



Next Stage Theatre School
Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Statement of Intent

Next Stage is committed to safeguarding the wholeness and the wellbeing of the children we work with and consider children to be anyone under the age of 18. It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to prevent the physical, sexual and emotional abuse or neglect of all members of our community, including children, and the welfare of the child is paramount. All children without exception have the right to protection from abuse regardless of factors including their gender, ethnicity, ability, sexuality or belief.

The current Child Protection Representative is Evelyn Purcell and her responsibilities include ensuring that all staff and volunteers commit and adhere to this policy, being the first point of contact for child protection issues, keeping a record of any concerns expressed regarding child protection, ensuring that staff and volunteers are given appropriate training, support and supervision on safeguarding children, and ensuring that everyone involved with the organisations is aware of this role. This includes working in person with children, and working online on Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic.

If you have any questions about our policies and procedures, please contact Evelyn Purcell on 087 153 2277.

Reviewing the policy

The policy was reviewed on 2/7/2023 and will be reviewed again on 2/7/2024.

Evelyn Purcell

Child Protection Representative

Next Stage Theatre School

17 Meadow Court

Naas, Co Kildare

Defining Child Abuse

Abuse is defined as the intentional exploitation of power by a person, resulting in distress, harm or neglect for the victim. Child abuse is 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. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others (e.g. via the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children. Although different terms are used to describe particular types of abuse, these often overlap and many children suffer effects of a range of destructive forms of behaviours. It is generally accepted that there are four main types of abuse.

The following definitions are based on those from Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2015). The definitions below list signs and symptoms, which may indicate abuse, but do not necessarily constitute abuse as there may be other explanations:

1.1. Physical abuse

Physical abuse 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 causes, ill health to a child whom they are looking after. A person might do this because they enjoy or require the attention they receive through having a sick child. Physical abuse, as well as being the result of an act of commission, can also be caused through omission or the failure to act to protect.

Signs of physical abuse may include:

- Unexplained or hidden injuries
- Lack of medical attention

1.2. Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child that causes severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve making a child feel or believe that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. 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 feature age or 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 participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of

another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Signs of emotional abuse may include:

- Reverting to younger behaviour
- Nervousness
- Sudden underachievement
- Attention-seeking behaviour
- Running away from home
- Stealing
- Lying

1.3. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of or consents to what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative acts such as rape, buggery or oral sex or non-penetrative act such as fondling, masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. Sexual abuse may also include non-contact activities, such as allowing children to look at or participate in the production of pornographic material or watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children, and this includes people from all walks of life.

Signs of sexual abuse may include:

- Preoccupation with sexual matters evident in words, play and/or drawings
- Being sexually provocative with adults
- Disturbed sleep or nightmares
- Bed wetting
- Secretive relationships with adults and children
- Stomach pains with no apparent cause

Child sexual exploitation is also a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation

does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

1.4. Neglect

Neglect is 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. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, it may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, clothing or shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment), failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger, failing to ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers), or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include the neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Signs of neglect may include:

- Looking ill-cared for
- Unhappiness
- Being withdrawn or aggressive,
- Lingering injuries or health issues

1.5. Bullying

Bullying is not always easy to define as it can take many forms and is usually repeated over a period of time. Common types are physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, theft), verbal (e.g. racism or homophobic remarks, threats, name calling), emotional (e.g. isolating an individual from activities) and cyber bullying (e.g through the use of technology).

Bullying will include:

- Deliberate hostility and aggression towards a victim
- A victim who is weaker and/or less powerful than the bully or bullies
- An outcome that is always painful and distressing for the victim

Bullying may include:

- Other forms of physical and/or emotional violence
- Sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing
- Tormenting, ridiculing, humiliation
- Racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- Unwanted physical contact or abusive or offensive comments of a sexual nature
- The use of technology

Bullying can result in children becoming vulnerable and isolated. These particular children may

then become an easy target for adult abusers. Concerns about bullying should be dealt with in the same way as concerns about child abuse.

2. Child disclosure procedure

When a child discloses something personal to you, remember to follow the steps below:

Receive

- Listen to the child
- If you are shocked by what they are saying, try not to show it
- Take what they say seriously
- Accept what the child says

Reassure

- Acknowledge how hard it must have been for the child to tell you what happened
- Stay calm and reassure the child that they have done the right thing by talking to you
- Be honest with the child so as to not make promises you cannot keep
- Do not promise confidentiality – you have a duty to refer the child who is at risk

React

- React to the child only as far as it is necessary for you to determine whether you need to refer this matter but do not push them for more details
- Do not ask leading questions
- Explain what you have to do next and to whom you have to talk
- Explain, and if possible seek agreement, that you will have to discuss the situation with someone else and will do so on a ‘need to know’ basis

Record

- Make some brief notes at the time and write them up in more detail as soon as possible – use the standard reporting form attached
- Take care to record timing, setting and personnel as well as what was said
- Be objective in your recording – include statements and observations rather than your interpretations or assumptions

Act Now

- Discuss the matter with the Child Protection Representative immediately

3. Code of conduct for staff and volunteers

3.1. Safe recruitment and selection

Determined abusers have often managed to gain access to children. We recognise, therefore, that the most effective point at which an organisation can use good management to minimise the possibility of abuse is when new staff or volunteers are appointed, although it is important to ensure that vigilance is maintained thereafter.

It is our policy that all staff and volunteers will be subject to a careful and rigorous selection and vetting process by the criteria listed below. We hope these will be understood by good applicants and will put off ill intentioned people.

- An interview process
- Carrying out the relevant checks with the Garda Vetting Service and obtaining certificates of good conduct from other countries if necessary
- Not offering work or volunteering to anyone who has been convicted of or has received a formal police caution concerning an offence against children
- Identifying reasons for gaps in employment or inconsistencies
- Providing any necessary safeguarding and child protection courses as well as common assessment framework training

Upon recruitment, Next Stage staff and volunteers should organise all their activities to reduce to a minimum those situations within which it may be possible for children to be abused. Staff and volunteers are required to abide by this Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy to safeguard the children they work with. This includes treat all children with respect and making sure any suspicions or allegations are recorded and reported to the Child Protection Representative. Below outlines a Code of Conduct for all staff and volunteers by which they must abide when working with Next Stage.

All of those who work for or volunteer with Next Stage will be made aware of this policy and of what procedure to follow if they have any concerns.

3.2. Physical contact

Adults should ensure that the touch and physical contact they use is not exploitative and is not open to misunderstanding. Children should be encouraged to say what they find acceptable and unacceptable in the way they are approached by adults or fellow children.

When working with individuals, do not:

- Subject young people to constant criticism, bullying or unrealistic pressure
- Engage in rough physical games or horse play

- Touch a young person in an intrusive or sexual manner
- Make sexually suggestive comments, even in jest
- Do things of a personal nature that young people can do for themselves
- Restrain a child using physical force

3.3. Working with individuals

When working with individuals, you should:

- Never be alone in a building, car or closed room with a child
- Remember that it is only in very exceptional circumstances where an adult may be alone with a child for a short period. Should this be the case the adult should ensure that other staff or volunteers are aware of the situation, that they support this action and that it takes place in clear view of the rest of the group, e.g. in a designated office or room with a clear glass window. The door must always be left open.

3.4. Outside of work

Outside of work, remember that:

- Staff and volunteers are not under any circumstances permitted to meet or communicate with children outside work related activities (e.g. calling, texting or via any forms of social media)
- Staff and volunteers must report if any instances of children trying to communicate with you outside of work related activities (e.g. calling, texting or via any forms of social media)
- If a child is not collected you are not under any circumstances permitted to take them home or leave the activity area.

3.5. Resources and equipment

When dealing with resources and equipment, keep in mind to:

- Minimise the prospect of injury by checking all equipment and playing surfaces
- Not employ excessive or inappropriate training methods
- Use only age appropriate language, media products and activities – sexually explicit materials are never appropriate
- Under no circumstances give medication, alcohol, tobacco, alcohol or other drugs to children
- To report any personal gifts from children and their parents to the Child Protection Representative
- Under no circumstance take any photographs or video footage of children unless authorised in writing by the Child Protection Representative

4. Zoom / Online Classes, Workshops and Camps

The following are guidelines our organisation follows when working online with children to ensure their safety.

- Meeting links and passwords should only be given out once people have registered as participants. They should not be shared widely or online.
- We schedule classes using a unique ID and not our personal meeting ID (PMI).
- We ensure our meetings are always password protected, and have waiting rooms.
- We disable the chat element for our meetings, except with hosts. The chat leaves young people vulnerable to bullying.
- We disable share options for anyone other than the host.
- We discuss our camp rules / code of behaviour in classes and workshops.
- We give participants the option to partake without their video on, if necessary.
- We are aware of the option as hosts to disable video. This could be necessary if something inappropriate is shown on camera by any participant.

5. Whistleblowing procedure

5.1. Assurances to staff and volunteers

Next Stage is committed to maintaining the highest standards of honesty, openness and accountability and to recognise that staff and volunteers have an important role to play in achieving this goal.

Staff and volunteers will usually be the first to know when someone inside or connected with an organisation is doing something illegal or improper, but often they feel apprehensive about voicing their concerns. This may be because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or the organisation itself, or it may be because they do not think that their concerns will be taken seriously because they are afraid that they will be bullied or dismissed.

Next Stage does not believe that it is in anyone's interests for staff and volunteers with knowledge of wrongdoing to remain silent. We, therefore, take all malpractice very seriously, whether committed by senior managers, staff, volunteers, members, suppliers or contractors. This section sets out the procedure by which you can report your concerns to us.

What should I report under this procedure?

It is impossible to give an exhaustive list of the activities that constitute misconduct or malpractice but, broadly speaking, we would expect staff and volunteers to report the following:

- Any concerns about children, staff or volunteers (e.g. something you see or hear)
- Criminal offences

- Failure to comply with legal obligations
- Miscarriages of justice
- Actions which endanger the health or safety of children we work with
- Actions which are intended to conceal any of the above

It will not always be clear that a particular action falls within one of these categories and you will need to use your own judgement. We would, however, prefer you to report your concerns rather than keeping them to yourself. If you then make a report in good faith, even if it is not confirmed by an investigation, your concern will be valued and appreciated, and you will not be liable to disciplinary action. If you do, however, make a false report maliciously or for personal gain, then you may face disciplinary action.

How do I make a report?

You can make an oral or written report, and there is a standard reporting form attached. We would normally expect you to raise your concerns internally to:

- Evelyn Purcell, Child Protection Representative (nextstagetheatreschool@gmail.com)

Do I need proof of wrongdoing to make my report?

We do not expect you to have absolute proof of any misconduct or malpractice that you report. You will, however, need to be able to show the reasons for your concern.

Will Next Stage protect my identity if I make a report?

We will do everything possible to keep your identity anonymous if you wish so. There may, however, be circumstances (e.g. if your report becomes the subject of criminal investigation) wherein you may be needed as a witness. Should this be the case we will discuss the matter with you at the earliest opportunity.

How will my report be investigated?

Once you have made a report, we will acknowledge receipt of it within two working days. There are, of course, two sides to every story and we will need to make preliminary enquiries to decide whether a full investigation is necessary. If such an investigation is necessary then, depending on the nature of the misconduct, your concerns will be either:

- Investigated internally (by management) or
- Referred to the appropriate external person for investigation (e.g. the police)

Subject to any legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcome of the preliminary enquiries, full investigation and any further action that has been taken.

Whilst we cannot guarantee that we will respond to your report in the way that you may wish, we will try to handle the matter fairly and properly. By using this procedure, you will help us to achieve this.

