

Peoples Playhouse Theatre Company Child Safe Policy

Our commitment to child safety

Peoples Playhouse is committed to child safety.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered where they have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We support and respect all children, as well as our adult members and volunteers.

It is the goal of this company to provide children with a positive, enjoyable show experience, with access to a wide range of interesting and challenging activities. The committee and production team of Peoples Playhouse regard it as their duty to ensure a child's emotional and physical safety at all times. All cast members have the right to a safe and caring environment, where they feel respected and valued, which promotes learning, personal growth and positive self-esteem

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

Peoples Playhouse is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

Peoples Playhouse has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all committee, production teams and other volunteers, including the requirement of Working with Children Check cards for all adults with direct contact with children.

Peoples Playhouse is committed to regularly training and educating our members and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We support and respect all children, as well as our members and volunteers. We are committed to promoting and supporting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability.

We have procedures in place that support our Committee, production teams and volunteers to achieve these commitments and to create a culture of openness, inclusiveness and awareness.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

Our children

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our organisation. We involve them when making decisions through open lines of communication, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome.

Child Behaviours

We ask that children be aware of the guidelines our production team, Committee and adult cast members will be following at rehearsals, fun days and when in Theatre. These guidelines are for you to feel safe, but might confuse you if someone you have been in many shows with seems to act a bit different around you when they take on a role of responsibility like Choreographer or Assistant Director.

Those people who have been cast mates in other shows, now have a different role to perform, and even though they are still your friends, they also have some authority to ask you to behave in a certain way, and the right to ask you to do things that are related to learning the things you need to know for the show you are in.

You have some rights and responsibilities as a cast member that will help you have the most enjoyable time possible.

We ask that you:

Follow the directions of the production team.

Ask if you don't understand the direction, or why they are asking it.

Ask another adult to help if you get confused or worried about something.

Don't hit, or physically hurt anyone, and tell an adult if someone hurts you in a way other than an accident.

Don't laugh at, make fun of, or be mean to your cast mates.

You should expect that no adult or cast mate will laugh at, make fun of, or be mean to you.

Whilst we recognise that some cast members will have personal relationships with each other we do ask that you keep these relationships private and not publicly display them in a way that might upset or embarrass someone else.

Try not to be alone with adults during rehearsals or in theatre – there should be a group with you.

Don't use your mobile phone to show or pass around videos/text messages/photos that could upset or embarrass other people.

Follow the directions of the production team, in regards to communication. Clear directions will be given to you and your family for the sharing of information. Your details and private information should not be shared outside these guidelines without speaking to the production team and your parents.

Don't take photos in the costume area or the dressing rooms, even of yourself because you might get a photo of someone else by accident who is not dressed.

Tell an adult if someone gives or shows you things that upset/embarrass or make you feel uncomfortable.

You should expect that an adult will check with you before they touch you, or your clothing/costumes and that they will ask you if it is ok, and you have the right to say no.

You should expect to be listened to if you have a problem (we can't always promise we have all the answers, but we will help think about some with you).

Remember that some things that are fun, like rough housing, play chasing and other physical games are fine when you have a break, but not so great in the middle of a rehearsal, and can lead to someone getting hurt or in trouble if things go wrong. Please don't be upset if we ask you to stop playing these games at times, or if an adult cast member or production team member doesn't want to play.

Our members and volunteers

This policy guides our members and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation.

All of our adult members and volunteers must agree to abide by our policies and code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All adult members and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing development of policies and the code of conduct.

Adults Behaviours

Physical Contact

Peoples Playhouse acknowledges that there are often times when it is clearly appropriate for physical contact between adults and children. This can occur especially during activities such as dancing, and in the nature of the character being played in any given scene or show, or when assistance is required, such as trying on costumes, quick changes side or back stage, escorting younger children to the bathroom in theatre and in sometimes tricky to manage costumes.

It can also occur in a hug of congratulations, a friendly pat on the back, a simple game, and a variety of social contexts.

Peoples Playhouse Committee, adult cast members, volunteers and production crew must use the following principles for touching children while respecting their privacy and feeling of safety:

- Any touching must be with the child's permission, for example, ask, " I need to put pins in here to know where to sew, is that ok?", " I want your character to grab him like this, can I show you ?
- Touching should be in the open and not secretive, with other people around and not especially focussed on one person.
- Touching should only ever be to support or respond to a need of the child and NEVER to meet the needs of an adult.
- Touching should be clearly related to a group activity/game/choreography or scene development
- Physically based consequences for misbehaviour are not permitted under any circumstances.

Avoiding compromising situations

Peoples Playhouse Committee, adult cast members, production crew and volunteers must avoid placing themselves or cast members in situations where they can be compromised or place themselves at risk of an allegation of improper conduct.

- Avoid being alone with a child; stay in view of others.
- Avoid 'favourites' and treat all cast with the same level of friendliness and courtesy.
- Seek the cast members permission before touching them or adjusting clothing/costumes.
- Avoid situations that cause embarrassment or humiliation to cast members, including comments designed to embarrass or belittle, or physical and exclusionary punishments such as "stand in the corner", or "sit with hands on heads".
- Avoid sexual talk or behaving in a way that promotes sexualised behaviour. This includes viewing or sharing explicit or suggestive material.
- Avoid public displays of romantic relationships and behaviours such as kissing, physical displays of affection, and conversation that are not appropriate for children.

Favouritism and exclusiveness

There is no place for 'favourites'. In most instances, the showing of favouritism to a child or small group of children fosters the needs of the adult, not the child. It can create emotional dependence on the adult and isolate the child from peers. When a child needs a little extra attention, it must be given openly and carried out in such a way that no secretiveness or exclusivity is perceived by the child or others. The child's parents should be involved in any discussions in relation to their child's social and emotional needs whilst in our care.

Respect and Authority

Peoples Playhouse Committee, adult cast members, production crew and parent volunteers must be aware of the implied authority their positions hold and endeavour to manage themselves respectfully in this regard. All interactions

and potential conflicts with young people and each other must be conducted in a respectful fashion which does not intimidate or humiliate the other party.

Conflict is ultimately inevitable in stressful and busy environments and should be managed in an open and reciprocally respectful manner. All adults should follow Peoples Playhouse procedures for managing situations in which differences of opinion, dispute, or performance management/discipline are evident. See production team/committee roles and responsibilities

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our child safe policy will be shared with our members and explained to everyone involved with the company. Peoples Playhouse will encourage our members to be involved in regular discussion and reviews to ensure the policy is effective, functional and meets best practice.

Our organisational culture aims for all adult members and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns.

We also support our production teams and volunteers through ongoing supervision to: develop their skills to protect children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New production teams, members and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to this organisation's code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Recruitment

Peoples Playhouse will take all reasonable steps to engage skilled people to work with children. We will continue to develop selection criteria which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting Committee members, production teams and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people aged 18 and over who are engaged in child-related work, including Committee, production teams, volunteers and cast members, will be required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this Check. Please see the [Working with Children Check](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au) website <www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au> for further information.

References and WWC cards will be checked and records stored securely.

Fair procedures

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to all adults engaged with Peoples Playhouse. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we will refer to our Legislative Responsibilities to guide our actions and to ensure that the immediate safety of the child is our first consideration.

Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

Failure to disclose: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.

Failure to protect: People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so. Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.

Further information about these legislative responsibilities can be found at www.justice.vic.gov.au.

Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include assessing physical environments, checking and monitoring volunteers, and educating and empowering children to speak up.

Regular review

This policy will be reviewed every two years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

Peoples Playhouse takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly.

Our Committee will deal appropriately with all allegations or seek assistance from outside the organisation if our training and understanding is not adequate.

We work to ensure all children, families, members and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves).
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed.
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it.
- observing suspicious behaviour.