



SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Introduction

West Chilton Dramatic Society (WCDS) has a moral and legal obligation to ensure that, when given responsibility for children all members, patrons, chaperones, parents/legal guardians and volunteers accept their responsibilities to safeguard children from harm and abuse. This means:

- It is everyone's responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- WCDS will provide a safe and welcoming environment where children are respected and valued.
- WCDS will ensure that everyone follows procedures to protect children and report any concerns about their welfare to appropriate authorities.

In this policy, where the term 'child' or 'children' is used, this refers to anyone under the age of 18 years old.

WCDS recognises that some adults are also vulnerable to abuse and so the policy and procedures should be applied (with appropriate adaptations) to allegations of abuse against, and the protection of, adults at risk. The Lord Chancellor's Department, in 1997, defined a vulnerable adult or adult at risk as a person 'who is, or may need community care services by reason of disability, age or illness; and is or may be unable to take care of, or unable to protect him or herself, against significant harm or exploitation'.

There are three elements to our policy:-

- **Prevention** through awareness of each individual child's needs
- **Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect**
- **Procedures** for identifying and reporting cases or suspected cases, of abuse

The aim of the policy is to promote good practice, providing children with appropriate safety/protection whilst in the care of West Chilton Dramatic Society and to allow members and volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.

Prevention

We recognise that "amateur theatre" can be a very "adult" environment and we expect all members, chaperones, parents/legal guardians, volunteers and anyone else who comes into contact with children to behave in an appropriate manner at all times, and remember that the welfare of children is paramount. WCDS recognises that when undertaking its activities, it should always act in the best interests of the child or children involved.

West Chilton Dramatic Society's actions will therefore:

- Adhere to guidance within:
 - the Children Act 1989 (and the 2004 amendment).
 - The Children (Performances and Activities) (England) Regulations 2014.

- Establish and maintain an ethos where children feel welcome and familiar with their environment and are informed of personal (toilets, dressing rooms etc.) and emergency arrangements (fire exits, meeting points etc.) and any Health and Safety Procedures (dangerous equipment, first aid etc.).
- Inform each child whom the appropriate person or people are to speak to if they have any questions, problems or concerns.
- Ensure that all children are treated with respect and dignity and are treated as individuals and offered equality of opportunities.
- Always work in an open environment (e.g. avoiding private or unobserved situations and unnecessary physical contact with children) and involve/allow parents/chaperones wherever possible, to take responsibility for the child/children they are responsible for. (Parents must only have responsibility for their own child.)
- Recognise the individual needs of the child, e.g. recognise when a child may be tired and may need a break.
- Ensure that children are supervised appropriately.
- Ensure that all Chaperones are registered with the Local Authority in which they reside and have an enhanced DBS check.
- Ensure that all adults involved with a WCDS production, event or activity are aware of their conduct around children and, other than licensed Chaperones (or parents with their own children), do not have unsupervised contact with children.

Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect

Abuse: a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can include ill-treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill-treatment of others. This can be particularly relevant, for example, in relation to the impact on children of all forms of domestic abuse, including where they see, hear or experience its effects. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults or by another child or children.

Physical Abuse: a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Sexual Abuse: involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may also include non-contact activities,

such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Neglect: the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger, failing to ensure adequate supervision or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Emotional Abuse: the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only in so far as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age and developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child from participating in normal social interaction. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may involve causing children to feel frightened or in danger, for example from witnessing domestic abuse or from serious bullying (including cyberbullying), or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, although it may occur alone.

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

West Chiltonington Dramatic Society will adhere to the relevant legislation when working with children and young people under the age of 18 years as outlined in the following:

- Children Act 1989 and
- Children Act 2004
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015 updated 2025)

Suspicion of Abuse

If you see or suspect abuse of a child, immediately make this known to the designated individual(s) responsible for child protection at WCDS. This will be the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). If the DSL is unavailable, please contact the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead. See later for contact details of these individuals.

Disclosure of Abuse

If a child tells you that, they or another child or young person is being abused:

- Always stop and listen straightaway, show that you take their allegations seriously and be non-judgemental, e.g. stay calm, avoiding comments and non-verbal behaviour which may make the child feel judged or ashamed.
- Reassure the child that s/he is right to tell someone of their concerns.
- Do not promise confidentiality. Be honest - explain that if you are told something of concern, you need to let someone know, but you will only tell the

- people who need to know and can help.
 - Encourage the child to talk, listen carefully and reflect back using the child's language ; allow the child to speak in their own way and at their own pace; avoid interrupting.
 - Do not ask leading questions, only prompting the child where necessary with open questions, e.g. who, what, when, where.
 - Record in writing what you have been told accurately and as soon as possible. Use the child's own words. Make a note of the date, time and location of the disclosure, and whether anyone else was present and of the child's demeanour.
 - Ensure that your concerns are reported immediately to WCDS's Designated Safeguarding Lead. If this individual is unavailable, contact one of the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead individuals.
 - Do not further investigate with a third party any suspicions, allegations or incidents of abuse.
 - Do not contact the child's parents/carers.
 - Do not confront the alleged abuser.
- Where there is a concern that a child is experiencing, may already have experienced abuse or neglect, is suffering or is likely to suffer 'significant harm' the Designated Safeguarding Lead will refer immediately to Children's Social Care (CSC) at the appropriate local authority. For WCDS, this will usually be West Sussex County Council:
The Integrated Front Door (IFD), Mon-Fri, 9:00am-5:00pm 01403 229900
Out of hours for urgent concerns: Emergency Duty Team: 033 022 26664
- Where there is concern of an immediate threat to life, emergency services must be contacted immediately via telephoning 999.
 - All members have a right and responsibility to refer concerns directly to CSC if necessary.
 - A new statutory duty around the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse is being introduced in the Crime and Policing Bill (currently passing through Parliament). This is expected to become law by the end of 2025/beginning of 2026 and to come into force 12 months afterwards. Amendments to this policy will be made as needed. In the meantime, any member who has cause for concern that a child is being/has been sexually abused needs to report that concern following the guidance in this policy.

Handling Allegations

- If a child makes an allegation against a member or other adult involved with the Society, it must be reported as a matter of urgency to the designated individual for child protection who will refer to the Social Services department for Children's Services. If the allegation is against the designated person, then the information should be reported directly to the Social Services department for Children's Services. (This would generally be referred to the authority in which the alleged incident took place).
- The alleged perpetrator should not be made aware of the allegation at this point.

Recording

- In all situations, the details of allegation or reported incident must be recorded. Make accurate notes of time, dates, incident or disclosure, people involved, what was said and done and by whom, action taken to investigate,

further action taken e.g. suspension of individual and if relevant: reasons why the matter was not referred to a statutory agency, name of person reporting and to whom it was reported.

The record must be stored securely and shared only with those who need to know.

- **DO NOT worry that you might be mistaken; you have a responsibility to pass on your concerns following a disclosure. Never think abuse is impossible, or that an accusation about a person you know well and trust is bound to be wrong.**

IT IS YOUR DUTY TO REFER CONCERNS ON, NOT TO INVESTIGATE

The Designated Lead for child protection and safeguarding

Name: Angela Sloan

Position in WCDS: Chair

**Contact details: 07973 393913
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The Deputy Designated Lead for child protection and safeguarding

Name: Amanda Hislop

Position in WCDS: Treasurer

**Contact details: 07702 945960
treasurer@wcds.co.uk**

Please note the NSPCC Helpline for any concerns about a child – useful for guidance and support:

0808 800 5000 help@nspcc.org.uk

*September 2024 Updated September 2025
Approved by WCDS Committee on 1 October 2025
Policy to be reviewed in September 2026*