

Disclosure of Child Abuse Policy



1.1 Our Approach

Canberra Youth Theatre employees, contractors and volunteers working with young people must understand that there shall be no form of abuse and neglect of a young person at any time.

Canberra Youth Theatre requires its employees, contractors and volunteers to report any suspected or discovered abuse and that every member of staff is to take all reasonable steps to safeguard and prevent an abuse of trust involving a young person from taking place.

If a young person makes a disclosure of abuse or neglect, it is important that the employee, contractor or volunteer listens carefully to anything that is said, and immediately communicates the information to the Artistic Director & CEO. Disclosures about criminal activities must be addressed and reported immediately to the Artistic Director & CEO who will then determine the next course of action.

1.2 Definitions of Abuse

As outlined in the Children and Young People Act 2008 (ACT), abuse of a child or young person is physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Abuse is the term used for differing types of maltreatment that endangers a child or young person's safety, wellbeing and development. Child abuse can be a single incident or chronic pattern of behaviours over time and may be intentional or unintentional.

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is a non-accidental act resulting in injury to a child or young person by a parent, caregiver or another person who has responsibility for the child or young person. Injury can be caused by a single episode or repeated episodes of physical abuse. The severity of injury can range from minor bruising to death. Physical punishment of a child or young person is a crime when it falls outside the bounds of 'reasonable chastisement'.

Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse is the term used to describe chronic and repetitive ill treatment of a child or young person, which causes significant harm to their psychological, social, emotional or cognitive development. Constant yelling, belittling, ignoring and ridiculing are all examples of emotional abuse.

Neglect: Neglect is the failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child or young person with the basic requirements necessary for their proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse is any sexual act or sexual threat imposed on a child or young person. Sexual abuse is when an adult or someone else who is bigger or older involves the child or young person in sexual activity by using their power over the child or young person and taking advantage of their trust.

1.3 Reporting Child Abuse

Employees, contractors and volunteers at Canberra Youth Theatre are not mandated by ACT law to report child abuse, however, Canberra Youth Theatre has chosen to report abuse as part of its responsibility for the safety, protection and care of young people at Canberra Youth Theatre who disclose. The Canberra Youth Theatre Board understands that reporting abuse or suspected abuse can be a difficult decision.

Section 8 of the Children and Young People Act 2008 states the following:

- In making a decision under this Act in relation to a particular child or young person, the decision-maker must regard the best interests of the child or young person as the paramount consideration.

Any person may choose to make a voluntary report if they believe or suspect a child or young person is being abused or neglected, or is at risk of abuse or neglect.

Section 354 of the Children and Young People Act 2008 states:

If a person believes or suspects that a child or young person:

- is being abused; or
- is being neglected; or
- is at risk of abuse or neglect,

The person may report the belief or suspicion and the reasons for the belief or suspicion, to the director-general.

If a person makes a voluntary or mandatory report to Care and Protection Services 'honestly and without recklessness', giving the information is not a breach of:

- confidence; or
- professional etiquette or ethics; or
- a rule of professional conduct;

and the person does not incur civil or criminal liability only because of giving the information.

1.4 Staff Reporting Procedure

If there is an allegation or suspicion of abuse, then this must be referred to the Artistic Director & CEO immediately. Canberra Youth Theatre is not an investigation or intervention agency. At all times the young person's welfare should be of paramount importance.

If an employee, contractor or volunteer has concerns, or are unsure that they have sufficient grounds to report their concerns, they should consult with the Artistic Director & CEO.

If there is still doubt whether there are reasonable grounds to make a report, the Artistic Director & CEO will consult with Care and Protection Services for further clarification of the concern. It is essential that concerns about the young person be recorded swiftly and accurately. Action to protect the young person is highly dependent on factual evidence.

Despite the fact that grounds may not exist for reporting, it is important to record any information that may assist if action is required at a later point. This is particularly important in cases where neglect or harm through emotional abuse is the primary concern.

1.5 Management of Reporting Procedure

Referral will normally be by the employees, contractors or volunteers to the Artistic Director & CEO. Any information received by the Artistic Director & CEO must not be withheld or filtered. This information will then be passed along immediately to Child and Youth and Protection Services. These procedures are not negotiable; they enable Canberra Youth Theatre to fulfil a duty of care and moral responsibility, to ensure the highest standard of safety and protection for the young people who participate in Canberra Youth Theatre programs and activities.