

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

STG Child Protection Policy

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Context

Stages Theatre Group (STG) believes in the rights of children and aims to provide a safe environment for children to express themselves freely. STG also facilitates the space in which children can design, create and produce their work. Therefore, all members of STG, i.e. staff on permanent, casual, contract or consultancy, interns and volunteers are bound by this policy. In the event, other service providers such as make-up artists, sound and lights technicians etc. are contracted, the lead artist of STG responsible for that particular activity or performance will be responsible for the children under their care for the duration of the said activity or performance.

STG will be responsible for the physical, emotional and mental protection of children while in their care. For this purpose, a clear set of procedures to follow is set out within this document.

This is important to STG because:

- The wellbeing of children is of utmost importance
- All children, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, disability, religious beliefs, language, sexual identity / orientation, have a right to protection from all forms of abuse
- All members of STG ought to be clear on how to respond should a situation arise

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Terms

Child/Children

According to the STG policy, individuals who are below the age of 18 are recognized and classified as minors or children.

Physical Safety

Arts related activities can take part in a variety of different settings. Wherever the location of the activity is, it is the duty of STG members to ensure that:

- teaching rooms, rehearsal spaces are open and accessible
- teaching rooms, rehearsal spaces are well lit
- there are appropriate changing rooms for children
- there is adequate supervision at all times
- there will always be a STG member on site until the child has been picked up by a parent or guardian.
- in the event children use public transport to reach home, a follow up call is made to confirm they have reached home safely

In addition, the working environment should also feel safe.

- There will be no nudity
- The content being used and generated by the arts involving children must be appropriate for the youngest member of the group
- Any physical contact will be limited to only what is necessary for the performance, practice or exercise and will be appropriate, justifiable and agreed to by the participating children. If at any point a child feels uncomfortable in any physical act needed for a performance or exercise the child cannot be forced into it and the senior artists must choose alternatives that the child is more comfortable with.
- No alcohol and smoking will be tolerated while in the company of children.

At present, parents / guardians and children are informed that photographs and videos may be taken during practice sessions, rehearsals and performances. This is for internal use and documentation purposes only. In the event any of this visual material will be used for public dissemination, explicit consent from the child and parent / guardian will be sought. Children are informed about confidentiality and it will be made clear that posting pictures or videos on social media is not encouraged. However, any content shared by the children themselves is beyond the control and responsibility of STG. The use of phones by children is prohibited during practices and rehearsals.

Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

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All children will be treated with respect and dignity irrespective of age, gender or physical ability. A balanced relationship will be maintained with children, based on mutual trust, encouraging them to share in the decision making process.

STG has a zero tolerance policy against bullying or any act that may cause mental or emotional stress. If any form of bullying is reported or observed, it will be dealt with immediately.

Actions to be taken against bullying:

- Talking to the person who caused the bullying in a non-authoritative manner, explaining the offence and why it is wrong
- Seeking an apology
- If escalation is needed, informing the parents or guardians
- Provide necessary support for the victim
- Follow up with the actions taken
- Keep a written record (please refer section on Records, Retention and Storage)

Working with differently abled children

STG is committed to equal opportunities and inclusivity. We do not tolerate harassment or teasing in any form that undermines a person's sense of self and belonging. All members of our community share a responsibility to ensure a secure and supportive environment, promoting growth and fostering positive self-esteem for all. We will accommodate children with different disabilities in participatory settings to the best of our abilities. We are committed to maintaining a setting in which everyone feels valued and respected and where individual differences are appreciated, understood, and accepted.

Professional support

STG has on board three trained psychologists, drama and education therapists who will be consulted should a situation arise that requires professional intervention or advice. In addition, whenever STG works with a new set of artists, a training session with one of the consultants will be held to advise on conduct when working with children and on dealing with challenges that may arise from the same.

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Identifying concerns

There are different ways in which children may disclose their concerns:

- directly– speaking about the incident(s) that took place
- indirectly – making ambiguous statements or hinting at incidents or people that suggests something is wrong
- behaviourally – displaying behaviour that signals something is wrong (this may or may not be deliberate)
- Non-verbally – writing letters, drawing pictures or trying to communicate in other ways.

(The points above are adapted from [NSPCC Learning](#).)

Children may not feel comfortable to address their concerns or may retract if they feel threatened or frightened. Therefore, adults in their presence, especially the senior artists of STG and / or those in constant contact with them need to be aware and vigilant to pick up on the signs and reinforce their support. Please refer to Annex 1 on types of abuse and how to identify them.

Implementation

All staff and those on contract with STG will have to read this policy (available in all 3 languages) and sign an acknowledgment.

STG will have 3 designated Child Protection Leads (CPL) who will be the first point of contact in the event of an incident. The contact details of the CPLs will be known and publicized widely as they will be the first point of contact for children in the event of an incident.

As soon as the CPL is aware of any form of abuse the person(s) identified as the point of escalation will be informed. The CPL will then address it with the child's parents or guardians in confidence, in order to safeguard the child, and ensure that the victim receives appropriate emotional support and understands that the abuse is not their fault. STG will seek professional assistance to stabilise the situation if deemed necessary (please refer section on Professional support).

Similar measures will be implemented if the abuser is also a child. Moreover, the perpetrator will receive counselling and support, while age-appropriate disciplinary measures will be taken on recommendations by the aforementioned professional consultants. In severe cases, it may be necessary to report the incident to child protection services for further intervention.

Any suspicion or allegation will not be taken lightly, and the reason for maintaining at least 3 CPLs is so that, in the unlikely event one of the CPLs is in fact the perpetrator, the other CPLs will seek the guidance of professionals in the field on how to handle the situation and will reach out to the Board of STG and / or the funding agency (where appropriate) if ultimate escalation is required.

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In the event of a reported incident the perpetrator will be suspended till the investigation is completed. Confidentiality of the incident and investigation will be maintained at all times.

Records, Retention and Storage

Any personal identifiable information collected must be:

- adequate, relevant and not excessive for the purpose(s) for which they are held
- factual, signed and dated clearly
- accurate and up to date
- only kept for as long as is necessary (and will be appropriately discarded)
- shared only on a need-to-know basis
- password protected if files are electronic, in a secure location if files are paper-based

Data will be collected by the relevant CPL who will also be the data custodian. Access to information will be on a need to know basis. A log of access to the files will be maintained. It is also the responsibility of the CPL to make the data provider (children or adults, depending on the case at hand) aware about what information is being stored, the reason for holding this information, who it may be shared with and for how long this data will be stored.

In the event an experience from elsewhere is shared within STG in any form (verbal and non-verbal) and if it invokes a cause for concern, the relevant STG member will alert all CPLs who will then seek the advice of a professional (please refer section on Professional support). In the event such experiences are shared among a group of children, STG always advises confidentiality; however, any communication that may occur outside of the immediate group is beyond the control or responsibility of STG.

The CPL will aim to capture details about the incident in a factual manner. Please refer Annex 2 for a template to follow and expand on if needed.

(The points above are adapted from the National Society for the [Prevention of Cruelty to Children, UK.](#))

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Annex 1

Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

(Adapted from CPP of the [Guildford Theatre School](#).)

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

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the Child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children 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 include interactions that are beyond the child's developmental capability, as well as over protection 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 to frequently feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may include non-contact activities such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images or watching sexual activities or 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.

Neglect: Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or a care-giver failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing (including exclusion from home or abandonment), failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, failing to ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers), or the failure to ensure access to the appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or being unresponsive to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Bullying: Bullying is behaviour that hurts someone else – such as name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone.

It can happen anywhere – at school, at home or online. It's usually repeated over a long period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally.

Bullying that happens online, using social networks and mobile phones, is often called cyber bullying.

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Cyber Bullying: Cyber bullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices such as cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, Text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Examples for forms of cyberbullying can be harassment, exclusion, trickery, cyberstalking, cyber threats, outing embarrassing pictures, creating fake profiles and cyber blackmail through the use of these information and communication technologies. A child can feel like there's no escape because it can happen wherever they are, at any time of day or night.

Child Sexual Exploitation: Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse in which children are sexually exploited for money, drugs, alcohol, accommodation or gifts as a result of them performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can also occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet or mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. Children or young people may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship. Child sexual exploitation is a hidden crime. Young people often trust their abuser and don't understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser or be too scared to tell anyone what's happening. Children who work in entertainment may be sexually exploited in return for offers of TV, film or modelling/ photographic work and roles in professional stage productions.

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**Annex 2
Template for Incident Reporting**

Name of CPL	
Date and time of report	
Date and time of incident	
Name(s) & age(s) of victim(s)	
Name(s) & age(s) of perpetrator(s)	
Names(s) & age(s) of witness(es)	
Description of the incident	
Action taken	
Referrals	
Follow ups	
Other	