



## CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The parents or carers of children taking part in THRIFT activities, are required to sign a form indicating that they and their children have read and understood the following documents, produced in consultation with the National Association of Youth Theatre, Action on Child Exploitation, Child-Safe, local police, WILDCARD Theatre company, The National Youth Music Theatre, The Bristol Old Vic, Youth Music Theatre:UK, The VIVA Network & West Berkshire Child protection team.

A major part of THRIFT's responsibility for young people in our care is to ensure their safety and wellbeing at all times.

To help us do this effectively we have implemented a Child Protection and Health and Safety policy which is designed to protect your child and all the children we work with.

THRIFT is committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for children and young people in order for them to benefit from and enjoy all the opportunities that Youth Theatre has to offer.

This policy recognises the following guiding principles:

- **The welfare of the child is paramount**
- **All children without exception have the right to protection from abuse.**
- **All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately; and**
- **All THRIFT staff, freelance employees and volunteers have a responsibility to report concerns.**

In addition there is a set of **Company Rules** which your child needs to observe while s/he is working with us.

THRIFT is not an investigation agency, although we might play a vital role in the detection and referral of child abuse. Only Social Services, the NSPCC or the police can make investigations.

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## Child Protection Policy Statement

THRIFT believes all children have the right to protection from abuse irrespective of race, social background, gender, skin colour, disability, religion or beliefs.

We recognise our responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children and young people and commit to protect them from abuse. It is never acceptable for a child to experience abuse or exploitation of any kind. Any person who has any knowledge of a potential child protection issue involving the organization is to immediately contact the Artistic Director. Our child protection policies provide a safe and positive environment for children and are essential in all the work with which we do and are associated with.

### **To achieve these commitments, THRIFT will:**

1. Ensure that all staff and volunteers are carefully selected and monitored. They will be informed of and make themselves familiar with the Child Protection Policy.
2. Carry out risk assessments at rehearsal, accommodation and performance venues.
3. Inform parents and young people how complaints or concerns should be reported.
4. Let parents and young people have information about THRIFT's Protection Policy.

Our Policy Statement applies to all paid staff and all volunteers whether these people's involvement is full or part-time, temporary or permanent. A copy of this statement along with the subsequent procedures will be given to all of the above people on their initial interview in order that any queries may be addressed before a permanent commitment is given by THRIFT.

### **THRIFT promises to:**

1. Employ staff only after interview and the receipt of satisfactory references.
2. Insist that all staff and volunteers undergo the Criminal Records Bureau Enhanced Disclosure check.
3. Highlight THRIFT's code of conduct to participants and each staff member.
4. Ensure that each Head Chaperone has undergone a period of training covering child protection, drug awareness, emergency aid and health and safety awareness.
5. Distribute a copy of this document to all members of staff and volunteers.
6. Ensure that all information will be treated with confidentiality.

## 1. Introduction

Thrift are committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for children and young people involved in any of its educational activities; camps, workshops, & residential workshops etc.

- Ensuring access to confidential information is restricted to the Head Chaperone & Artistic director or the appropriate external authorities.
- Reviewing the effectiveness of our Child Protection Policy annually.
- Ensuring there is a designated Child protection officer. In 2006 year that person will be Tim Godwin (B.A hons,PGCE) Artistic Director of THRIFT.

### 1.1 Policy issues

THRIFT, believe that:

1. Child protection is both an individual and a corporate responsibility.
2. All children and young people have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation and inequalities should be challenged.
3. All children and young people should be encouraged to fulfill their potential.
4. The welfare of children and young people is paramount.
5. Everyone must take precautions and responsibility to help create a safe place for children and support their care and protection. This begins with everyone being well informed and aware of child protection issues.
6. Openness must be encouraged about concerns relating to child protection matters because child abuse thrives on secrecy.
7. THRIFT owe a duty of care to the children with whom they work and a responsibility to meet minimum standards of protection for the children in their care.

As a provider of theatre-based education work throughout the United Kingdom, THRIFT is committed to practice which protects children and young people from harm. Staff in this organisation accept and recognise our responsibilities to develop awareness of the issues which cause children harm.

In this document 'staff' is taken to mean staff both temporary and permanent and volunteers and 'an individual' or 'these groups' is taken to mean children and young people.

THRIFT will take every reasonable step to ensure that these groups are protected through:

1. Following carefully the procedures for recruitment and selection of staff
2. Providing effective management for staff through induction, support and training
3. Adopting protection guidelines through a code of behaviour for staff
4. Prioritising the welfare of participants when planning and implementing projects
5. Sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know

## 1.2 Recorded Material

All images of children and young adults will be kept in a safe place, and parental permission will be required for taking and/or using photographs or video material in publicity material.

## 1.3 How do we define childhood?

Child - up to and including the age of 18. THRIFT runs workshops for children, both residential and non-residential.

Young Person - There is no legal definition for this term, however, in this document, 'young person' refers to the upper age ranges of the official definition of a child. The term acknowledges that individuals for instance, 16 or 17 years old may not think of themselves as 'children'. THRIFT runs one-off projects, and workshops for young people.

## 1.4 THRIFT's understanding of abuse

The government guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* categorises abuse as: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect (See Appendix) In all forms of abuse there are elements of emotional abuse and it is possible to be subjected to abuse in more than one way at a time.

### Are all our staff sure of what 'abuse' and 'protection' means?

Yes. Before working with THRIFT, a copy of this document and our guide to working with young people is given to and discussed with staff.

### What are the barriers to disclosing abuse?

Child abuse thrives on secrecy and on people's fear of disclosure. It is important to be aware of the reasons why people, including children, may not want to disclose fears, abuse or suspicions they may have. We therefore have procedures to enable people and children to come forward with any concerns they may have.

## 1.5 How do we work within the law?

The practices and procedures within this policy are based on the principles contained within UK and international legislation and government guidance and have been designed to complement Local Area Child Protection Committee procedures and take the following into consideration:

- *The Children Act 1989;*
- *The Protection of Children Act 1999;*
- *Working Together to Safeguard Children and Young People 1999;*
- *"Caring for the Young and Vulnerable"- Home Office Guidance for Preventing the Abuse of Trust 1999;*
- *The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000;*
- *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;*
- *The Human Rights Act 1998;*
- *"What to do if you are worried a child may be being abused" – DOH 2003*

### **Criminal Records Bureau Enhanced Disclosure**

At present the CRB checks are not a legal requirement of companies such as THRIFT. However, for the sake of 'good practice', the THRIFT has decided that all THRIFT staff members and volunteers undergo the Enhanced check. This gives details of any criminal record, appearance on List 99 (DofE) and any other relevant background information.

### **The Protection of Children Act 1999**

This act assists in the identification of those people considered to be unsuitable for work with young people by the use of the Protection of Children Act List and List 99. There is no legal requirement on THRIFT to check against these lists. The Company does however use the above Disclosures to cover this area.

### **Sexual Offences Act 1997 and Sexual Offences (Amendments) Act 2000**

Anyone who has been convicted under either of the above acts will not be employed by THRIFT.

### **Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974**

All prospective employees of THRIFT must declare any convictions under this act. This will not necessarily bar them from working with THRIFT but will be taken into consideration before employment is offered.

### **Data Protection Act 1984 & 1998**

All records held by THRIFT are confidential and no information may be disseminated without the agreement of the young people and their parents. This includes recommending young people for further work in theatre and the taping and distribution of videos and sound recordings. The videos and tapes are the sole property of THRIFT.

### **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**

The THRIFT will ensure risk assessments are carried out in order that the company may work in a safe and healthy environment. However, THRIFT requires that all company members take reasonable steps to protect themselves.

### **The Children (Performance) Regulations 1968**

Every child under the age of 16 who does four or more performances per year for which the general public pay to see, must be licensed by their own local authority. The regulations govern the length of performance and rehearsal periods, the accommodation in which the child is housed, time spent in travelling to and from such rehearsals and performances and the use of approved 'matrons'.

### **Licensing of Pastoral Team**

On each of the children's licences, a named chaperone is responsible for the children in the ratio of ten children to each chaperone. This chaperone should be licensed by their own local authority. However, many authorities are now refusing to do this since the CRB checks came into being, the argument being that licensing is now unnecessary, as the CRB checks cover the same area. THRIFT does, however, ask chaperones whenever possible to become licensed.

## 2. THRIFT Company Rules

- Always inform your workshop leader or chaperone every time you enter or leave the building/premises.
- Always arrive in plenty of time for each workshop.
- Strictly no smoking allowed in any of the buildings.
- Use of drugs, alcohol or illegal substances is prohibited
- Do not bring in any valuable items unless you absolutely have to.
- Always clean away all of your rubbish in the bins provided.
- Always listen to staff members and respect them when they are talking. You should not talk when you have been asked to remain quiet; you may miss some important information.
- Always tell a member of staff if you are involved in an accident.
- Always tell a member of staff if you have, or witness, any problems.
- Always switch your mobile phone off at the start of each session.
- Do not take anything without permission.
- Do not eat or chew gum in workshop session.
- Do not bully physically or emotionally any member of your course.
- Always treat others as you wish to be treated yourself.
- Always follow these rules and you will create a safe and happy working environment that will allow everybody, including yourself, to have fun.

## **3. Health & Safety**

### **3.1 Risk Assessment**

THRIFT will ensure that the Child Protection officer undertakes reasonable risk assessments for every project that it runs. These will be monitored regularly. The risk assessment will cover:

- 1 Practical details of the project.
- 2 Elements/aspects that can go wrong in the project.
- 3 Likelihood of elements going wrong.
- 4 Impact of these elements going wrong.

### **3.2 Accidents and Injuries**

1 THRIFT will maintain an accident record book and will require staff to enter a record of the accident when a child or young adult is injured whilst under THRIFT's supervision. The record will be countersigned by the person responsible for the child, or, in the absence of that person, by a responsible member of staff. The accident book will be kept for 3 years.

2 If a child or young adult arrives at the session with an obvious physical injury, a record will be made in the accident book and the person with responsibility for that individual will be required to counter-sign. This record will be used if a formal allegation is made later as a record that the individual did not sustain the injury whilst working with THRIFT.

## **4. GOOD PRACTICE FOR THRIFT STAFF**

### **4.1 Staff responsibilities**

*Our policy on staff responsibilities towards members.*

#### **4.1.1 Inappropriate relationships**

THRIFT practitioners should never enter into inappropriate relationships with members, even if they are beyond the age of consent. Inappropriate relationships are not only sometimes sought on the part of staff. Participants can make what they see as perfectly reasonable advances in an inappropriate situation. In addition, it has been known for a staff member to be accused of inappropriate behaviour by a participant where a one-to-one situation has occurred.

These different occurrences mean that responsibility for the probity of both sides of the working relationship lies with the staff member. If a member of staff is working with a young person on a one-to-one basis, this should be conducted in a public area or, if this is not possible, in a designated room with the door left open.

An additional situation to be aware of is giving lifts home to participants in a private vehicle. If a young person has no way of getting home after a session, staff should put the young person in a taxi rather than use their own vehicles. If this is not possible and the member of staff has to use a private vehicle, they should inform another person of the situation before leaving. In either case, staff should attempt to contact parents or guardians of the young person to confirm these arrangements.

#### **4.1.2 Discipline**

Discipline is essential for productive creative activity to take place, but it is never appropriate to use physical force to maintain it. Youth theatre staff do have the right to challenge disruptive, aggressive, offensive or illegal behaviour. In the case of mild infractions you might ask the member to sit out of the rest of the workshop or rehearsal, but stay in the room. For more serious breaches it might be necessary to exclude the young person from the project. In the unlikely case of grossly offensive or violent behaviour, ask the person to desist immediately. If they persist then you have little alternative than to suspend the activity and call for help.

#### **4.1.3 Disclosure**

'Disclosure' is the new term for what, in the past, has been called police checking or screening. The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) is an executive agency of the Home Office set up to help organisations make safer recruitment decisions. By providing access to criminal records and other information, the CRB will enable organisations to identify who may be unsuitable for certain types of work and positions, especially those involving contact with children or vulnerable adults.

With the advent of the Disclosure service there are concerns being raised about the balance to be struck between the need for child protection and the need to allow everybody to have a place and a purpose within the community. The CRB has established a code of practice which includes detailed guidance about disclosures. The guidelines are designed to combat unfair discrimination. This is in a context where there are millions of people with past criminal convictions, possibly involving imprisonment. Many of these people can still prove to be perfectly capable and safe staff and volunteers.

#### **4.1.4 Child abuse**

The Children's Act 1989 recognised that it is a moral duty of all citizens in the UK to report any child they believe to be at risk of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or neglect. It is specific advice that a member of staff should not undertake to keep secrets for a participant. As with most work with young people this is about judgement on the part of staff. If you believe a young person is at risk as a result of keeping information secret, you should seek advice.

The important thing is that THRIFT staff are aware of the possibility of abuse. If there is any doubt regarding a participants well being, then again advice should be sought. Some people who recognise signs and symptoms of abuse are worried that their intervention may make a bad situation worse (e.g. breaking up a family, etc.) However, only 1.5% of referrals result in a child being officially registered as 'at risk'. THRIFT's point of contact will be the local authority's social services department. THRIFT may also approach the Police and local Youth and Community Service who will have specific procedures.

#### **4.1.5 Rights and confidentiality**

If a complaint or allegation is made against a member of staff, s/he should be made aware of his or her rights under both employment law and internal disciplinary procedures.

## 4.2 A code of good practice for youth theatre workers, volunteers and senior members

### Code of behaviour

- DO treat everyone with respect
- DO provide an example you wish others to follow
- DO plan activities which involve more than one adult being present, or at least within sight or hearing of others
- DO respect a young person's right to personal privacy
- DO have separate sleeping accommodation for leaders and young people
- DO provide access for young people to talk about any concerns they may have
- DO support young people and adults to create a safe environment where they feel comfortable to talk about attitudes or behaviours they do not like
- DO avoid situations that compromise your relationship with young people and are unacceptable within a relationship of trust (e.g. inappropriate relationships regardless of whether the young person is over the age of consent)
- DO remember that someone else might misinterpret your actions, no matter how well intentioned
- DO recognise that caution is required even in sensitive moments of listening such as when dealing with bullying, bereavement or abuse
- DO NOT have any inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others
- DO NOT jump to conclusions about others without checking the facts
- DO NOT collude with crushes
- DO NOT show favouritism to any individual
- DO NOT make suggestive remarks or gestures, even in fun
- DO NOT let suspicion, disclosure or allegation of abuse, go unrecorded or unreported

## 5. PROCEDURES

Child abuse can and does occur outside the family setting. Although it is a sensitive and difficult issue, child abuse has occurred within institutions and within other settings, e.g. schools, youth clubs and sports clubs. Recent research indicates that abuse that takes place within an organisation is rarely a one-off event. It is crucial that those involved in theatre are aware of this possibility and that ***all allegations are taken seriously and appropriate action pursued.***

Allegations will often relate to poor practice where an adult's behaviour is inappropriate and maybe causing concern to a young person/s, colleague/s or parent/s.

***Poor practice constitutes any behaviour that contravenes THRIFT Codes of Conduct***

- *Infringes on an individual's rights;*
- *Is a failure to fulfill the highest standards of care.*

### 5.1 LEVELS OF AWARENESS

It is understandable that people who are well-motivated, loving and caring individuals with a deep commitment to the theatre and its practice, are reluctant to believe that children may be suffering harm in a theatre environment or at home. It

may be difficult to accept that children could be at risk because of the way the organisation is being run and the attitudes of those involved. Levels of awareness need to be raised without creating an atmosphere of anxiety or suspicion.

**However**, a basic principle should be that:

***If you become aware of anything which causes you to feel uncomfortable, you should talk to the Nominated Child Protection Officer.***

This means being aware of the **attitudes** of staff, workshop leaders and volunteers and of the **interactions** between them and the children, and with each other. Certain modes of behaviour by an individual or individuals may be excused by the comments:

***"He/she has always behaved like that"***

or

***"We've come to expect that sort of behaviour and attitude from X group, they are the same every year"***

If the behaviour is contrary to THRIFT Policy and Procedures, meaning that young people are potentially at risk, then action **MUST** be taken. Adults must also be alert to any unusual incidents or activities which take place where staff, workshop leaders or volunteers are putting themselves in a vulnerable position

## **5.2 WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE**

THRIFT will ensure that all young people, parents and staff are aware that any allegations will be taken seriously, quickly and thoroughly investigated in confidence and the findings reported to the necessary parties.

As responsible adults working with young people on a regular basis, it is an important function of our duty of pastoral care, to be aware of the indicators of abuse.

***It is NOT the responsibility of those working in theatre to decide that abuse is occurring, but it IS their responsibility to act on any concern.***

**Difficulties the alleged abused young person may find in reporting the alleged incident**

1. They will not be believed
2. They may believe they are to blame
3. They may not want the alleged perpetrator to get into trouble
4. They may be embarrassed or guilty
5. They may believe that they will be removed from home if the incident arose before they arrived at the THRIFT course
6. They may believe that the abuse is 'normal'
7. They may have been threatened and are scared to report the incident

**Difficulties the staff or other members of THRIFT may encounter before reporting an alleged incident**

1. Not believing the allegation
2. Shock, fear, denial

3. Not wanting to get 'involved'
4. Fear of the consequences
5. Not knowing how to handle the situation
6. Fear of mishandling the situation

### 5.3 RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE, SUSPICIONS AND ALLEGATIONS

In all cases of reported poor practice/abuse, the following principles must always be adopted:

## Listen and Reassure

*You should do:*

1. Look at the child directly.
- 2 Accept what the child says.
- 3 Be aware that the child may have been threatened.
- 4 Do not adopt a critical approach.
- 5 Do not press for information.
- 6 Reassure the child that (s)he is right to tell you, and that you will take what (s)he says very seriously.
- 7 Do not promise to keep the information the child has disclosed a secret.
- 8 Let the child know what you are going to do next, who you are going to tell, and why, and roughly what will happen.
- 9 Finish on a positive note.
- 10 As soon as possible afterwards, make hand written notes of exactly what the child said and the date and time.(See *RECORD*)

### DO:

- **Stay calm** - do not rush into inappropriate action. React calmly in order to not alarm the young person;
- **Reassure the child** - that they are not to blame and confirm that you know how difficult it must be to confide;
- **Listen sympathetically** - to what the child says and show that you take them seriously;
- **Keep questions to a minimum** - the law is very strict and child abuse cases have been dismissed where the child has been led or words and ideas have been suggested. Only ask questions to clarify;
- **Ensure you clearly understand what the child has said** - in order that the information can be passed on to the appropriate agencies;
- **Consult with the club or CB Welfare Officer** - ensuring that you communicate all the information accurately;
- **Maintain confidentiality** - complete the incident report form. All incidents will be treated with an "open mind" and be handled in a fair and equitable manner. Confidentiality must be maintained until a case is proven;
- **Ensure the safety of the young person** - if urgent medical attention is required, then call an ambulance, inform the doctors of the concerns and ensure they are aware that this is a child protection issue.

**DO NOT:**

- Panic - or allow your feelings to be evident;
- Make promises you cannot keep - explain that you will need to tell other people;
- Make the child repeat the story unnecessarily;
- Delay;
- Speculate or make assumptions;
- Approach the alleged abuser;
- Take sole responsibility.

*In all cases, if you are not sure what to do, you can gain help from the NSPCC 24-hour free phone helpline (0800 800 500)*

## RECORD

Information passed to external agencies must be as helpful as possible. It will be necessary to make a detailed report at the time of disclosure. The report should contain the following detail:

- The young person's name, address, date of birth, race, ethnic origin, and any disability they may have;
- Nature of the allegation;
- A description of any injuries/bruising;
- Any observations about the behaviour/emotional state of the young person;
- Times, locations, dates;
- The young person's account in their own words of what has happened;
- Actions that have been taken as a result of your concerns;
- Whether the person writing the report is expressing their own concerns or those of a third party;
- Sign and date;
- Keep a copy;
- Keep a record of the name and designation of a Social Services member of staff or police officer to whom concerns were passed.
- **DO NOT INVESTIGATE YOURSELF.**

## TAKING APPROPRIATE ACTION

- 1 Do not delay.
- 2 Do not act alone.
- 3 Do not start to investigate.
- 4 Inform the Head Chaperone of the position immediately.
- 5 The Head Chaperone will consult with others relevant to the incident.
- 6 Meet with the Head Chaperone and take a written record of the facts.
- 7 Notify the Child Protection officer.
- 8 The Child Protection officer will then inform the social services of the disclosure who will then liaise with the relevant departments on a need-to-know basis and will, if appropriate, inform the police. It is the responsibility of the authorities to determine whether abuse has occurred.

### 5.4 ACTION TO TAKE IF A YOUNG PERSON INFORMS YOU THAT HE/SHE IS CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE'S BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS THEM IN A THRIFT SETTING

Follow the procedures as laid down below:

- Make a full record (*see RECORD*) of what has been said, heard and seen as soon as possible;
- THRIFT Child Protection Officer should be informed immediately;
- Child Protection Officer should report the matter to the THRIFT Artistic Director.

Following guidance that the issue is poor practice, then the Child Protection Officer should:

Follow the company's disciplinary procedures for a first report of poor practice.

Following guidance that the issue is abuse, then the Child Protection Officer should:

If the young person requires immediate medical attention:

- An ambulance must be called;
- The doctor should be informed that the concern relates to child protection;

Refer the allegation to police or Social Services They will give advice relating to the contacting of parents/guardians;

Inform the Child Protection Officer and forward a written report utilising the Incident Report Form.

**Non-action is not an option. The welfare of the young person/s is paramount.**

The THRIFT Artistic Director, will:

- Decide whether any individual accused of abuse should temporarily be suspended pending further Social Services or police enquiries

- Assess all individual cases under the appropriate misconduct and disciplinary procedures irrespective of the findings of the Social Services and police. There may be three types of investigation:
  - Criminal
  - Child protection
  - Disciplinary or misconduct

The results of Social Services and police investigations will inform the THRIFT Disciplinary investigation.

- Support the respective Child Protection Officers in all aspects, particularly the need to obtain appropriate support for affected young people, parents/carers and members of staff;
- Where allegations are unfounded, THRIFT will work in a professional manner to ensure that the person concerned is given appropriate support to continue his or her work in theatre.

### **5.5 ACTION TO TAKE IF YOU BECOME AWARE THROUGH YOUR OWN OBSERVATIONS OR THROUGH A THIRD PARTY OF POSSIBLE ABUSE OCCURRING AT A YOUNG PERSON'S HOME OR IN SOME OTHER SETTING (OUTSIDE OF THRIFT)**

This situation needs very careful handling.

1. It may be necessary to speak to the police and social services before speaking to the family and be led by them.
2. It is important that the young person is reassured of confidentiality but point out that certain people will have to be informed for their own safety.
3. Do not carry out any physical examination if the abuse is thought to be physical or sexual. If abuse is believed to have occurred, it may be necessary to contact the doctor for verification.

You should:

- Ensure the safety of the young person - if he/she requires immediate treatment, call an ambulance, inform the doctors of your concerns and ensure they are aware that this is a child protection issue. THRIFT procedures should then be followed:

Please refer to Section **RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE, SUSPICIONS AND ALLEGATIONS** in this policy;

- Report your concerns to the Child Protection Officer;
- The Child Protection Officer may seek advice from the NSPCC. If there is any delay in receiving advice, contact must be made with Social Services;
- If a formal referral is made, make it clear to Social Services or the police that this is a child protection referral;
- All police forces have dedicated Child Protection Teams (CPTs) which deal with allegations of abuse within the family setting and by people in a position of trust. In a real emergency, dial 999;

- Parents/carers should only be contacted following advice from Social Services.

**In all cases, please always remember the following:**

- It is often more difficult for some young people to disclose abuse than others. Young people from ethnic minorities may have regularly experienced racism, which may lead them to believe that certain groups, including those in authority roles, do not really care about their well being. They may well feel they have good reason to question whether the response may be different;
- Disabled young people may have to overcome additional barriers before feeling that that they can disclose abuse. They may rely on the abuser for their daily care and not know of alternative sources of care. The abuse may be the only attention/affection they have experienced. There may be communication differences and they will almost certainly have to overcome prejudices which block our willingness to believe they may be abused or to use their medical condition to explain away indicators which in a non-disabled young person would concern us.

**These groups of people need us to be extra vigilant and to give thought as to how we will respond.**

- In all cases, every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained.

Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis. This will include the following people:

- The Child Protection Officers;
- Designated personnel within THRIFT;
- The person making the allegation;
- Social Services and police;
- The parents of the young person alleged to have been abused.

## **5.6 IF THE ALLEGED ABUSE OCCURRED ON A THRIFT COURSE**

1. After the initial discussion with the alleged abused young person, it will be necessary to speak to the alleged perpetrator to inform them of the accusation and any evidence provided.
2. The discussion procedure should follow that of the alleged abused young person.
3. All discussion should again be recorded, dated and signed.
4. Reassure the alleged perpetrator that no disciplinary action will be taken until the matter has been thoroughly investigated.
5. Assure them that they will not be discussed (except in the case of proven gross misconduct) until an appeal from them has been considered.

## **5.7 IF THE ALLEGATION PROVES TO BE FALSE**

1. Speak to the alleged abused and reassured them.
2. Try to discover the cause of the false accusation - malice, arguments, feeling of rejection
3. Discuss with the alleged abused the consequences of their false accusation.
4. Suggest that the person making the accusation apologies to the alleged perpetrator in the presence of the Head of Pastoral Team

5. Allow discussion of any problems between the two parties to resolve the situation.
6. Reassure the alleged perpetrator that, although reported, no further action will be taken.

## **5.8 IF THE ALLEGATION PROVES TO BE WELL FOUNDED**

1. Again reassured the abused person of confidentiality and that the incident will be taken seriously.
2. Tell them that they have done the right thing in reporting the incident and inform them of any action that is taken as a result of the incident.
3. Parents should be informed.
4. If the perpetrator is a young company member, the perpetrator's parents should be informed.
5. Discussion will be held between the Head of Pastoral Team & THRIFT Child protection officer, to determine the correct course of action.
6. If the incident (except in the case of gross misconduct) appears to be an isolated one, then the normal disciplinary proceedings (as in the THRIFT HANDBOOK) may be taken i.e. warnings, loss of privileges including non-appearance on stage and curfew. If the incident reoccurs, then the young person may be sent home.
7. In the case of gross misconduct by a young company member, that person will be removed immediately from the area of other company members and when appropriate arrangements have been made with the parents will be sent home.
8. In the situation where a member of staff is involved, that member of staff should be immediately suspended from their work with the young people. Appropriate disciplinary proceedings will be taken including dismissal and if deemed appropriate by the General Manger, the police informed.
9. All actions should be recorded and in the case of dismissal from the company the person involved will receive in writing the reason for their dismissal.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

In all instances where issues of Child Protection are involved, staff must endeavour to act within the guidelines of this and other company policies. Any individual who is placed in or finds them self in a situation where they believe an issue of Child Protection may arise, and feels unable or uncertain of how to proceed, should consult the THRIFT Child protection officer immediately, rather than take responsibility for proceeding. It is not enough to cite lack of awareness or uncertainty in these areas as a justification for good practice.

## 6. APPENDICES

*For the use of THRIFT staff and volunteers and the information of parents/guardians/carers.*

### 6.1 ABUSE

Abuse is a powerful and emotive term. It is a term used to describe ways in which children are harmed, usually by individuals and often by those they know and trust.

**Workshop leaders and others working with young people hold this trust and may be at risk of misusing their power over children, young people and vulnerable adults.**

In order to provide young people with the best possible experiences and opportunities in theatre, it is imperative that everyone operates within an accepted ethical framework and demonstrates exemplary behaviour. This not only ensures that theatre makes a positive contribution to the development of young people and safeguards their welfare, but also protects all personnel from false allegations of abuse or poor practice.

It is not always easy to differentiate poor practice from abuse, albeit intentional or unintentional. It is not, therefore, the responsibility of employees or volunteers in theatre to determine whether or not abuse is taking place.

**It is, however, their responsibility to identify poor practice and possible abuse and to act if they have a concern about the welfare of a young person.**

There may also be an increased risk within many theatre activities, for abuse to occur which does not necessarily fit into these categories.

It is generally accepted that there are four categories of abuse but it must be remembered that abuse may occur in more than one category at any one time.

#### 1. Neglect

As the majority of THRIFT courses are of short duration, neglect is rarely encountered as it tends to be present as the result of an on-going situation. However, the signs should never be ignored, and any suspicions referred to the designated person.

Signs to be aware of:

- a) A child is constantly hungry or secretes away food for later consumption
- b) A child who arrives dirty or inappropriately dressed for the weather conditions
- c) A child who appears to be grossly underweight and is constantly tired
- d) A child talks to others of being left unsupervised at inappropriate times

**In a theatre situation, neglect may occur when:**

- **Children, young people and vulnerable adults are left alone without proper supervision;**
- **A young person is exposed to unnecessary heat or cold without adequate sustenance or protection;**

- A young person is expected to work for an unreasonable length of time without adequate breaks, sustenance and rest.
- A young person is exposed to an unacceptable risk of injury.

## 2. Physical

Cuts and bruises are normal incidents in most children's lives. However, unexplained injuries, especially on areas of the body not normally exposed, could indicate physical abuse.

Signs to be aware of:

- a) Unexplained injuries on any part of the body
- b) Bruising
- c) Burns and scalds
- d) Bite marks or marks left by pinching
- e) Refusal to discuss injuries and implausible excuses for these
- f) Unwillingness for parents to be contacted if the injuries occurred before the child arrived
- g) Aggression towards others
- h) Fear of treatment of injuries
- i) Withdrawn behaviour
- j) Flinching when approached or touched
- k) Arms and legs covered and an unwillingness to get changed
- l) If the abuse has occurred at home, a fear of returning there

**In a theatre situation, physical abuse may occur when:**

- **Workshop leaders or helpers expose children, young people and vulnerable adults to exercise/games which disregard the capacity of the persons physical ability;**
- **Workshop leaders or helpers expose children, young people and vulnerable adults to over rehearsing, over working or fatigue;**
- **Workshop leaders or helpers expose children, young people and vulnerable adults to alcohol, or give them the opportunity to drink alcohol below the legal age;**

## 3. Emotional

This can be the result of the overprotective parent who will not allow the child to associate with other children. It may however arise when a child is belittled or ignored and receives no love or affection from parents/guardians especially when that affection is poured on to a sibling. The situation could also arise during THRIFT activities, when preference is given to other company members.

Signs to be aware of:

- a) Over reaction to mistakes
- b) Aggression
- c) Bed wetting
- d) Fear of new situations
- e) Inferiority complex

- f) Neurotic behaviour
- g) Self-harming
- h) Attention-seeking
- i) Fear of parents being contacted

**In a theatre situation, emotional abuse may occur when workshop leaders:**

- **Provide repeated negative feedback;**
- **Repeatedly ignore a young person's efforts to progress;**
- **Repeatedly demand performance levels above those of which the young person is capable;**
- **Over-emphasise the 'star' ethic.**

## **4. Sexual**

Children or young people who have been sexually abused will exhibit physical and emotional behaviour which will give cause for concern. They should always be taken seriously and allowed to speak freely of their predicament. Very often they will find this very difficult to discuss as they may have been told that 'it is a secret' by the perpetrator and warned of the danger of not being believed.

Signs to be aware of

- a) Physical difficulty in walking or sitting, stomach pains
- b) Bruising
- c) Becoming either aggressive or withdrawn
- d) Sleep disturbance
- e) Bed wetting
- f) Eating problems
- g) Secretiveness
- h) Fear of being left with a certain person or group
- i) Sexual knowledge far above that which is normally expected of their age group.
- j) Sexually inappropriate behaviour with their peers and/or adults
- k) Self-harm
- l) Drug or alcohol abuse
- m) Obsessional washing
- n) Running away

**In a theatre situation, sexual abuse may occur when:**

- The close proximity of workshop leaders and those working with young people is used by potential abusers to exploit their position of trust to sexually abuse.
- Workshop leaders and those working with young people engage in inappropriate physical contact that is or could be deemed to be sexual in nature.
- Young people are exposed to inappropriate language or discussion of a sexual nature, or given access to inappropriate material [i.e. pornography] either knowingly or unknowingly.

The list of the above 'signs' is not exhaustive but is merely there to act as a guide. It should also be remembered that there may be other reasons for changes in behaviour pattern and these should be taken into consideration and investigated before reporting any concerns of abuse.

## 6.2 BULLYING

Bullying is not always easy to define and will not always be an adult abusing a young person. It is often the case that the bully is a young person. There are three main types of bullying:

- **Physical**, e.g. hitting, kicking, theft;
- **Verbal**, e.g. racist or homophobic remarks;
- **Emotional**, e.g. persistent negative feedback.

All of these will include:

- Deliberate hostility and aggression towards a victim;
- A victim who is weaker and less powerful than the bully or bullies;
- **An outcome which is always painful and distressing for the individual.**

Bullying behaviour may also include:

- Other forms of violence;
- Sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing;
- Tormenting, ridiculing, humiliation;
- Racial taunts, graffiti, gestures;
- Unwanted physical contact or abusive, offensive comments of sexual nature.

The competitive nature of theatre makes it a potential environment for the bully. This may manifest itself in some of the following ways:

- A parent who pushes too hard;
- A workshop leader who adopts a 'performance at all costs' philosophy;
- A person who intimidates others;
- A workshop leader who is over-disciplinarian and officious.

## 6.3 Applicable forms

To implement the policy, people will need access to specific forms. These may include:

- Personal commitment child protection form - all those to be covered by the policy should sign this form to say they have read, understood, and agree with the policy
- Reporting child abuse form - this is to be used when wanting to report abuse
- Character reference form - this is to be used when deciding whether to recruit a person
- Third party agreement form (for use of information) - for use when you are checking the credibility of an information request, that could put a child in jeopardy if the information is given to those who want to harm children.
- Criminal record declaration - this is to facilitate police checks (if you have such a system in your country) to check the background of any person applying to work for the organization.
- Consent forms - for parents, guardians or care workers, to give consent for extra curricula events or residential camps etc
- Accident forms - insurance type forms if children are to take part in risky outdoor activities

## 6.4 GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. All THRIFT members should be treated with respect and have a right to privacy.
2. Be aware of any potential risks and report to the Head Chaperone any cause for concern. Risk assessments will be carried out by the Artistic Director and the Head Chaperone.
3. If a young person needs to be spoken to or requests to speak to you on their own, explain the necessity of a witness (another member of staff or one of their peers).
4. Never take a child in to your own bedroom or to toilet areas in the absence of another staff member.
5. Do not enter a young person's room on your own. Always knock on the door before entry.
6. Be careful of how and where you touch a young person. Sometimes some affection is needed by the young person but this should be limited to a swift hug. Never pat a young person on the bottom. This is not only for the protection of the young person but mainly for the protection of the member of staff
7. Never use physical means of control without another member of staff being present. This could be misconstrued as assault even if the young person is in danger.
8. Take seriously any allegations of abuse, record them and report them for further investigation. Never trivialise or ignore accusations.
9. Do not spend excessive amounts of time with one particular child.
10. Give the young people an opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have and ensure that the environment is conducive to discussions taking place.
11. Keep records of any false accusations against you or other members of staff
1. Record any touching or conversation of a sexual nature instigated by a young person wither with you or another member of staff. Never ignore these as they may be reported by the young person at a later date.
13. Never engage in or allow others to engage in inappropriate behaviour e.g. verbal, sexual, horseplay
14. Never make sexual comments or engage in sexual activity with the young person.
15. Never allow abusive or discriminatory behaviour from any company member. This includes discrimination because of faith, race or colour.
16. Never give personal money.
17. Never use drugs when working.
18. Never undermine or criticise other members of staff.
19. Never put yourself in a compromising or potentially dangerous situation.
20. Do not rely on your good name to protect you.