



Child Protection Policy Statement

I Introduction

The Lime Tree Theatre is committed to a child-centred approach in its work with children¹ and young people. It undertakes to provide a safe environment and experience, where the welfare of the child/young person is paramount. It will adhere to the recommendations of *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, published by the Department of Health and Children.

The procedures implemented cover:

- Code of behaviour for all staff
- Reporting of suspected or disclosed abuse, (see Appendix 1 for categories of abuse)
- Confidentiality
- Recruitment and selecting staff
- Managing and selecting staff
- Involvement of primary carers
- Allegations of misconduct or abuse of staff;
- Complaints and comments
- Incidents and accidents

This policy will be reviewed on April 30th 2016.

Signed by 

Date: April 30th 2015

¹ The Child Care Act 1991 defines a child as a 'person under the age of 18 years other than a person who is or has been married' (S.2.1).

II Code of behaviour for staff.

The aim of the code of behaviour for staff at the Lime Tree Theatre is to help create a supportive environment for staff to provide a child-centred approach for children or young people.

The code of behaviour is categorised under the following headings:

1. Child-centred approach
2. Good practice
3. Inappropriate behaviour
4. Physical contact
5. Health and safety

Child-centred approach

- Treat all children and young people equally;
- Listen to and respect children and young people;
- Involve children and young people 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 and young people as individuals;
- Respect a child's or a young person's personal space.
- Discuss boundaries on behaviour and related sanction, as appropriate, with children and young people and their primary carers;
- Agree group 'contract' before beginning session;
- Encourage feedback from group;
- Encourage feedback from group;
- Use age-appropriate teaching aids and materials;
- Lead by example;
- Be aware of a child's or young person's other commitments when scheduling rehearsals or activities, e.g. school or exams;
- Be cognisant of a child's or young person'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 (name, address, phone, special requirements, attendance, emergency contact);
- Make primary carer, children/young people, visitors and facilitators aware of the Child Protection Policies and procedures;
- Have emergency procedures in place and make staff aware of all these procedures.
- Be inclusive of children and young people 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.
- Observe appropriate dress behaviour;
- 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 yearly;
- 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;
- Ensure clear communication between artist and the Lime Tree Theatre;
- Have 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 full knowledge and consent of primary carers;
- Avoid if at all possible giving a lift to a child/young person and if you do then make sure that primary carers 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.

Inappropriate Behaviour

- Avoid spending excessive amounts of time alone with children/young people;
- Don't use or allow offensive or sexually suggestive physical and/or verbal language² .
- Don't single out a particular child/young person for unfair favouritism, criticism, ridicule or unwelcome focus and attention
- Don't socialise inappropriately with children/young people, e.g. outside of structured organisational activities.

Physical Contact

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

Health and Safety

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

² However, work emanating from the artistic process and work of artistic content will not be censored in this way

III Reporting Procedures

Louise Donlon has been designated as the person to contact if you have an issue or concern about any aspect of a child's or young person's safety and welfare. It is the responsibility of this person to support and advise staff about policy and procedures in relation to child protection and to ensure that procedures are followed. It is also the responsibility of Louise Donlon to liaise with the Health Service Executive or Gardai where appropriate.

Louise Donlon can be contacted at the Lime Tree Theatre at (061) 774772 or on her mobile (087) 683 6142.

The Deputy Designated person will be Gillian Fenton. She can be contacted at (061) 774778 and (087) 7840270

Grounds for concern

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 or young person that s/he has been abused;
- (ii) an account by a person who saw the child/young person 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 collaborative 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, dysfunctional behaviour);
- (v) consistent indication, over a period of time, that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

Recording procedures

An incident book for recording concerns about the protection of children and young people will be kept in the Lime Tree Theatre. Louise Donlon and the Deputy Designated person will have access to these records. They will be stored in a secure manner and confidentiality will be maintained at all times in accordance with Section 4 of this document (Confidentiality Statement).

Staff should record the following information in relation to children and young people:

- Suspicions
- Concerns
- Worrying observations
- Behavioural changes
- Actions and outcomes

Dealing with a disclosure

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

Reporting Procedures

- The person who expresses the concern should be involved and kept informed
- Actions and outcomes should be noted;
- All details should be recorded, including date, time, the people involved in the concern or disclosure and the facts in the incident book
- Information recorded should be factual. Any opinions should be supported by facts;
- Inform Louise Donlon or her deputy if she is unavailable;
- Louise Donlon 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', (see Section 4: Confidentiality statement)

- If there are reasonable grounds for concern as outlined above, Louise Donlon 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 Louise Donlon or the deputy Designated person is not available, contact the local Duty Social Worker of the Health Service Executive directly;
- In cases of emergency outside of Health Service Executive Social Work Department hours, contact the Gardai. In situations that threaten the immediate safety of a child/young person, it may be necessary to contact the Gardai.

IV Confidentiality Statement

We in the Lime Tree Theatre are committed to ensuring peoples' rights to confidentiality. However, in relation to child protection and welfare we undertake that:

- Information will only be forwarded on a 'need to know' basis in order to safeguard the child/young person
- Giving such information to others for the protection of a child or young person is not a breach of confidentiality
- total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where the best interests of the child or young person are at risk
- Primary carers, children and young 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/young person at further risk;
- Images of a child/young person 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)

- Procedures will be put in place in relation to the use of images of children/young people;
- Procedures will also be put in place for the recording and storing of information in line with our confidentiality policy.

V Recruiting and selecting staff policy statement

The Lime Tree Theatre will ensure that staff are carefully selected, trained and supervised to provide a safe environment for all children and young people, by observing the following principles:

- Roles and responsibilities will be clearly defined for every job (paid or voluntary)
- Posts will be advertised widely
- We will endeavour to select the most suitably qualified personnel
- Candidates will be asked to sign a declaration form
- At least two written references that are recent, relevant, independent and verbally confirmed will be necessary
- Staff will be selected by a panel of at least two (or more) representatives through an interview process
- No person who would be deemed to constitute a 'risk' will be employed
- Some of the exclusions would include:
 1. Any child related convictions;
 2. Refusal to sign declaration form;
 3. Insufficient documentary evidence of identification;
 4. Concealing information on one's suitability to working with children
- There will be a relevant probationary period;³
- All staff will be required to consent to Garda clearance, and where available this will be sought
- Legal advice will be sought when developing policy and procedures in relation to the safe recruitment and selection of staff.

³ The probationary period will be one year

VI Staff management policy statement

To protect both staff (paid and voluntary) and children/young people, the Lime Tree Theatre undertakes that

New staff will:

- Take part in a mandatory induction training session
- be made aware of the Lime Tree Theatre's code of conduct, child protection procedures and the identity and role of who has been designated to deal with the issues of concern;
- 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 Child Protection Policy Statement
- Be provided with child protection training.

VII Policy statement on the involvement of primary carers

The Lime Tree Theatre is committed to being open with all primary carers.

We undertake to:

- Advise primary carers of our child protection policy;
- Inform primary carers and schools of all activities and potential activities;
- Issue contact/consent forms where relevant;
- Comply with health and safety practices;
- Operate child-centred policies in accordance with best practice;
- Adhere to our recruitment guidelines;
- Ensure as far as possible that the activities are age appropriate;
- 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, we will:

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

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

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

VIII Dealing with an allegation against staff

Two separate procedures must be followed:

1. In respect of the child/young person Gillian Fenton will deal with issues related to the child/young person.
2. In respect of the person against whom the allegation is being made Louise Donlon will deal with issues related to the staff member.
 - The first priority is to ensure that no child or young person is exposed to unnecessary risk;
 - If allegations are made against the Designated Person then the Deputy Designated Person should be contacted;
 - The reporting procedures outlined in Section 3 of these guidelines should be followed. Both the primary carers and the child/young person should be informed of the actions planned and taken. The child/young person should be dealt with in an age appropriate manner;
 - The staff member will be informed as soon as possible
 - i. Of the nature of the allegation;
 - ii. The staff member should be given the opportunity to respond;
 - The chairperson/head of the organisation should be informed as soon as possible;
 - Any action following an allegation of abuse against an employee should be taken in consultation with Health Service Executive and Gardai;
 - After consultation, the chairperson/head of organisation should advise the person accused and agree procedures will be followed.

IX Complaints and comments procedures

In the event of complaints or comments:

- Complaints or comments will be responded to within 1 week;
- Louise Donlon has responsibility for directing complaints/comments to the appropriate person;
- Verbal complaints will be logged and responded to.

X Accidents procedure

- The Lime Tree Theatre will maintain an up-to-date register of the contact details of all children/young people involved in the organisation;
- Children /young people's details should be cross-referenced between the incident book and file;
- External organisations with whom the Lime Tree Theatre has dealings must provide proof that they have public liability insurance;
- The first-aid box should be available and regularly re-stocked;
- The location of the first-aid box will be at the stationary room - off Reception;
- Availability of the first-aid box will be in accordance with the Lime Tree Theatre's Health and Safety guidelines. The location of accident/incident books must be made known to staff;
- Children and young people must be advised of risks of dangerous material;
- Record details of risk equipment used and take steps to minimise risk;
- Take cognisance of responsibility for first-aid on off-site trips.

Appendix 1

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 definition 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 and 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.

3. 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.

Appendix 2

Health Service Executive Area Social Work Department Contact Details

Limerick

Duty Social Worker
Roxtown Health Centre
Roxtown Terrace
Old Clare Street
Limerick.

Duty Social Worker Tel: (061) 417622