young person says or indicates that they are being abused, you should:

- stay calm so as not to frighten the young person
- reassure the child that they are not to blame and that it was right to tell
- listen to the child, showing that you are taking them seriously
- keep questions to a minimum so that there is a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said. The law is very strict and child abuse cases have been dismissed where it is felt that the child has been led or words and ideas have been suggested during questioning. Only ask questions to clarify
- inform the child that you have to inform other people about what they have told you. Tell the child this is to help stop the abuse continuing.
- the safety of the child is paramount. If the child needs urgent medical attention call an ambulance, inform the doctors of the concern and ensure they are made aware that this is a child protection issue
- record all information using Annex A: Child protection Incident Record Form
- make a full written report of what has been said, heard and/or seen as soon as possible to the CPO and/or Chair of the Management Committee (if CPO is unavailable)

In all cases if you are not sure what to do you can gain help from NSPCC Helpline. Tel No: 0808 800 5000

#### 4.4 Recording Information (Use Annex A: Child protection Incident Record Form)

To ensure that information is as helpful as possible, a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure/concern. In recording you should confine yourself to the facts and distinguish what is your personal knowledge and what others have told you. Do not include your own opinions.

Information should include the following:

- name, age and date of birth of the child/young person reporting the incident
- home address and telephone number of the child/young person reporting the incident
- whether or not the person making the report is expressing their concern or someone else's
- the nature of the allegation, including the name of child/young person involved (if

different from the person reporting the incident), dates, times and any other relevant information

- a description of any visible bruising or injury, location, size etc. Also any indirect signs, such as behavioural changes
- details of witnesses to the incidents
- the child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising/injuries occurred
- have the parents been contacted? If so what has been said?
- has anyone else been consulted? If so record details
- has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record detail

#### 4.5 Reporting the Concern

All suspicions and allegations MUST be reported appropriately. It is recognised that strong emotions can be aroused particularly in cases where sexual abuse is suspected or where there is misplaced loyalty to a colleague. It is important to understand these feelings but not allow them to interfere with your judgement about any action to take.

Aldridge Youth Theatre expects its members and helpers to discuss any concerns they may have about the welfare of a child immediately with the person in charge and subsequently to check that appropriate action has been taken.

If the nominated AYT Child Protection Officer is not available you should take responsibility and seek advice from the NSPCC helpline, the duty officer at your local social services department or the police. Telephone numbers can be found in your local directory.

Where there is a complaint against an employee or volunteer, there may be three types of investigation.

Criminal in which case the police are immediately involved

Child protection in which case the social services (and possibly) the police will be involved

Disciplinary or misconduct in which case Aldridge Youth Theatre will be involved . As mentioned previously in this document staff at AYT are not child protection experts and it is not their responsibility to determine whether or not abuse has taken place. All suspicions and allegations must be shared with professional agencies that are responsible for child protection.

Social services have a legal responsibility under The Children Act 1989 to investigate all child protection referrals by talking to the child and family (where appropriate), gathering information from other people who know the child and making inquiries jointly with the police.

NB: If there is any doubt, you must report the incident: it may be just one of a series of other incidences which together cause concern

#### 4.6 Internal Inquiries and Suspension

The Aldridge Youth Theatre Safeguarding/Child Protection officer will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further police and social services inquiries

Irrespective of the findings of the social services or police inquiries the management Committee will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff or volunteer can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision; especially where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases the Management Committee must reach a decision based upon the available information which could suggest that on the balance of probability, it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of

the child should remain of paramount importance throughout.

## **5. Recruiting and Selecting Personnel with Children**

### 5.1 Introduction

It is important that all reasonable steps are taken to prevent unsuitable people from working with children. This applies equally to paid staff and volunteers, both full and part time. To ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children the following steps should be taken when recruiting.

### 5.2 Controlling Access to Children

All staff and volunteers should complete an application form. The application form will elicit information about the applicants past and a self disclosure about any criminal record.

Consent should be obtained from the applicant to seek information from the Criminal Records Bureau.

Two confidential references, including one regarding previous work with children should be obtained. These references **MUST** be taken up and confirmed through telephone contact.

Evidence of identity (passport or driving licence with photo)

### 5.3 Interview and Induction

All paid staff and volunteers will be required to undertake an interview carried out to acceptable protocol and recommendations. All employees and volunteers should receive formal or informal induction during which:

A check should be made that the application form has been completed in full, including sections on criminal records and self disclosures

- Their qualifications should be substantiated
- The job requirements and responsibilities should be clarified
- They should sign up to the organization's Child Protection Code of Conduct, (page 1 and 2 of this document). This form Annex B and must be signed off by all paid staff and volunteers working/in contact with children/young people
- Child Protection Procedures are explained and training needs identified e.g. basic child protection awareness

### 5.4 Training

In addition to pre-selection checks, the safeguarding process includes training after recruitment to help staff and volunteers to:

- Analyse their own practice against what is deemed good practice, and to ensure their practice is likely to protect them from false allegations
- Recognise their responsibilities and report any concerns about suspected poor practice and/or abuse
- Respond to concerns expressed by a child
- Work safely and effectively with children

Aldridge Youth Theatre requires:

- All staff and volunteers who have access to children to undergo a DBS check
- All employees, volunteers, coaches, welfare officers and managers to undertake relevant child protection training or undertake a form of home study, to ensure their practice is exemplary and to facilitate the development of positive culture towards good practice and child protection
- All staff and volunteers to receive advisory information outlining good/bad practice and informing them what to do if they have concerns about the behaviour of an adult towards a young person
- All leaders should have an up to date first aid qualification

Declaration

On behalf of Aldridge Youth Theatre we, the undersigned, will oversee the implementation of the Child Protection Code of conduct and take all necessary steps to ensure it is adhered to.

(N.B. One of the signatories should be the Child Protection Officer)

Name

Position

Signed

Name

Position

Signed