



centre for the arts

St. Michael's Theatre

Child Protection Policy

Policy Statement

For the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults

St. Michael's Theatre believes that the welfare of the child, young person and vulnerable adult is paramount. All children, young people and vulnerable adults, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, racial origin and religious beliefs have the right to protection from abuse. We believe that all suspicions and allegations of abuse should be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately and that staff (paid and unpaid) should be clear on how to respond appropriately.

St. Michael's Theatre will take every reasonable step to ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults are protected where our own staff are directly involved in the delivery of an arts project. If a complaint or criminal proceeding occurs between a member of staff, Youth Arts practitioner and a third party, as a result of the theatres direct or indirect involvement St. Michael's Theatre will treat the situation with the utmost urgency and confidentiality.

We undertake to provide a safe environment and experience, where the welfare of the child, young person and vulnerable adult is to the fore and have therefore implemented the following procedures to ensure their protection:

- Code of behaviour for all staff;
- Reporting of suspected or disclosed abuse;
- Confidentiality;
- Recruitment and selecting staff and sub-contractors for Youth Arts;
- Managing and supervising staff;
- Involvement of primary carers;
- Allegations of misconduct or abuse by staff;
- Complaints and comments;
- Incidents and accidents.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Designated Persons:

Tomás Kavanagh
Theatre Director

Suzanne Sinnott
Youth Arts Officer

Date: 23rd May 2024

People-Centred Approach

- Treat all children, young people and vulnerable adults equally;
- Listen to and respect children, young people and vulnerable adults;
- Involve children, young people and vulnerable adults in decision-making, as appropriate;
- Provide encouragement, support and praise (regardless of ability);
- Use appropriate language (physical and verbal);
- Have fun and encourage a positive atmosphere;
- Offer constructive criticism when needed;
- Treat all children, young people and vulnerable adults as individuals and respect their personal space;
- Discuss boundaries on behaviour and related sanctions, as appropriate, with children, young people, vulnerable adults and their primary carers;
- Encourage feedback from group;
- Use appropriate teaching aids and materials, in terms of age and ability;
- Lead by example;
- Be aware of other commitments when scheduling rehearsals or activities, e.g., school, exams, medical appointments;
- Be cognisant of a person or child's limitations, due to a medical condition for example;
- Create an atmosphere of trust;
- Respect differences of ability, culture, religion, race and sexual orientation.

Good Practice

- Register each child/young person or vulnerable adult (name, address, phone, special requirements, attendance, emergency contact);
- Make primary carers, children/young people/vulnerable adults, visitors and facilitators aware of the protection policy and procedures;
- Have emergency procedures in place and make all staff aware of these procedures;
- Be inclusive of children, young people or adults with special needs;
- Plan and be sufficiently prepared, both mentally and physically;
- Report any concerns to the Designated Person and follow reporting procedures;
- Encourage children and young people to report any bullying, concerns or worries and to be aware of anti-bullying policy.
- Evaluate work practices on a regular basis;
- Provide appropriate training for staff and volunteers;
- Report and record any incidents and accidents;
- Update and review policies and procedures regularly;
- Keep primary carers informed of any issues that concern their children;
- Ensure proper supervision based on adequate ratios according to age, abilities and activities involved; observe appropriate gender balance for residential;
- Have a written agreement with any external organisation that an artist is working with;
- Don't be passive in relation to concerns, i.e., don't 'do nothing'; don't let a problem get out of control;
- Avoid taking a session on your own. If this is not possible then it should be in an open environment with the full knowledge and consent of primary carers and support workers;

- Avoid if at all possible giving a lift to a child/young person or vulnerable adult and if you do then make sure that primary carers/ support workers are informed;
- Maintain awareness around language and comments made. If you think that something you said may have caused offence or upset, then try to address it in a sensitive manner;
- Observe appropriate dress and behaviour.

Inappropriate Behaviour

- Avoid spending excessive amounts of time alone with children/young people or vulnerable adults;
- Don't use or allow offensive or sexually suggestive physical and/or verbal language;
- Don't single out a particular child/young person or vulnerable person for unfair favouritism, criticism, ridicule, or unwelcome focus or attention;
- Don't allow/engage in inappropriate touching of any form;
- Don't hit or physically chastise children/young people or vulnerable people;
- Don't socialise inappropriately with children/young people or vulnerable people, i.e. outside of structured organisational activities.

Physical contact

- Seek consent of child/young person or vulnerable adult in relation to physical contact (except in an emergency or a dangerous situation);
- Avoid horseplay or inappropriate touch;
- Check with a child/young person or vulnerable adult about their level of comfort when doing touch exercises.

Health and safety

- Don't leave children, young people or vulnerable adults unattended or unsupervised;
- Manage any dangerous materials;
- Provide a safe environment;
- Be aware of accident procedure and follow accordingly.

Reporting procedures

Suzanne Sinnott, Youth Arts Officer, has been designated as the person to contact if you have an issue or concern about any aspect of a child, young person or vulnerable adult's safety and welfare. It is the responsibility of this person to support and advise staff about policy and procedures in relation to protection policy and to ensure that procedures are followed. It is also the responsibility of the Designated Person to liaise with the Health Service Executive or Gardaí where appropriate.

Suzanne Sinnott can be contacted at St. Michael's Theatre on 051-421255.

Mary Ronan, Office Manager has been designated as deputy to Suzanne Sinnott and can also be contacted at St. Michael's Theatre on 051-421255.

The following excerpt from Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare

of Children (4.3.2 - p.38) shows what would constitute reasonable grounds for concern:

- (i) specific indication from the child, young person or vulnerable that s/he has been abused;
- (ii) an account by a person who saw the child/young person or vulnerable adult being abused;
- (iii) evidence, such as an injury or behaviour, which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way;
- (iv) an injury or behaviour which is consistent both with abuse and with an innocent explanation but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse - an example of this would be a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indications of abuse or dysfunctional behaviour;
- (v) consistent indication, over a period of time, that a child, young person or vulnerable adult is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

Recording procedures

Staff should record the following information in relation to children, young people or vulnerable adults:

- o Concerns;
- o Worrying observations;
- o Behavioural changes;
- o Actions and outcomes.

Dealing with a disclosure

- Stay calm and listen to allow him or her enough time to say what s/he needs to say;
- Don't use leading questions or prompt details;
- Be re-assuring but do not promise to keep anything secret;
- Don't make the child, young person or vulnerable adult repeat the details unnecessarily;
- Explain to the child, young person or vulnerable adult what will happen next (explanation should be appropriate to the individual).

Reporting procedures

- The reporting procedure should be known and accessible to all staff;
- The person who expresses the concern should be involved and kept informed;
- Actions and outcomes should be noted;
- Record all details, including the date, time and people involved in an incident book.
- Information recorded should be factual. Any opinions should be supported by facts;
- Inform the Designated Person or his or her deputy, if unavailable;

- The most appropriate person should discuss the concern or consult with
- primary carers. Parents, carers or responsible adults should be made aware of a report to the Health Service Executive unless it is likely to put the child, young person or vulnerable adult at further risk;
- The Designated Person may contact the Health Service Executive Duty Social Work Department for an informal consultation prior to making a report;
- Information will be shared on a strictly ‘need to know’ basis.
- If there are reasonable grounds for concern as outlined above, the Designated Person will contact the Duty Social Worker in the Health Service Executive area using the standard reporting form available from the Health Service Executive.
- Reports to the Duty Social Worker can be made verbally initially and then followed by the standard reporting form.
- Reports should be made to the Health Service Executive without delay;
- If the Designated Person or Deputy Designated Person is not available, contact the local Duty Social Worker of the Health Service Executive directly;
- In case of emergencies outside of Health Service Executive Social Work Department hours, contact the Gardaí. In situations that threaten the immediate safety of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, it may be necessary to contact the Gardaí.

Confidentiality statement

We in St. Michael’s Theatre are committed to ensuring peoples’ rights to confidentiality. However, in relation to the welfare and protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults we undertake that:

- o Information will only be forwarded on a ‘need to know’ basis in order to safeguard
- o the child/young person or vulnerable adult;
- o Giving such information to others for the protection of a child, young person or vulnerable adult is not a breach of confidentiality;
- o We cannot guarantee total confidentiality where the best interests of the child, young person or vulnerable adult is at risk;
- o Primary carers, children, young people and vulnerable people have a right to know if personal information is being shared and/or a report is being made to the Health Service Executive, unless doing so could put the child/ person or vulnerable at further risk;
- o Images of a child, young person or vulnerable will not be used for any reason without the consent of the parent/carer (however, we cannot guarantee that cameras/videos will not be used at public performances);
- o Procedures will be put in place in relation to the use of images of children, young people or vulnerable adults;
- o Procedures will also be put in place for the recording and storing of information in line with our confidentiality policy.

Recruiting and selecting staff policy statement

We will ensure that staff are carefully selected, trained and supervised to provide a safe environment for all children, young people and vulnerable adults, by observing the following principles:

- o Roles and responsibilities will be clearly defined for every job (paid or voluntary);
- o We will endeavour to select the most suitable person for the project;
- o Candidates will be asked to sign a declaration form;
- o Two written references that are recent, relevant, independent and verbally confirmed will be necessary;

No person who would be deemed to constitute a 'risk' will be employed;
Some of the exclusions would include:

- any abuse-related convictions;
- refusal to sign application form and declaration form;
- insufficient documentary evidence of identification;
- concealing information on one's suitability to working with children; young people or vulnerable adults;
- All staff will be required to consent to Garda clearance, and where available, this will be sought.
- There will be a relevant six month probationary period, except in the case of casual staff.

Staff management policy statement

To protect both staff (paid and voluntary), children, young people and vulnerable adults, we undertake that:

New staff will:

- o Take part in a mandatory induction training session;
- o Be made aware of the organisation's code of conduct and protection procedures in relation to children, young people and vulnerable adults;
- o Undergo a probationary or trial period.

All staff will:

- Receive an adequate level of supervision and review of their work practices;
- Be expected to have read and signed the Policy Statement for the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults;
- Be provided with appropriate policy training.

Policy statement on the involvement of primary carers/ carers and teachers

Arts organisations should explicitly state in their guidelines how they intend to involve and share information with primary carers (parents or responsible adults) in the case of any concern over a child, young person or vulnerable adult's welfare.

We are committed to being open with all primary carers and teachers

We undertake to:

- o Advise primary carers and teachers of our protection policy;
- o Inform primary carers and schools of all activities and potential activities in relation to the project the group/ school is involved in;
- o Issue contact/consent forms where relevant;
- o Comply with health and safety practices;
- o Operate people-centred policies in accordance with best practice;
- o Adhere to our recruitment guidelines;
- o Ensure as far as possible that the activities are appropriate, in terms of age and ability;
- o Encourage and facilitate the involvement of parent(s), carer(s) or responsible adult(s), where appropriate.

If we have concerns about the welfare of the child/young person or vulnerable adult, we will:

- o Respond to the needs of the child, young person or vulnerable adult;
- o Inform the primary carers or teachers on an on-going basis unless this action puts the child, young person or vulnerable adult at further risk;
- o Where there are protection and welfare concerns in relation to the child, young person or vulnerable adult, we are obliged to pass these on to the Duty Social Worker and, in an emergency, to the Gardaí;
- o In the event of a complaint against a member of staff, we will immediately ensure the safety of the child/young person or vulnerable adult and inform carers as appropriate.

As a people-centred organisation, we are committed to putting the interest of the child, young person or vulnerable adult first. To that end we will:

- o Contact local Health Service Executive and Gardaí where there is a protection or welfare concern in relation to a child, young person or vulnerable adult;
- o Encourage carers to work in partnership with us under the guidelines set out by our organisation to ensure the safety of children, young people or vulnerable adults;
- o Have a designated contact person available for consultation with carers in the case of any concern over the welfare of a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

A deputy designated person has also been appointed should the designated person be away. The designated person is Suzanne Sinnott and can be contacted on 051-421255. The deputy designated person is Mary Ronan and can be contacted on 051-421255.

Dealing with allegations against staff

Two separate procedures must be followed:

1. In respect of the child/young person or vulnerable adult Suzanne Sinnott will deal with issues related to the child/young person or vulnerable adult. In her absence, issues will be dealt with by deputy designated person Mary Ronan.
2. In respect of the person against whom the allegation is made Tomás Kavanagh, Theatre Director, will deal with issues related to the staff member.

- o The first priority is to ensure that no child, young person or vulnerable adult is exposed to unnecessary risk;
- o If allegations are made against the Designated Person, then the Deputy Designated Person should be contacted;
- o The reporting procedures outlined in these guidelines should be followed. Both the primary carers and child/young person or vulnerable adult should be informed of actions planned and taken. The child/young person or vulnerable adult should be dealt with in an appropriate manner, taking into account age and ability.
- o The staff member will be informed as soon as possible of the nature of the allegation;
- o The staff member should be given the opportunity to respond;
- o The chairperson/head of the organisation should be informed as soon as possible;
- o Any action following an allegation of abuse against a member of staff should be taken in consultation with Health Service Executive and Gardaí;
- o After consultation, the chairperson/head of organisation should advise the person accused and agreed procedures will be followed.

Complaints and comments procedures

In the event of complaints or comments:

- o Complaints or comments will be responded to within one to two weeks;
- o In the case of a child, young person or vulnerable adult, Suzanne Sinnott, or in her absence, Mary Ronan, has responsibility for directing complaints/ comments to the appropriate person;
- o In the case of an allegation against a staff member, Tomás Kavanagh has responsibility for directing complaints/comments to the appropriate person;
- o Verbal complaints will be logged and responded to accordingly.

Accidents procedure

- o The organisation must maintain an up-to-date register of the contact details of all children/young people or vulnerable adults involved in the organisation;
- o External organisations with whom your organisation has dealings must provide proof that they have public liability insurance, in situations where St. Michael's Theatre public liability insurance is not applicable, i.e. over- night trips with schools and community organisations.
- o A first-aid box is located at reception. Please ask carer or teacher to apply first

aid to child, young person or vulnerable adult. Note: if an allergy occurs St. Michael's Theatre is not responsible.

- o Availability of first-aid should be in accordance with the organisation's Health and Safety guidelines. The location of accident/incident book for participants on education programmes at St. Michael's Theatre is located in the education room.
- o Take cognisance of responsibility for first-aid on off-site trips.
- o Children, young people and vulnerable adults must be advised of risks of potentially dangerous material being used in workshops;
- o Record details of broken equipment in education room and report to reception immediately.
- o All accidents/incidents must be reported to Designated Person Suzanne Sinnott or Deputy Designated Person Mary Ronan. In the case of an accident or incident, fill in accident/incident report form, to be signed and dated by the staff member who witnessed it.
- o If staff member is injured please report incident or accident to Health and Safety Officer John Caulfield or to reception in the absence of the Health and Safety Officer.

Accident/Incident Report Form

Youth Arts Project

Name of participant

Date and time of
incident

Location

Accident/Incident
description

State what exactly you saw happen

Did the injured child/ young person or vulnerable adult say what caused the accident

What happened after the accident

Signature of Staff Member _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____ Contact No. _____

Definitions of abuse

There are four main categories of abuse as outlined in Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children. The following is a synopsis of the information contained in that document. For the full definitions please refer to Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1993 (pp.32-34).

1. Neglect

“Neglect can be defined as being where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care....The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child’s needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well-being and/or development are severely affected.” (Children First p.31)

2. Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse usually happens where there is a relationship between a carer and a child rather than as a specific incident or incidents.

“Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms.” (Children First p.31)

Rather, it can manifest in the child’s behaviour or physical functioning. Examples of these include ‘anxious’ attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement and uncooperative or hostile behaviour.

“The threshold of significant harm is reached when interaction is predominantly abusive and become typical of the relationship between the child and the parent/ carer.” (Children First p.32)

Examples of emotional abuse in children include:

- Imposition of negative attributes on children, expressed by persistent criticism,

sarcasm, hostility or blaming;

- Emotional unavailability by the child's parent/carer;
- Unresponsiveness, inconsistent or inappropriate expectations of the child;
- Premature imposition of responsibility on the child;
- Unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of the child's capacity to understand something or to behave and control him/herself in a certain way;
- Under or over-protection of the child;
- Use of unreasonably harsh discipline;
- Exposure to domestic violence.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include the following:

- Shaking;
- Use of excessive force in handling;
- Deliberate poisoning;
- Suffocation;
- Allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant physical harm to a child.

4. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves the use of a child for gratification or sexual arousal by a person for themselves or others.

Examples of sexual abuse include:

- Exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child;
- Intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification;
- Masturbation in the presence of the child or involvement of the child in an act of masturbation;
- Sexual intercourse with a child whether oral, vaginal or anal;
- Sexual exploitation of a child... may also include showing sexually explicit material to children which is often a feature of the 'grooming' process by perpetrators of abuse;
- Consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an under-age person.

Permission for Outings

I/we give my/our permission for _____ (name of participant)
to partake in the following excursion outside St. Michael's Theatre:

Signed _____ (primary carer/ carer or teacher)

Date _____

Permission to be photographed or video recorded as a participant of a St. Michael's Theatre education programme

I/we give permission for _____ (name of participant)
to
be photographed or filmed, under the supervision of St. Michael's Theatre staff.

Signed _____ (primary carer/ carer or teacher)

Date _____

Accident and/or Emergency Consent Form

I/we give permission for staff at St. Michael's Theatre to act on my behalf in case of emergency or accident and to take such action as may be necessary for the benefit of the child, young person or vulnerable adult. The decision is to be taken by the person in charge at time of the emergency.

Signed _____ (primary carer/ carer or teacher)

Date _____

Record details

Participant

Primary Carer/ Carer or Teacher
Full Name

Date of Birth
Full name
Address Address

Male/female Contact No.

Start date of project Mobile No.

Name of designated person to collect participant

Contact No./ Mobile

Does participant suffer from any medical conditions or allergies that we should know about?
If so, please outline specific details and special requirements, if any

Does participant suffer from any hearing and/or speech difficulties?
Please give details

Additional Information that might help us get to know participant better