



# **Child Protection Policy, Guidelines and Procedures**

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## Child Protection Statement

At Dance Ireland the care and safety of all <sup>1</sup>children and young people when they are at DanceHouse or participating in Dance Ireland activities is our primary concern. Dance Ireland is committed to creating a safe, friendly and conducive environment which inspires confidence and creativity in the children and young people who participate in Dance Ireland activities and/or will attend DanceHouse. We believe it is especially important that all people who work with children and young people are aware of the issues of good practice and their responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children and young people. Our guidelines have been developed bearing the dance setting in mind.

To this end, all our staff will receive compulsory training in the principles of best practice in child protection, as set out in the *Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*.

This policy will be reviewed annually, every December.

Dance Ireland:

- Recognises that all children and young people have the right to freedom from abuse<sup>2</sup>.
- Ensures that all our staff are carefully selected and accept responsibility for helping to prevent the abuse of children and young people in their care.
- Responds swiftly and appropriately to all suspicions or allegations of abuse, and provides parents and children with the opportunity to voice any concerns they may have.
- Assigned a Child Protection Officer who takes specific responsibility for child safety and acts as the main point of contact for parents, children, young people and outside agencies.
- Ensures access to confidential information is restricted to the Child Protection Officer or appropriate external authorities.

Paul Johnson  
Chief Executive  
1 January 2008

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<sup>1</sup> As per the *Children First Guidelines*, a child is defined as an unmarried person under the age of 18 years.

<sup>2</sup> As per the *Children First Guidelines*, abuse is defined as neglect, bullying, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse.

## **Duties of the Child Protection Officer**

Dance Ireland has appointed a Child Protection Officer (assigned to the post of General Manager) to act as a liaison with children, parents and outside agencies when dealing with any child protection issues. This Officer acts as a resource to any staff member who has child protection concerns and is responsible for reporting allegations or suspicions of child abuse to the Health Service Executive (HSE) or an Garda Síochána.

Duties of the Child Protection Officer include:

- To operate within the guidelines set by the appropriate authorities and those approved by Dance Ireland.
- Reports suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the statutory authorities, i.e., the HSE or an Garda Síochána.
- Liaises between the young people, staff and the statutory authorities where necessary.
- Creates and maintains links with the statutory authorities and other relevant agencies and resource groups.
- Facilitates the provision of support to any victim or employee making a referral and provides support also to the person against whom the allegation has been made.
- Advises his/her employers, staff and students on individual cases.
- Advises on good practice.
- Organises/facilitates training and workshops on guidelines in child protection.
- Maintains proper records on all cases referred to him/her in a secure and confidential manner.
- Keeps up to date on current developments regarding provision, practice, support services, legal obligations/requirements and policy.

## **Code of practice for staff & teachers**

In devising the following code, consideration has been given to the particular needs and circumstances of Dance Ireland and DanceHouse activities. The aim is to ensure that the creativity and individuality of each child is accommodated while acknowledging the right of each child to education in a relatively disruption-free environment.

This code of practice must be adopted by anyone working with children and young people who hire studio space at DanceHouse.

Every effort will be made by all members of staff to adopt a positive approach to the question of behaviour. The following code of behaviour offers a framework within which positive techniques of motivation and encouragement are utilised by teachers at DanceHouse and off site.

It is agreed that a high standard of behaviour requires a strong sense of community within DanceHouse and a high level of cooperation among staff and between staff, users and parents.

The following guidelines must be followed by all staff and those working with children/young people who hire studio space at DanceHouse:

- Be sensitive to the risks involved in participating in contact games and exercises.
- Be sensitive to the fact that jokes of a sexual or religious nature may be offensive to others and should never be told in the presence of children.
- Be sensitive to the possibility of becoming over involved or spending a great deal of time with any one young person. They need to be clear about the purpose and nature of their relationship with any young person, e.g., whether the relationship is constructive in building up the independence and confidence of the young person or is being used to satisfy some need or desire of the employee. All students should be treated equally.
- Children/young people should be encouraged to report cases of bullying behaviour to either the Child Protection officer or any employee of their choice.
- Never meet alone with a young person. Be sensitive to the potential risk to personal safety and false allegations which may arise. If required to speak privately to a young person, do so in a public space, i.e. corridor, foyer, and inform another colleague that you are so doing.
- All students should be encouraged by their tutors to respect the personal space, safety and privacy of their peers.
- Employees are not permitted to give lifts in their cars to individual young people. In exceptional cases, permission may be granted by parent/guardian by telephone or note.

- While physical contact of a comforting and reassuring nature is a valid way of expressing concern and care for children, where such contact is acceptable to all persons concerned; however employees should be aware of what physical contacts are inappropriate, what actions might be misunderstood and what situations might render them vulnerable. If a child or young person discloses an abusive situation, it is not advised to have any physical contact with the person.
- Employees must never physically punish or be in any way verbally abusive to a young person.
- Teachers/Facilitators will keep a handwritten record of all instances of serious misbehaviour as well as a record of improvements in the behaviour of disruptive pupils. Parents will be involved at an early stage, rather than as a last resort.
- Communication with parents will be verbal or by letter, depending on circumstances. The parents will be invited to come to DanceHouse to discuss their child's case. A single instances of gross misbehaviour or repeated instances of minor misbehaviour may result in expulsion. Aggressive, threatening or violent behaviour towards a teacher will be regarded as serious or gross misbehaviour and, depending on circumstances, may result in expulsion.
- Children should not be left unattended or unsupervised, at any time while in DanceHouse. It is the responsibility of the hirer to ensure that chaperone arrangements are in place to supervise children at all times, while using (but not exclusively):
  - Toilets
  - Changing Rooms
  - Common Areas
  - Studios
- Collecting Children/Young people; the foyer area of DanceHouse is the designated dropping off/picking up point.
- Photographs: in the interest of privacy and child protection, the use of photographic equipment and video cameras is not permitted in DanceHouse or at Dance Ireland activities without the prior consent of the tutor/parents/DanceHouse management. A signed consent form will be required, before any photography or recording is allowed (see Appendix 2)

#### Implementation of the code

All teachers/persons hiring space at DanceHouse who work with children and young people will be informed of Dance Ireland's Child Protection Policy and requested to sign up to same. Failure to sign up to the policy will result rental contract being cancelled.



## **Code of behaviour for children & young people**

- Always arrive in plenty of time for your class.
- You must sign in when you arrive at DanceHouse and must also sign out before you leave. Upon signing in you must go to the assigned studio and remain there for the duration of the class/workshop. Students must not leave the premises without the consent of their teacher.
- Always consider the staff working at DanceHouse: do not run or shout in the corridors, stairs, lift, toilets/changing areas, reception area.
- Always place rubbish in the bins provided.
- Always listen to staff members and respect them when they are talking.
- Always tell a member of staff if you are involved in or witness an accident.
- Always tell a member of staff if you have, or witness any problems.
- Always respect property.
- With the exception of water, food and drink are not permitted in the studios.
- Always be sensitive to the fact that jokes or a sexual or religious nature may be offensive to others.
- You should not bring your valuables to DanceHouse. DanceHouse provides lockers which we encourage you to use. However, DanceHouse is not responsible for any loss or damage to goods which are left at the owner's own risk.
- You should not, under any circumstances, use a mobile phone to take pictures while at DanceHouse or taking part in Dance Ireland activities.
- The possession, use or distribution of alcohol, tobacco or illegal substances while in DanceHouse or taking part in Dance Ireland activities is not permitted, and will qualify as gross misbehavior, and may result in expulsion.

## **Safe Recruitment and Selection Policy Statement**

We will ensure that our staff are carefully selected, trained and supervised to provide a safe artistic environment for all children and young people.

We undertake that:

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities will be outlined for every job.
- Candidates will be asked to sign a declaration form.
- Written references which are recent, relevant, independent and verbally confirmed will be necessary.
- The factors that would exclude an applicant are as follows: any child-related convictions, refusal to sign the application form and declaration form, insufficient documentary evidence of identification, concealing information on one's suitability to working with children.
- All staff will be required to consent to Garda clearance, and where available, this will be sought.

## **Managing and supervising staff**

Dance Ireland wishes to protect staff (paid and voluntary) and children/young people and in order to do this we will ensure that:

- New staff will take part in a mandatory induction training session.
- New staff are made aware of the organisation's code of conduct, child protection procedures, and the identity and role of the Child Protection Officer.
- New staff undergo a probationary period.
- Existing staff will receive an adequate level of supervision and review of their work practices.
- Existing staff have read and signed the Child Protection Policy Statement.
- Existing staff will be provided with child protection training.

## **Dealing with allegations against staff**

If a child abuse case is suspected or alleged, the following steps should be taken by the Child Protection Officer, or by an employee or young person wishing to make the report themselves:

1. A report should be made to the HSE in person, by telephone or in writing. Reports may be made to the Child Care Manager or directly to the Social Worker. Each Health Board has a Social Worker on duty for a certain number of hours each day. The duty Social Worker is available to meet with, or talk on the telephone to persons wishing to report Child Protection Concerns.
2. It is generally most helpful if persons wishing to report child abuse concerns make personal contact with the duty Social Worker. This will facilitate the Social Worker in gathering as much information as possible about the child and his or her situation. If a third person, such as a Child Protection Officer makes the report, it is likely that the Social Worker will wish to speak to the person who first witnessed the incident, received the disclosure, or felt the concern.
3. In the event of an emergency, or the non-availability of HSE staff, the report should be made to An Garda Síochána. This may be done at any Garda station. Under no circumstances should a young person be left in a dangerous situation pending the intervention of the HSE.

This procedure should be followed even where the suspicion arises in another organisational context but is disclosed to an employee who is delivering a class in another setting. In this instance s/he should report to the Child Protection Officer.

In the event of allegations being made against a staff member, the protection of the child/young persons is the first and paramount consideration. The company has a dual responsibility in respect of both the child/young person and the employees. The same person will not have the responsibility for dealing with both the reporting issues and the employment issues. An allegation against an employee must be assessed promptly and carefully.

If reasonable grounds for concern exist a formal report to the HSE should be made. The company should ensure actions taken by them do not undermine or frustrate any assessment or investigation by the HSE or An Garda Síochána. The company should take protective measures that are appropriate to the level of risk and not unreasonably penalize the employee unless necessary to protect the child/young person, i.e., increased supervision, assigned different duties, suspension.

Procedures for dealing with allegations against staff:

- If allegations are made against the Child Protection Officer, this should be dealt with by the Chief Executive of the organisation.
- The staff member should be informed as soon as possible that an allegation has been made against them and the nature of the allegation.

- Parents and guardians and the child/young person should be informed of actions planned and taken.
- The staff member should be given an opportunity to respond.
- The Chairperson of the company should be informed as soon as possible.
- Any action against the employee should be taken in consultation with the HSE and An Garda Síochána.
- After consultation the Chairperson will advise the accused and agreed procedures will be followed.

### **Dealing with a disclosure**

- Stay calm and listen to the child/young person, allowing them enough time to say what s/he needs to say.
- Do not ask leading questions or prompt details.
- Reassure the child/young person but do not promise to keep anything secret.
- Do not make the child/young person repeat the details unnecessarily.
- Explain to the child/young person what will happen next (explanation should be age appropriate).

Anonymous complaints can be difficult to deal with but should not be ignored. In all cases the safety and welfare of the child or young person is paramount. Any such complaints relating to inappropriate behaviour should be brought to the attention of the Child Protection Officer. This information should be checked out and handled in a confidential manner.

The ability of the statutory authorities to investigate and assess a case of potential or actual child abuse will depend on the quality of information available to them. Different levels of information will be available to persons reporting who may or may not be familiar with the young person's personal situation. Within these constraints, every effort should be made to clarify the grounds for concern and assist the statutory authorities to decide how far and in what manner to pursue an investigation. When completing a report form, factual detail is required, not opinions or impressions. Check the details against the first record made of the incident or concern to ensure accuracy. Sign the form and date it when completed. While the information in some cases will be limited, as much as possible the following details should be included in a Reporting Form (see appendix I).

## **Where reasonable grounds for concern are not immediately apparent**

Where an employee has a suspicion of abuse and there may be insufficient evidence to substantiate it, s/he should continue to monitor the situation. The following steps are recommended:

- The employee should, as soon as possible, discuss this situation with the Child Protection Officer. All discussions should be restricted to those with an obligation to know.
- Alternatively, s/he may contact the HSE Child Care Manager or Social Worker for advice. Any communication of a suspicion of abuse, provided it is not made maliciously, is legally privileged and protected under The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998.
- The employee may continue to observe the behaviour of the young person and the suspected abuser, recording any information which may be relevant using the guidelines for completing the Reporting Form as contained in this policy under the section on Recording and Retention of Information.
- The employee should endeavour to be available to the young person involved. This has to be done in a sensitive manner. It is not proper for the worker to intimate or suggest to a person that s/he may have suffered an abuse.

## **Accidents procedure**

Guidelines for dealing with and reporting accidents are available to all staff under Dance Ireland's Health and Safety Policy and Statement.

This includes information on dealing with various types of accidents, procedures for reporting accidents and accident report forms.

All Dance Ireland staff are aware of reporting procedures, location of first-aid boxes etc.

## **Recording and Retention and Storage of Information**

In all situations, including those in which the cause of concern arises from a disclosure made in confidence, it is extremely important to record the details of an allegation or reported incident, regardless of whether or not a referral is subsequently made to a statutory agency. This should happen as soon as possible after an incident takes place.

Any reports/completed forms should be stored in a safe and secure location. The need for good record keeping at all stages of the Child Protection Process cannot be over emphasised. Employees need to be mindful of the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

Adjustments cannot be made to an existing document. In the event of anew developments/information, a new document should be completed which will accompany the existing document. These documents should be stored permanently as they belong to the organisation, not to the person who first made the report.

When an individual makes a report to the statutory authorities, the possibility always exists that s/he may be called to give evidence should legal action be taken. It is therefore important to record details of disclosure and any other relevant information that may have been heard and seen.

## **Confidentiality**

We in Dance Ireland are committed to ensuring people's 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;
- We cannot guarantee total confidentiality 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 HSE, 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.
- 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.

## Appendix I (Report Form)

Name of young person	
Name of parents/carers/any other children in the family	
Name and address of the person alleged to be causing harm to the young person	
A full account of the current concern about the young person's safety or welfare	
The source of any information which is being discussed with the HSE	
Dates of any incidents being reported	
Circumstances in which the incident /concern arose	
The young person's own statement, if relevant	
Name of young person's school	
Name of young person's General Practitioner	
Reporter's own involvement with the young person and their parents/carers	
Details of any action already taken in relation to the young person's safety and welfare	
Name and addresses of any agency or key person involved with the family	
Identity of person reporting:	<p>Name Address</p> <p>Phone number Occupation Relationship with the family</p>

## Appendix 2 (General Consent Form)

Name of young person	
Name of consenting parent/carer	
Name of Event Purpose of Event Date of Event	
Name of photographer / recording person	
Purpose / use of image <b>NB: image can only be used for that purpose</b>	
<p>Declaration:</p> <p>We/I, the undersigned, permit use of the image of _____ for public dissemination purposes.</p> <p>Signed: _____</p> <p>Date: _____</p>	

## References

*Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children & Young People in the Arts Sector*, The Arts Council of Ireland, Dublin, 2006.