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# Recognising Child Abuse

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A guide for Chaperones



# **A child is anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this document**

## **Introduction**

This guide has been designed specifically for adults working as Chaperones/Matrons in the entertainment business. Its purpose is to raise awareness of safeguarding through recognition of symptoms, child protection responsibilities, safe working practices and professional conduct.

Child abuse and neglect is widespread so all adults working with children should be alert to the possibility of abuse/neglect and know what to do with their suspicions or any allegations reported to them. Chaperones have a special responsibility to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in their care. Through their day-to-day contact with children, chaperones must ensure that no child is at risk of exploitation/ abuse or neglect. It would be helpful for Chaperones to know to whom they can report any concerns to within the production company and/or where the nearest children's Service department is located.

## **What is child abuse?**

A form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

## **If a child is being abused how will I know?**

Recognising abuse is not a precise art. In many cases several little things may be happening that add up to possible abuse. The following details explain the different types of abuse and what to look for.

### **Physical abuse**

A form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

This is perhaps the easiest type of abuse to recognise. There are many ways of inflicting physical injury and many children get bumps and bruises during normal activities but you need to be aware of where the injury is. Is this a common site, does the explanation fit the type of injury, are there frequent injuries? Listen carefully to the child's explanation. Lack of an explanation should always be viewed with suspicion.

### **Emotional abuse**

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 a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

### **Neglect**

The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- a. provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)

- b. protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- c. ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- d. ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Emotional abuse and neglect both require observations over a course of time. The quality of the relationship between the child and the parent/carer should be observed. Does the parent have unrealistic expectations of the child in terms of their ability to undertake tasks? Are excessive demands being placed on the child in relation to theatrical performance and professional success? Is the child considered only for their financial contribution? Any concerns of this nature must be recorded and kept. When you have a clearer picture and examples of concerns you should seek advice, preferably from Children's Services (Social Care), as to what to do next.

### **Sexual abuse**

Involves forcing or enticing a child 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 assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

This is not an easy type of abuse to identify. Younger children may display provocative behaviour or knowledge that is not age appropriate. Drawings or written work may be an indicator of sexual abuse. When working with an older person you may receive a direct disclosure of sexual abuse. You, in your capacity as chaperone, will be spending a lot of time in the company of the child. That person should, over the course of time, develop trust and confidence in you. It will be then that they may feel able to make a disclosure to you. Should this happen you must listen and take what is being said as serious. At no time must you ask the child any leading questions. Make sure you record what has been said to you as quickly as possible as well as what you have said in reply to the child. Any disclosure of a sexual nature must be referred as soon as possible. We are not allowed to keep secrets where something may have happened to a child. You must always inform a child of this should they ask you to keep a secret.

### **Child sexual exploitation**

A form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

### **Child Criminal Exploitation**

Where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

For these forms of exploitation follow the same guidance above if you have any concerns that a child is being exploited

### **How to report a suspected abuse?**

If you have a concern about the wellbeing/safety of a child in your care you have a duty to report it. If your concern relates to a physical injury or a disclosure of a sexual nature you should phone Children's Service's

as soon as you are made aware of the concern. You will need to provide the following information when you make a referral:

- The child's name, date of birth, address, ethnicity any disabilities/learning difficulties and where possible details of the GP
- The parent/carers name and address
- The reason for the referral i.e. your concern
- Any other information that you have relating to the family which is relevant to the referral.

**If you do not have all this information you should not delay making a referral.**

If the child's not in immediate danger, but you're still concerned about them, please contact Bedford Borough Council's Children's Services Integrated Front Door (previously known as MASH) online at this link [Report a concern about a child](#)

If you are unable to use the online form you can also contact them by phone:

- Tel: 01234 718700 (office hours)
- Tel: 0300 300 8123 (out of hours)

Or by email: [Multi.Agency@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:Multi.Agency@bedford.gov.uk)

If the production company has a nominated child protection person then that person should be informed and may wish to assist you in making the referral. However, in the case of a disclosure of sexual abuse you should always write down the account of what was said to you. Someone else cannot do this as it will become a second hand account. Where you have received a disclosure of sexual abuse by someone who is not part of the production team, you should not divulge the contents of that disclosure or ask the child to repeat the disclosure to anyone else on the set. If the disclosure relates to someone on the set, then you will need to inform a senior member of staff immediately, as action will need to be taken. (See allegations against production staff)

If you have been making notes regarding previous concerns about the child, then these should also be attached to the written record and sent to Children's Services.

### **Behaviour towards children on the set**

Every adult working with children, in whatever profession, needs to be aware of their own conduct and behaviour towards the children that they are working with. This applies to all the production company staff and chaperones. Staff must be aware of how they talk to children, make physical contact with them and their general behaviour around children.

Children should not be spoken to in a manner that is likely to put them down or upset them. Physical contact should be avoided, wherever possible, as it can be misconstrued. Where direct physical contact is necessary, for example, dressing and makeup this should, where possible, be undertaken in the presence of other adults. Intimate contact should never take place.

Be aware if a particular child is being singled out for extra attention and being invited to attend extra meetings/coaching on his/her own. Always question, is this really necessary? Listen to what the child is saying about people they are working with. Are there any adverse comments or someone they do not want to be near? What could be worrying the child?

### **Allegations against production staff/chaperones**

Occasionally, there may be an allegation regarding the behaviour of a member of the production team, a Chaperone, a member of the cast or a helper. If this happens full co-operation will be sought from those in charge, the individual member of staff and the licensing authority. Where the allegation is of a serious nature Children's Service should be informed. A decision will need to be made concerning whether the member of staff will need to be suspended until an investigation is completed. The Police and Children's Services will

carry out the investigation and they will consider whether it is safe for the registration of that person to continue working with children.

### **Informing parents of a child abuse referral**

Where a child has made an allegation regarding a parent/carer advice should be sought from Children's Services regarding informing the parent/carer of the referral. Parents will be informed of the source of a referral but it may not be appropriate at that moment in time to inform them as it may jeopardise an investigation. If you are asked to inform a parent/carer whom later becomes abusive or intimidating, then seek advice from Children's Services or the Police.

If the allegation is regarding a member of the production crew/or other person on the set, then you will need to speak to the parent/carer and make them aware of what is happening.

### **Points to remember**

Children rarely lie about abuse.

Children can be abused by family members, friends and people who they come into contact with whilst on the production set.

The welfare of the child is paramount and it is the Chaperone's responsibility to safeguard the welfare of that child at all times whilst they are in their care.